UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA

Los Angeles

World-Remaking Experiments in Seventeenth-Century English Literature

A dissertation submitted in partial satisfaction of the

requirements for the degree Doctor of Philosophy

in English

by

Joseph Paul Torres

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ABSTRACT OF THE DISSERTATION

World-Remaking Experiments in Seventeenth-Century English Literature

by

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Professor Lowell Gallagher, Chair

World-Remaking Experiments in Seventeenth-Century English Literature argues that early modern writers respond to epistemological and theological instabilities by developing textual practices that revise or reconfigure the conditions of inhabiting a world marked by uncertainty and failure. Drawing on posthumanism, queer theory, critical race theory, game theory, and art history, this dissertation shows how writers across the 17th century craft literary worlds, in which failure enables new cosmopoetic possibilities.

Chapter 1 reads John Donne's *Metempsychosis* as staging permutations of parasitic logic. The text's deliberately incomplete cosmology transforms ontological limits into species of world-remaking, rather than failures of knowledge. Chapter 2 examines Andrew Marvell's "Upon Appleton House," arguing that its recursive, queer, and often contradictory *cosmopoiesis* operates through modes of insufficiency, which remake the topographical poem into a dynamic site of historical experimentation. Chapter 3 turns to Margaret Cavendish's *The Blazing World*, showing how its queer whiteness and double focalization produce a speculative world, wherein

racialized and gendered formations are unsettled and reimagined. Chapter 4 explores William Shakespeare's *Measure for Measure*, whose juridical and narrative contingency expose deontological failure at the heart of political authority, prompting alternative forms of ethical world-remaking. Chapter 5 argues that John Milton's *Paradise Lost* offers a cosmopoetic model grounded in narrative gaps, interpretive ambiguities, and divergent visual traditions—including 19th-century illustrations of the epic's conclusion.

Across these case studies, this dissertation demonstrates that early modern literature does not mourn the collapsing fantasies of epistemic mastery and totalizing truth, but turns instead toward modes of provisional, experimental, and self-consciously insufficient world-remaking. This project thus reframes 17th-century English texts as sustained meditations on how worlds can and must be continually remade in the wake of failure.

The dissertation of Joseph Paul Torres is approved.

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DEDICATION

To Nicola, who makes new worlds, when old ones fail.

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INTRODUCTION

Since the late seventeenth century, scholars have interrogated the idea of *cosmopoiesis*, or worldmaking. In general, the idea posits the fecundity of artistic craft in creating new textual worlds—literary templates for imagining how the cosmos and the human worlds that inhabit it are shaped and contingently reshaped.[1] As Giuseppe Mazzotta argues, *cosmopoiesis* signals an epistemic shift from the medieval view of creation as imitation of a divinely ordered cosmos to an early modern conception of the world as something imaginatively and rhetorically constructed.[2] Substantiating Mazzotta's argument, Ayesha Ramachandran claims that medieval texts considered God to be the sole creator of the world, while the early modern period marked the beginning of a "view of the world as humanly fashioned."[3] These two critics are typical of the scholarly trend, which tends to emphasize the difference between divine and human *cosmopoiesis*, resulting in readings that prioritize self-reflexive, agential human beings as the only legitimate worldmakers.[4]

However, while this species of criticism focuses on how early modern authors attribute intentionality and success to cosmopoetic projects, it does not account for the way in which these writers innovatively engage with failures as productive modes of re-creation. To more completely comprehend the novelty of this practice, I analyze the extended repertoire of tactics

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[1] For a history of the term "worldmaking," especially in relation to the New World, see Ayesha Ramachandran, *The Worldmakers: Global Imagining in Early Modern Europe* (Chicago: U of Chicago P, 2015). For recent conceptions of *cosmopoiesis*, see e.g. Nelson Goodman, *Ways of Worldmaking* (Indianapolis: Hackett, 1978); *Worldmaking Spenser*, ed. Patrick Cheney and Lauren Silberman (Lexington: UP of Kentucky, 2000); and *This Distracted Globe*, ed. Marcie Frank, Jonathan Goldberg, and Karen Newman (New York: Fordham UP, 2016).

[2] Giuseppe Mazzotta, *Cosmopoiesis: The Renaissance Experiment* (Toronto: U of Toronto P, 2001): xii-xiii.

[3] Ramachandran, 10. In this context, Ramachandran discusses cultural worlds.

[4] In a separate context, Gordon Teskey calls this difference the relation between "divine Creation in the past and human creativity in the future" [*Delirious Milton: The Fate of the Poet in Modernity* (Cambridge: Harvard UP, 2006), 2].

(including subtextual as well as surface elements) by which writers and their fictional characters—their avatars—can alter, reform, or adapt extant worlds. I call this process world-remaking. World-remaking puts pressure on the means by which texts—and their specifically literary features—can destabilize and reconstruct representations of actual, possible, or alternative worlds, as well as the associated ideologies whose enabling assumptions produce multifarious perspectives and scales of judgment on those worlds. I examine these specific modes of critical purchase in the textual worlds of John Donne's *Metempsychosis*, William Shakespeare's *Measure for Measure*, Andrew Marvell's "Upon Appleton House," Margaret Cavendish's *The Blazing World*, and John Milton's *Paradise Lost*.

I understand these world-remaking modes through the lens of modal logic; i.e., they represent not a set of substantive properties, but a range of qualifying attributes—possibilities, failures, and contingencies, which influence how worlds may be remade. My sense of modality bears an affinity to the work of Raymond Williams, who differentiates among three sets of cultural elements: dominant, residual, and emergent.[5] In Williams's terms, I argue that failure is dichotomous in the dominant sense, yet becomes multimodal in the emergent sense. As I will show, the texts of my study frequently resurrect residual codes, yet invest them with disruptive energies, wherein late modern critics can detect emergent structures of feeling.[6]

Like many contemporary scholars of *cosmopoiesis*, I begin with Nelson Goodman's insightful premise that "it always starts from worlds already on hand; the making is a

[5] Raymond Williams, *Marxism and Literature* (Oxford: Oxford UP, 1977), 121-7.

[6] Although Caroline Levine critiques R. Williams's theory of cultural history [Caroline Levine, "Raymond Williams, Marxism and Literature (1977), *Public Culture* 32.2 (2020), 423-30], his terms usefully correlate with the boundary-crossing, disruptive feeling, and transgression in 17th-century literary texts.

remaking."[7] Extending the scope of Goodman's work, I use the term world-remaking to describe the processes whereby writers and their creations do not necessarily build "a world out of others,"[8] but revise and restructure a previously established world. As a nominalist, Goodman emphasizes the individuality of particular worldmakers; consequently, he assumes that *cosmopoiesis* depends on an individual maker's "determination and skill" and deductively analyzes the criteria for cosmopoetic success.[9]

But what happens when the process fails?[10] Is the perceived failure not considered an authentic mode, if its effects contribute (in unpredicted or orthogonal ways) to the reconstruction of a world? How should we classify authors and characters whose failures lead to such profound alterations? To answer these questions, I refuse to take for granted the implicit (and implicitly humanistic) assumption in extant scholarship on the topic that *cosmopoiesis* necessarily aligns with the agents' will. Instead of premising my argument on the perceived adequacy of authorial intent, I exclusively interrogate varied forms of failure as legitimate and productive modes of world-remaking precisely because they never completely match the maker's intended design: a possibility toward which Ramachandran has previously gestured. Ramachandran brilliantly claims that early modern *cosmopoiesis* is a response to the failure of world-discovery—that is, to the recognition that exploration and empirical inquiry cannot deliver the kind of total, unified

[7] Goodman, 6.

[8] Ibid. 7.

[9] For Goodman's nominalism, see ibid. 10n, 21, 94-5, 95n, and 101n. For his discussion of "determination and skill," see ibid. 97.

[10] For a discussion of failure's inherence in creative activity, see Giorgio Agamben, *Creation and Anarchy: The Work of Art and the Religion of Capitalism*, trans. Adam Kotsko (Palo Alto: Stanford UP, 2019).

knowledge they promise—and that Milton's "new ethics" is the consequence of a world wherein the quest "to uncover absolute truths" is doomed to fail.[11]

Building on Ramachandran's acumen, I investigate modes of world-remaking, not only as responses to failure, but also as being based on or grounded in it. World-remaking implies failure not only in the need to remedy past imperfections, but also in the interest it harbors in the probability of generating new flaws and enlisting these for eventual use. My study demonstrates how early modern cosmopoetic tactics in the literary field transform the perception of failure. What had been seen as an accident or flaw to be corrected turns into a crucial affordance in the equipment of world-remaking.

World-remaking includes but deemphasizes the imaginative impulse to transform the world, an impulse that has commonly been studied as a component of utopian projects, manifestos, and science fiction.[12] Using Fredric Jameson's framework of utopia, Sherryl Vint distinguishes this "impulse" from a "blueprint" in her analysis of characters who continually work to create utopia without ever finishing the creative process.[13] However, one of the authors in my study, John Milton, disavows "*Eutopian* polities" precisely because they exist "out of the world," and offers instead modes that account for failures "in this world."[14] Thus, the utopian impulse is not *worldly* enough to apply to Milton's world-remakers, who either fail to reform

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[11] Ramachandran, 188. Further, "worldmaking is possible, even necessary, because of the insurmountable gap between our fragmentary apprehension of the phenomenal world and our desire for complete knowledge of it" (ibid. 10).

[12] See Nicole McDaniel, "'Remaking the World' One Story at a Time in 'The Fifth Book of Peace' and 'Veterans of War, Veterans of Peace,'" *Melus* 36.1 (2011), 61-81; and Sherryl Vint, "Archaeologies of the 'Amodern': Science and Society in Galileo's Dream," *Configurations* 20.1 (2013), 29–51.

[13] Vint, 31. See Fredric Jameson, *Archaeologies of the Future: The Desire Called Utopia and Other Science Fictions* (2005): 231-2.

[14] John Milton, *Areopagitica, The Riverside Milton*, ed. Roy Flannagan (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1998), 987-1024: 1010.

worlds in conjunction with their intentions, or subsume these failures in service of larger modes of world-remaking. Although world-remaking can involve a utopian impulse or blueprint, my interest here is in how failure—including but not limited to the failure to remake the world in alignment with such impulses or blueprints—can nonetheless contribute to the achieved reconstruction of a world.

Instead of utopian spaces, the worlds produced by the texts of my study are more closely aligned with Michel Foucault's understanding of heterotopias. According to Foucault, heterotopias have six principles: (1) they are probably in every culture; (2) each one has a specific, changeable function within the culture; (3) they can juxtapose several incompatible sites; (4) they are "most often linked to slices in time"; (5) they "always presuppose a system of opening and closing that both isolates them and makes them penetrable"; and (6) they "function in relation to all the space that remains."[15] Like heterotopias, the worlds of my study require the logics of other sites to enact themselves. These worlds differ from heterotopias in the productive potential of their failures—failures by the standards of other worlds. Like languages, which incorporate linguistic mistakes and historical contingencies, worlds evolve as systems of symbolization and description whose functional scope extends beyond humans' intended designs. This sense of evolution is a perpetual process, rather than a paradigmatic progression. Attending to this non-totalizable or surplus element, I put pressure on various forms of failure that the implied reader may observe in the unfolding of a given text's apparent organizational or generic template. Miscalculation, misprision, contingency, imperfection, impossibility, uncertainty, flaw, and surprise are all modes, which do not align with the textual cues, suggesting

[15] Michel Foucault, "Of Other Spaces: Utopias and Heterotopias," trans. Jay Miskowiec, *Architecture /Mouvement/ Continuite* (October 1984), 4-8.

the world-remaker's conscious will. In brief, this study investigates how represented worlds evolve beyond characters' intentionality and understanding, as well as how failure itself can contribute to the successful reformation of a textual world.

World-remaking destabilizes the supposed paradigm shift between medieval and early modern views of creativity. It emphasizes that in Renaissance literature, human beings are not always viewed as having full agency in their attempts to recreate the world (the latter assumption harboring a debt to the influential historicist methodology of Jacob Burckhardt). Their plots are consistently foiled by fate, as in Hamlet's famous lines for the Player King.[16] Even in *Paradise Lost*, in which the celebration of individual human agency supposedly reaches its full completion, the only successful world-remakers are those who yield their conscious will and intentionality to God. Those who attempt to recreate the world outside of the divine will, or fate, are doomed to fail. Against this backdrop, I continue the work of scholarship that has destabilized the Burckhardtian framework of Renaissance individualism.[17] I claim that early modern writers reinvented the world not only in terms of skill and determination—or systematic, progressive, utopian change—but often in terms of excesses and errancies that humans' imaginative structures cannot contain.[18] Many writers' ideas of the world were too capacious to be embraced by such a limited model as the self-conscious human agency emphasized by recent

[16] "Our wills and fates do so contrary run/ That our devices still are overthrown./ Our thoughts are ours; their ends, none of our own" [William Shakespeare, *Hamlet: Revised Edition*, ed. Ann Thompson and Neil Taylor (London: Arden Shakespeare, 2006): 3.2.205-7].

[17] See e.g. Hans Baron, "The Limits of the Notion of 'Renaissance Individualism': Burckhardt after a Century," *In Search of Renaissance Civic Humanism: Essays on the Transition from Medieval to Modern Thought* (1988), 2:155-81.

[18] In this way, early modern writers anticipate the law of unintended consequences, an intuition that John Locke would posit at the end of the 17th century and that Adam Smith would develop in the mid-18th century. See John Locke, *The Works of John Locke in Nine Volumes*, vol. 4 (London: Rivington, 1824) and Adam Smith, *The Theory of Moral Sentiments* (Indianapolis: Liberty Fund, 1984)].

criticism. Early modern writers may have believed in something akin to paradigm shifts, but their texts posit the idea of such transitions as an unruly mode of world-remaking.

As a result, world-remaking also destabilizes the allegorical thinking inherent in a myth that famously straddles medieval and early modern worlds: the myth of the king's two bodies. This myth famously seeks to authenticate transitions from one reign to the next. However, the texts of my study produce world-remaking modes that wander outside the orbit of movement governing that myth, precisely by treating failures as (unexpectedly) foundational and productive, instead of inauthentic or accidental.[19] They shift the focus from the underlying ontological resonance of authenticity—with is correlative sense of "true vs. false" and "model vs. copy"—to the arena of productivity and the pragmatics of communication. Both categories are at issue in my project, which teases out the gradual shift from a cosmopoetic view dominated by a metaphysical sense of how things (should) work, driven by teleological conviction—to a secularizing view in which the play of contingencies and immanent probabilities are in the ascendancy and teleological projections disclose their speculative and conditional mainsprings.

Further, the political theology inherent in the myth of the king's two bodies is threatened by the discoveries of the "new" world, which decenter and displace Anglocentric world-remaking. In turn, the "new" world's threats to the "old" secularize the drama of cosmopolitan plurality, rather than uphold the solvency of political sovereignty. I argue that the very idea of sovereignty (a species of political theology) breaks down under the exposed, emergent idea of

[19] The concept of "accident" is closely tied to Aristotelian ontology, particularly in its distinction between accidental and essential properties—that is, between qualities that a thing may have without altering its fundamental identity, and those that constitute its being. This dyad resonates with my treatment of failure, where disruption (what might be called the "accidental") does not merely signal deviation from the essential, but becomes a space of modal inquiry. See Aristotle, *Metaphysics*, trans. Hugh Tredennick, vol. 17, *The Complete Works of Aristotle: The Revised Oxford Translation*, ed. Jonathan Barnes. (Princeton: Princeton UP, 1984). Further, Agamben's work on potentiality and impotentiality extends this Aristotelian framework, emphasizing not just what something is, but what it might fail or refuse to become. See Agamben, "On Potentiality," *Potentialities: Collected Essays in Philosophy*, trans. Daniel Heller-Roazen (Stanford: Stanford UP, 1999), 177-84.

cosmopolitan plurality.[20] The register of ethical attunement to otherness—introduced by the world-remaking schemes at issue—disrupts the world of political theology, opening a different kind of world where authority is neither divinely endowed nor secured at the apex of a fixed ontological hierarchy.

The performative discourses of quasi-divine sovereignty reveal their own manufactured and contingent character when viewed through the dual lenses of early modernity's internal contradictions and its external encounters. On one hand, radical movements such as Anabaptism emerge from within Europe's monarchical and ecclesiastical structures, exposing rifts in the ideological coherence of divine-right rule. On the other, the period's expanding contact with non-European cultures—via exploration, colonization, and trade—offers comparative perspectives that unsettle Anglocentric legal and theological universals. These dual exposures make visible the disjunction between sovereignty's idealized claims and the historical realities they seek to discipline, thereby illuminating the constructed nature of early modern political theology.

In contrast, because my selected texts see the productivity of failure, their world-remaking energies open space for emergent literacies inside the dominant cultural disposition of the era. Within the grand narratives through which various worlds are postulated, with their designs of providential predictability, the texts tolerate unsettled ambiguity. Failure becomes a mode of attentive patience that does not prematurely create categorical propositions about the shapes the world must take. Because the different worlds posited within even a single text do not

[20] For insightful studies of political theology, see e.g. Peter Lake and Michael Questier, *The Antichrist's Lewd Hat: Protestants, Papists, and Players in Post-Reformation England* (New Haven: Yale UP, 2002); and Debora Shuger, *Political Theologies in Shakespeare's England: The Sacred and the State in* Measure for Measure (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2001).

fit together neatly, the ethical field they comprise cannot be reduced to political dogma. Providential predictability is replaced by a calculus of probable short-term outcomes, disintegrating the grand-narrative model of historical time by decoupling it from any overarching sense of eschaton or telos.[21]

My project maps the decay of this older, though still persistent, sense of "the world" that carries universalizing (indeed, in many cases totalizing) connotations; this long-range view affords critical understanding of the retreat of this dominant sense as a shared legacy of assumptions and beliefs about what goes into the shape, appearance, and feel of "the world."[22] The early modern mutations to this sense inhabit a perspective that is more attuned to the ideas of the experiment, or the tactic.[23] In 17th-century English literature, world-remaking is conceived within a newfound appreciation of the local and the singular, as well as the corresponding understanding of "the world" as a *problematic*—or an intervention that holds many parts and diverse perspectives—which are irreconcilable with a totalizing view of how things are. As such, I trace the onset of the idea of a world as a problem or question (rather than a universalizing vision) of what makes "the world" a world.

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[21] For a detailed explanation of such secularization, see esp. chapter 1 of Reinhart Koselleck, *Futures Past: On the Semantics of Historical Time*, trans. Keith Tribe (New York: Columbia UP, 2004).

[22] In Raymond Williams's terms, this older sense of "the world" would be a dominant cultural element in the process of becoming residual. See R. Williams, 121-7.

[23] Jacques Derrida's distinction between the bricoleur and the engineer is particularly relevant to the modal logic of failure I explore. Derrida describes the bricoleur as one who works with whatever is at hand, engaging in a practice that is improvisational, situated, and structurally dependent on contingency. In contrast, the mythic figure of the engineer operates from a presumed foundation of total mastery or originary presence. This framework helps illuminate how early modern texts render failure not merely as a negation of success, but as a constitutive mode of working within limitations—a form of cosmopoetic bricolage that foregrounds incompletion, fracture, and speculative recombination as conditions of world-remaking. See Jacques Derrida, "Structure, Sign, and Play in the Discourse of the Human Sciences," *Writing and Difference*, trans. Alan Bass (Chicago: U of Chicago P, 1978), 278-93.

By destabilizing universal conceptions of the human world, I track the emergence of posthumanist intuitions in early modern texts, which reimagine the scope and force of human agency, as well as the place of the human in the world. However, the category of the posthuman is itself vexed. While the prefix "post-" is meant to signal an inner erosion of the assumptions underpinning humanism, the field of posthumanist scholarship frequently remains entangled in the very philosophical and scientific traditions it seeks to critique. As such, my project does not merely rehearse a chronological narrative of humanism followed by posthumanism; instead, it places pressure on both terms, attending to the ambiguity, slipperiness, and historical instability that shape their meaning. What emerges is not a teleological unfolding, but a series of literary world-remaking experiments, which variously question the boundaries of the "human," articulate modes of being that precede its formal codification, and signal the conceptual breakdown of its coherence from within.

I interrogate the conceptual limits of the "human" in early modern literature by engaging with the scholarship of Sylvia Wynter, who has critically examined the formation of the humanist subject. Wynter seeks "to *re-enchant* the human in humanism" for the sake of "a new universalism"—by explaining how the "de-godded Man" of early modern Europe leads to the development of the humanist subject.[24] Wynter highlights the "process" by which the figure of Man emerges as a governing logic in modernity, rather than a fixed ontological category.[25] My project builds on her insight by examining what might be said to exist beyond this category—what literary texts can imagine as posthumanist modes of being or knowing. Whether Wynter's

[24] David Scott, "The Re-Enchantment of Humanism: An Interview with Sylvia Wynter," *Small Axe* (8, September 2000), 178, 195-6.

[25] Ibid., 163, 165, 193, 205-7.

work falls in the ambit of posthumanist critique or "counter-humanist" critique is unimportant; my analysis shows how this opposition is in fact a red herring. The multimodal approach, with its attention to the role(s) of genre and hybrid generic discourses, leaves space to include Wynter's positions within what is legibly a posthumanist practice.

Like Rosi Braidotti and Paulo Kawanishi, I am skeptical of the dominant critical tradition, which projects a self-determining or evolutionarily predictive character onto the development of the humanist subject and the establishment of the human world.[26] Instead, I read this development with attention to the contingencies involved in elevating the humanist subject to the ontological status it has enjoyed. I argue that many texts, often mistaken as heralds of humanism, in fact harbor anti-humanist intuitions that would eventually become more explicit in the 18th century. These anti-humanist energies anticipate posthumanism's challenge to normative accounts of the human world and its ontological coherence.

The texts of my study express arguably posthumanist insights in manifold ways—there is no *a priori* template. Sometimes the tactics are characterological, situational, or generic. For example, in "Upon Appleton House," a topographical poem that morphs into a species of metahistorical delirium, the errant curiosity of Marvell's speaker leads him to a pantheistic stance that turns him into what Rosi Braidotti would call "a posthuman knowing subject," who is "embodied and embedded, affective and accountable."[27] Alternatively, this posthumanist ethos can be dramatized as a complex ethical situation that decenters traditional ontological categories and overweighs any individual character's attempts to control it, as in Shakespeare's *Measure for*

[26] Rosi Braidotti, "A Theoretical Framework for the Critical Posthumanities," *Theory, Culture & Society* 36.6 (2018): 31-61; and Paulo Kawanishi, "A posthuman dialogue between Michel Foucault and Bruno Latour," *V!RUS* 21 (2020): http://www.nomads.usp.br/virus/virus21/?sec=4&item=3&lang=en, accessed 21 May 2023.

[27] Braidotti, 31.

Measure, where virtually all the players find themselves in a game whose rules prove as shifting and incalculable as the players' own desires. Posthumanist sensibilities can also take the form of slippages from generic conventions. Milton historicizes events and complicates his characters so much that *Paradise Lost* appears to move into the territory of the novel. This novelistic quality makes sense according to Sandra Macpherson's recent estimation of the novel as a literary form that emphasizes unintended consequences.[28] Satan's role in *Paradise Lost* dramatizes a paradox at the heart of Milton's theodicy: he is held accountable for initiating the Fall, which, on one level, appears fated—or at least enabled—by chance. His plummet through Chaos halts not by deliberate agency, but by the "ill chance […] of som tumultuous cloud," a seemingly arbitrary interruption that allows him to find footing and begin his project of remaking the world of Eden.[29] Whether character-driven, case-specific, or genre-based, the texts' emergent posthumanist elements do not presciently announce a chronological development from humanism, but instead map out spaces for deviation from—and from within—17th-century humanistic norms.

In this way, my conception of world-remaking intervenes in critical conversations that depict *cosmopoiesis* as a universal sense of symbiotic transactions. Pheng Cheah claims that world literature is "a special form of mediation" aimed at bringing forth "universal humanity" through "spiritual […] exchange."[30] Eric Hayot extends this notion of world "symbiosis" to the

[28] Sandra Macpherson, *Harm's Way: Tragic Responsibility and the Novel Form* (Baltimore: John Hopkins UP, 2010).

[29] Milton, *Paradise Lost, Riverside Milton*, 296-710: 2.935-6.

[30] Pheng Cheah, "What Is a World? On World Literature as World-Making Activity," *Daedalus* 137.3 (2008) 26-38: 29-30.

"oeuvre-worlds" created by multiple artists in an "ideological unconscious of the work."[31] While Cheah and Hayot posit *cosmopoiesis* as a symbiotic model of universalizing exchange, world-remaking exploits the logic of the parasite. In Michel Serres's *The Parasite*, the asymmetrical relation of taking without giving is the basis for a model of parasitism that applies to a variety of contexts, including literary works, which, like parasites, draw upon and transform extant texts and ideas—and can only exist by finding readers.[32] Parasitic logic provides linkages between the experimental senses of failure and the broader posthumanist intuitions circulating throughout the texts of my study. Donne's *Metempsychosis*, Shakespeare's *Measure for Measure*, Marvell's "Upon Appleton House," Cavendish's *The Blazing World*, and Milton's *Paradise Lost* become effective parasites because they move through different permutations of parasitic logic, taking advantage of inherent weaknesses in traditional, received discourses, and converting these flaws or failures into opportunities for remaking worlds. Virtually any form (perhaps all forms) of intertextuality can entail a species of parasitism, but the parasitic positions of my selected texts subvert the older, universal sense of "the world" from within. In turn, the tactical, unfinished, and contingent dimension of these world-remaking operations sets the stage for the dislocating effects associated with each text's emergent, posthumanist insights.

My intervention in the conversation on *cosmopoiesis* does not contest its dominant critical emphasis on philosophical and intellectual history. Rather, I focus on the affordances of literary history by examining how the parasitic entailments of specifically literary tools of world-remaking (especially genre) trouble the sovereign complacency of monolithic, decisive

[31] Eric Hayot, "On Literary Worlds," *Modern Language Quarterly: A Journal of Literary History* 72.2 (2011), 129-61: 141.

[32] Michel Serres, *The Parasite*, trans. Lawrence R. Schehr (Minneapolis, U of Minnesota P, 2007): 22, 66-7, 73.

understandings of "the world." The literary modes of world-remaking that I interrogate add up to a story that is not mortgaged to a metanarrative of development or decay. Instead, they are a convocation of experiments on ephemerality, which simultaneously destabilize and hold onto an idea of "the world" as a set of tactics. Together, they help relate a clandestine history of secularization.

Thus, I argue for an alternative model of early modernity that recognizes forms of failure as both authentic and productive modes of world-remaking. My project also presents a more dialectically attentive demonstration of how to understand failure not in substantive or categorically stable terms, but through shifting vectors of deep context, including the informing admixtures of generic conventions and intertextual linkages. To clarify this semantic range of failure, I turn to Giorgio Agamben's poetics of inoperativity. For Agamben, the inoperative harbors a special potency, "which, by freeing the human creature from every biological or social destiny and from any predetermined task"—together with their normative criteria of success and failure—"make[s] him available for that particular absence of work we are accustomed to call 'politics' and 'art.'"[33] Although the texts examined in this study celebrate teleology, they more importantly dwell in possibilities that suspend the forward motion of their own narratives. Each text traverses a plurality of worlds organized by different genres, including topographical, biblical, and classical. The generic interplay within the texts introduces a formal dimension to the idea of failure, by confusing the criteria whereby success can be measured; readers can only know if failure occurs in one of these worlds depending on its generic conformity. In other words, genres and worlds are interdependent. An author's or a character's world-remaking mode can only be understood as a failure depending on the criteria of one world at a time. However,

[33] Agamben, *Creation and Anarchy* 27.

because even a single text in my study can depict a dizzying array of generic worlds, the texts' contradictory possibilities yield a polyphonic network wherein all successes must necessarily be failures according to the logics of different worlds.

This polyphony is necessarily antiteleological. To borrow Agamben's terms, success is suspended and rendered inoperative.[34] The texts thereby wrest failure from its dyad with success, and the consequence of failure—its futurity—appears undecided, enabling a discursive register of failure as an experimental dynamic. Rather than a paradigmatic sequence that rectifies the negativity of failures in a diachronic series, world-remaking is an experimental network that harnesses the productivity of failures in a synchronic orientation; i.e., instead of marking negativity, failure figures productivity. Thus, I conceive of world-remaking not in paradigmatic terms, but in experimental terms—a range of qualifying attributes (rather than substantive properties)—that represent a perpetual actuality, or a continuous and tangled articulation of re-worlding.

This continuous articulation involves the texts in experimental aesthetic designs, which speak to a variety of perspectives, including queer, posthuman, and racial. Accordingly, I adopt an intersectional approach to modify and expand my treatment of 17th-century texts' world-remaking strategies. Agamben's philological and philosophical meditations on the boundaries and potentialities of the human, Braidotti's studies of the posthuman ethos, and various aspects of game theory, queer theory, and critical race theory all articulate insights that fall into the orbit of posthumanist thought, as it has been articulated and shaped in recent decades. The various critical approaches gravitate toward a shared investment in thinking the posthuman as a decisive affordance of world-remaking. This particular convocation of voices and strategies presents a

[34] Id.

new perspective in the critical scholarship on early modern *cosmopoesis*, as there is an underlying linkage between the species of failure I examine throughout the project and the transhistorical intuitions of posthumanist thought that surface in the failures, eccentricities, and errancies of the world-remaking schemes at issue.

In this way, my project reflects methodologically and theoretically on the notion of "world" as it mutates across various sites of engagement in John Donne's *Metempsychosis*, William Shakespeare's *Measure for Measure*, Andrew Marvell's "Upon Appleton House," Margaret Cavendish's *The Blazing World*, and John Milton's *Paradise Lost*. As such, my manner of analysis builds throughout, tailored to draw out the critical purchase of each world-remaking experiment: posthumanism in Donne, game theory in Shakespeare, queer theory in Marvell, critical race theory in Cavendish, and privation theory in Milton. Each text's particular cosmopoetic experiment generates an array of world-remaking modes that call for different modes of analysis, as I will demonstrate.

To begin, scholars have been uncertain about how to generically "place" *Metempsychosis* within John Donne's body of work.[35] A certain strand of thought focuses on the poem's possible satiric intent, as if to say that the bizarre ethos it depicts must surely be a joke. In turn, this view relies on the notion that playful or ludic performativity is a nonproductive component of a

[35] Don Cameron Allen, "The Double Journey of John Donne," *A Tribute to George Coffin Taylor*, ed. Arnold Williams (Chapel Hill: UNC P, 1952), 83-99; Wesley Milgate, "Introduction," *John Donne: The Satires, Epigrams, and Verse Letters*, ed. Milgate (Oxford: Clarendon P, 1967), xxvii; George Williamson, "Donne's Satirical *Progresse of the Soule*," *ELH* 36.1 (1969): 253; Janel Mueller, "Donne's Epic Venture in the 'Metempsychosis,'" *MP* 70 (1972): 113; Karl P. Wentersdorf, *Metempsychosis* or *The Progresse of the Soule*," *SEL* 22.1 (1982): 70; Theresa M. DiPasquale, "Anti-Court Satire, Religious Polemic, and the Many Faces of Antichrist: An Intertextual Reading of Donne's 'Satyre 4' and Spenser's *Faerie Queene*," *Studies in Philology*, 112.2 (2015): 274, n23. The following critics emphasize the epic quality of *Metempsychosis*: Richard Hughes, *The Progresse of the Soule: The Interior Career of John Donne* (London: The Bodley Head, 1968); John A. Thomas, "John Donne's *The Progresse of the Soule*: A Re-Evaluation," *The Bulletin of the Rocky Mountain Language Association* 25.4 (1971); Ronald Corthell, "Donne's *Metempsychosis*: An 'Alarum to Truth,'" *SEL* 21.1 (1981): 101; and John Carey, *John Donne: Life, Mind and Art* (London: Faber and Faber, 1981).

developing worldview, and thus (in my terms) would be a dimension of failure. However, critics have not considered that the experimental choreography of failure in *Metempsychosis* opens onto posthuman investments—more precisely, onto Donne's particular way of imagining posthumanist space. I consider not whether failure occurs in a given instance in the poem, but *how*—at what scale, or according to which measure. I also consider the poem's varied blind spots that both shore up and silently resist the metaphysical scaffolding of the humanist ethos, thereby opening onto posthuman intuitions, which entail a certain errancy from seemingly stable positions.

Because Donne's protagonist, the great soul, primarily inhabits nonhuman bodies in the poem's narrative, her world-remaking (in)activity destabilizes normative hierarchies of divine, human, animal, and thing. Destiny is everywhere in *Metempsychosis*—dispersed across a web of connectedness that creatures (un)knowingly weave. With this pantheistic stance, the great soul becomes an emergent form of Braidotti's "posthuman knowing subject."[36] The soul is invested in this world, not a higher, platonic, or heavenly world. Donne's depiction of Destiny can be called a posthuman God, who weaves vegetable, animal, and human failures into a complex tapestry that is incoherent by the standards of any traditional, hierarchal interpretation. Creatures' incognizant participation in Destiny's world-remaking scheme diminishes their cosmopoetic autonomy. Yet this diminishment in fact enables and perpetuates a field of world-remaking energies as depicted by Donne. While *Metempsychosis* does indeed undercut subjects' individual agency, that very diminishment paradoxically bolsters their actions' world-remaking effectiveness. Because their actions are mobilized and repurposed by Destiny to alter the world, their re-creative capacity is actually increased by the deflation of their immediate intentions. The

[36] Braidotti, 31.

idea of capacity itself acquires new attributes, as it migrates from intentional agency to peripatetic adventure.

Measure for Measure also dramatizes an instance of an emergent posthumanist ethos, as the play decenters the ontological hierarchies that comprise Duke Vincentio's dominant ideological framework for political governance and social order. The other characters' thoughts and actions, which break out of traditional deontology and its regulatory precepts, serve as perturbations in the Duke's established scheme, disrupting the complacent political theology that he attempts to reinforce. Thus the play's emergent posthuman intuitions do not presciently announce a chronological outworking from humanism, but instead map out contemporary spaces for deviation from within early 17th-century humanistic norms—departures from what is casually called "the rules of the game." As such, the play's posthumanism is rife for analysis through the lens of game theory, which helps articulate the decentering and destabilizing actions that testify to the play's posthuman sensibilities.

In order to map out *Measure for Measure*'s emergent posthumanist ethics, I turn to elements of game theory that help clarify the characters' ethical operations. Although it emerged in the 20th century, game theory finds evidence of its practice in early modern European thinkers, such as Girolamo Cardano, Blaise Pascal, and Christiaan Huygens.[37] Game theory also has pre-echoes in the antecedent forms of casuistry that are historically closer to Shakespeare's era. Even Pascal, who opposes casuistry, reasons in a way that can be explained and codified in

[37] See Girolamo Cardano, *The Book on Games of Chance (Liber de Ludo Aleae)* (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1961); and Christiaan Huygens, *Christiani Hugenii Libellus de Ratiociniis in Ludo Aleæ. Or, the Value of All Chances in Games of Fortune; Cards, Dice, Wagers, Lotteries, &c. Mathematically Demonstrated*. (London: printed by S. Keimer, for T. Woodward, near the Inner Temple-Gate in Fleetstreet, 1714). For Blaise Pascal's contribution to the problem of expected value in probability theory, see Oystein Ore, "Pascal and the Invention of Probability Theory," *The American Mathematical Monthly* 67.5 (1960): 409-14.

terms of game theory's situational ethics; famously, Pascal's wager is itself an imperfect-information game, based on cost-benefit analysis. Crucially, there is no single egalitarian or universal game to explain human behavior in the abstract; instead, game theorists have formulated various scenarios to explain behavior in the context of multifarious, probable cases. By applying scenarios of game theory to the play, I interrogate how the text works, instead of what it means; i.e., my argument changes the emphasis in analyzing *Measure for Measure* from interpreting its meaning to describing the tactical gestures that inform the play's converging social worlds and the players' various efforts to impose public meanings or legitimize private meanings of actions. For example, by interrogating what the Duke does (or aims to do) and the effects of his actions, instead of what he represents characterologically, I analyze what happens to the idea of political theology in a realistic, ambiguous situation. In its posthumanist character, the play represents plural worlds that coalesce in ways that do not line up with the intentions of specific actors, but in ways legible to game theory. The local itself is already a mesh of converging worlds, some of which rehearse affects not yet fully discernible in the play's depiction of various cultural literacies. The play's worlds thereby correspond to different games, complete with rules and allowed exceptions and corresponding vectors of movement.

In a related vein, Andrew Marvell's "Upon Appleton House" overweighs Marvell's authorial intent or the poem's immediate context, due to its multimodal energies that present-day readers can recognize as queer in suggestive but discursively unstable ways. The poem's dynamic of failure produces queer effects, registers, and intuitions; as a result, "Upon Appleton House" displays a spectrum of queer agency, memory, and typology. While these queer energies are oftentimes sexual, or quasi-sexual, they are also oftentimes nonsexual. Collectively, they manifest in textual moments that are eccentric or strange across a range of behaviors and

gestures. Through experimental play, they deform received traditions and perceived normalities, opening possibilities that do not conform to seventeenth-century social realities.

As such, the poem's intertextuality novelly engages both diachronic and synchronic orientations. It is diachronic in the sense that it grapples with interpretive traditions that arise from biblical and classical texts in a cause-and-effect sequence. Yet it is also synchronic, in the sense that the poem displaces those traditions to recuperate original textual meanings that appear bizarre or queer by mid-seventeenth-century standards of normative interpretation. In the context of Marvell's England, these strange meanings invest the poem with queer energies that are narratively illegible, but that nevertheless enable a discursive register of failure as a multimodal dynamic. The poem's failures do not signpost extant moral and theological standards, or refer to other metrics, such as verisimilitude and notions of truth as a sign of adequation. As such, the failures are neither fully traditional or familiar quanta of lapse, nor are their consequences clearly defined. Marvellian queerness, in other words, is a textual effect of Marvell's poetics of errancy and eccentricity.

Notwithstanding all this, emergent queer insights in 17th-century English texts did more than disrupt traditional hierarchies; they also created new ones. Early modern writers such as Margaret Cavendish used queering operations to formulate whiteness as a racial and epistemological category. *The Blazing World*'s articulation of the default position of white subjectivity is shaped by the convergence of queer and imperializing tactics of its protagonist, the Empress. I seek to understand this text as a generative site for the study of the co-insistence of queerness and racializing political ambitions in early modern contexts. Whiteness for Cavendish, I argue, operates both inside and outside *race*, making it rather dangerously elusive in the ways we approach it and come to understand it epistemologically and

phenomenologically—both as an object of historical inquiry and as an informing element that may be present and visible without being legible. In this regard, the eccentricity of whiteness shares space with queerness, in that both attributes achieve functional potency, in Cavendish and in the early modern period generally, before they acquire conceptual clarity and the denotative power of a name. Because whiteness (uncomfortably) shares space with queerness in the era, I am motivated to examine how both attributes begin to be shaped by Cavendish's imperial world imaginaries.

My focus on the emergent politics of whiteness in *The Blazing World* opens fresh ways of thinking about the queerness that informs key parts of the narrative. Specifically, whiteness tangentially helps emphasize the culturally and historically unstable operations of "queer" practice in the era. Cavendish's engagement in the tactics of whiteness dovetails with her investment in queering the representation of her characters' desires and behaviors. In this way, the same narrative strategies in her speculative fiction serve two interests that appear at odds: 1) the incipient privilege of whiteness, which circulates as a cultural given, before it turns into a taxonomic and instrumentalized category of human identity; and 2) the nascent scandal of queerness, which operates as a random attribute of singularity or eccentricity, before it is isolated as a distinctive and essentialized component of psycho-sexual identity. Thus, *The Blazing World* performs diverging yet overlapping ideological codes in the ascendancy.

A fascinating kind of chiastic energy is at play in Cavendish's romance, whereby "white" is "queer" and "queer" is "white" (with the sense of each term shifting as it changes position in the chiasmus—revealing how emergent categories "float," functionally effective without being fully intelligible, before they become dominant). Further, *The Blazing World* links the generic worlds of romance and history, destabilizing the diegetic boundary between the narrative world

and the historical world. Because Cavendish's readers are made aware of this boundary, the text operates like a Spenserian allegory. However, Cavendish exploits the fictive quality of such allegorical thinking by showing how the ideological underpinnings are fictional, while also rendering them invisible.

Whereas Cavendish celebrates the fictionality of political theology, Milton blurs the diegetic boundary between the world of his story and the world of history. As a regicide, Milton depicts political theology—and all forms of kingship outside of Heaven—as satanic imitations of the divine original. *Paradise Lost* relies on the Augustinian insight that evil can be insubstantial yet potent because it is imitative. Milton grafts "political theology" onto "evil" by basing the psychology of evil on privation theory, so that Satan's imitation of God's monarchy, his willful rivalry against omniscience, renders political theology an ontologically inferior fabrication of theology itself. Milton's Augustinian sense of evil is the ultimate world-remaking failure because it is a potent absence. Satan's failures to reform Heaven, Hell, and Paradise in conjunction with his intended design are incorporated as necessary features of the overarching world-remaking mode of Milton's God—demonstrating failure's capacity for cosmopoetic productivity.

The five chapters of my project analyzes distinctive iterations of the problem of world-remaking failures. The first two chapters follow the loosely structured world-wandering of Donne and Marvell, while the last three interrogate the more tightly focused world-models of Cavendish, Shakespeare, and Milton. Each text exhibits an inclination toward a "closed" world (legible and conforming to an *a priori* scheme of order). At the same time, each text's multiple genres and modes give license, under shifting conditions, for different types of errancy. My argument does not construct a teleological narrative, wherein a chronologically later text demonstrates a new stage of secularization, or a more radical critique of the "humanist"

assumptions inherited from antiquity and early modern philosophy. Because the texts oscillate between different senses of "the world" without building on each other, I organize the chapters nonchronologically.

Donne and Marvell remain profoundly attached to what Foucault describes in *The Order of Things* as the dominant ethos of the premodern world—an ethos based on a web of cosmic resemblances and communicative porosity; in contrast, Cavendish, Shakespeare, and Milton demonstrate different modes of harnessing the emergent ethos of what Foucault calls the "Classical" era (i.e., modernity)—an ethos governed by taxonomic grids of identity and difference.[38] A compatible contemporary reference for the shift Foucault painstakingly describes is in Alexandre Koyré's *From the Closed World to the Infinite Universe*.[39] These two works of intellectual and cultural history map onto my sequence of chapters because they envision evolving arrays of tactics—rather than a systematic project—underlying what cultural and literary historians observe as a shift in the dominant culture's sense of the "global." Donne's deliberate and wild errancy among various idioms and authorities and Marvell's famous retreats into idiosyncratic renderings of the *hortus conclusus* trope speak to a casual assumption of an overarching, metaphysically coherent order. To be sure, Cavendish, Shakespeare, and Milton continue to trade in the same intellectual traditions as Donne and Marvell. However, *The Blazing World*, *Measure for Measure*, and *Paradise Lost* issue signals that they have already crossed to the other shore: the secular and "mappable" world of taxonomically legible (not to say fixed) identities and differences that are not reflexively guaranteed by metaphysical assurances.

I have chosen texts that, for the most part, have a complicated relation to the received

[38] Foucault, *The Order of Things: An Archaeology of the Human Sciences* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1970).

[39] Alexandre Koyré, *From the Closed World to the Infinite Universe* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Press, 1957).

literary canon. Many drift at the periphery of the "Western" canon (and consequently at the fringes of Eurocentric conceptions of the "human"). Donne's *Metempsychosis* is a critically neglected text by a canonical author. As a "problem play," *Measure for Measure* resists full integration into the Shakespeare canon. Marvell's "Upon Appleton House" is a strange experiment in reinterpreting apocryphal breakdowns and other "failures" in biblical canonicity. Cavendish's *The Blazing World* has only (relatively) recently migrated to the forefront of academic study in early modern literature. Finally, after focusing on the fringes of the canon, my study concludes by aiming directly at its heart: *Paradise Lost*, wherein Milton unintentionally problematizes the very idea of the "canonical," together with the *a priori* status of divine authority and corresponding project of world-remaking subsumption under a totalizing gaze. Throughout these five texts, the errancies and eccentricities of perspective result in a multifarious dynamic of failure, whose cumulative effect demonstrates subtle but decisive mutations from premodern to modern understandings of the ontological, ideological, operative, and canonical function of the "human" in 17th-century English literary world-remaking experiments.

Chapter 1. The World-Remaking of the Parasite in Donne's Metempsychosis

John Donne's *Metempsychosis* (1601) is a thought-experiment that articulates, expands, and satirizes the Pythagorean system of metempsychosis as depicted in Ovid's *Metamorphoses*.[40] This system serves as a legacy for Donne's poem, but the poem depicts it as a post facto, synthetic, mental operation to make sense of the accidental array of circumstances that constitute the past. The "great Soul," as Donne playfully calls his protagonist, perpetually dies and reincarnates in multiple forms—vegetable, animal, and human (11). She begins as the soul of the Forbidden Fruit; thereafter, she animates a mandrake; a sparrow; two fishes in succession; a whale; a mouse; a wolf and, immediately afterward, that wolf's offspring; an ape; and finally Themech, the daughter of Eve. Throughout the text, the great soul's different permutations learn how to locate weaknesses and take advantage of inherent flaws in new situations.

In this way, the text's world-remaking anticipates the logic of the parasite. This parasitic logic, I argue, is central to understanding both the poem's unstable and irregular satiric posture and its unsettled position between the two dominant philosophical frameworks of the era—classical humanism and Christian thought—since both its generic restlessness and its philosophical ambivalence grow out of the same interplay of appropriation, disturbance, and transformation. Michel Serres's *The Parasite* offers a particularly useful model for unpacking this interplay, as his account of parasitism illuminates how literary works, like parasites, draw upon and transform extant systems in ways that destabilize their authority while ensuring their continued operation.[41] Parasitic logic provides linkages between the modal senses of failure and the broader posthumanist intuitions circulating throughout *Metempsychosis*. I will return to these

[40] Ovid, *Metamorphoses*, trans. A.D. Melville (Oxford: Oxford UP, 2009), xv. 60-368.

[41] Serres, *The Parasite*, 22, 66-7, 73.

framing concepts and their relation to Serres's (and Donne's) notion of the parasite.

For the moment, I wish simply to specify how both modal operations and posthumanist intuitions entail a certain errancy or decentering movement from seemingly stable positions. I consider not whether failure occurs in a given instance, but *how*—at what scale, or according to which measure. I also consider the varied blind spots that both shore up and silently resist the metaphysical scaffolding of the humanist ethos. From this vantage point, the poem's parasitic gestures are mobilized toward a cosmopoetic ambition, exploiting weaknesses in received discourses and converting them into opportunities for remaking worlds.

As such, Donne's posthumanist and parasitic investments are linked to the materialist and anti-metaphysical aspects of Lucretian thought, the legacy of which is silently embedded in the intellectual and cultural infrastructure of *Metempsychosis*. Lucretius is also (and more explicitly) a figure of paramount importance to Serres—and probably not coincidentally. I will return to the Lucretian legacy in a moment; for now, let us note simply that *Metempsychosis* harnesses a range of gestures that contribute to its "parasitic" logic as both an organizing principle and quasi-philosophical experiment in the Lucretian dynamism of world-remaking.[42]

These gestures include the poem's evident appropriations of the satiric genre, the seeming lack of correspondence between grammatical form and semantic content, the ruses of intertextual allusiveness that do not quite add up to a coherent vision, and what today may be recognized as the queer dimensions of the text's discourse. In turn, the tactical, unfinished, and contingent dimension of this world-remaking operation sets the stage for the dislocating effects

[42] For recent work in early modern studies from the Lucretian perspective, see e.g. Gerard Passannante, *The Lucretian Renaissance: Philology and the Afterlife of Tradition* (Chicago: U of Chicago P , 2011); and *Elemental Ecocriticism: Thinking with Earth, Air, Water, and Fire*, ed. Jeffrey Jerome Cohen and Lowell Duckert (Minneapolis: U of Minnesota P, 2015).

associated with the text's emergent, posthumanist insights. The poem's posthumanist elements—its decentering of human agency, investment in nonhuman actors, and blurring of boundaries between species and things—arise in ways that cross historical periods, linking early modern concerns with ideas that contemporary critics now identify as posthumanist. These transhistorical intuitions of posthumanist thought surface in the failures, eccentricities, and errancies of the world-remaking scheme at issue, decentering human agency from its privileged position in the textual world. The poem's parasitic ethos makes legible the complementary investments of its range of gestures, all of which contribute to the posthumanist effect.

For starters, the "progress" of the soul is actually a regression—a product of the miseducation brought about by random encounters, which the poem ironically refers to as "Destiny." While the soul's ascent from vegetable to animal to human is preserved, Destiny becomes a ghost in the machine—a wildcard in a game of fortune. The poem itself turns out to be antiteleological; its referential "telos" points not to an imagined utopian accomplishment, but instead to the ceremonial illusions and unethical behaviors of Elizabethan courtly protocol. By no coincidence, the text also engages in queer textuality and sexuality—featuring the soul's physical attractions and relationships that are coded as strange or aberrant. At every turn, in other words, *Metempsychosis* exposes the emptiness of ideological trappings, explodes the mythos of received or ordained authority, bleeds political theology of allegorical meaning, and leaves in their place a deliberate void—an absence of stable meaning that resists closure and refuses to supply an alternative framework. Allegory operates throughout the narrative, but Donne does not take it seriously as a heuristic to decode registers of divine action in the world. Instead, the poem critically evaluates political sovereignty, but eschews any need to reinforce or rehabilitate hierarchy.

Thus, the poem's elaborate satire contains a blind spot. That is, the holistic effect of *Metempsychosis*'s satirical bent exempts from scrutiny the narrator's staging of his own sovereignty—i.e., the prestation of virtuoso intellectual activity in critical ("unmasking") mode, without concern for the particular topic being inspected. The prospect of the narrator's nihilism is thoroughgoing, without a tacit "ground" to any ideological commitment, beyond the bravura demonstration of satirical wit. In terms of intellectual history, the poem engages in the curious feedback loop of Pyrrhonian skepticism, which manifests a species of repetition-compulsion to resist the (illusory) satisfactions of any committed form or content of knowledge.

In the prefatory Epistle, Donne summarizes the plot, claiming to narrate the soul's "passages from her first making when she was that apple which Eve ate, to this time, when she is he whose life you shall find in the end of this book" ("Epistle" 36-9).[43] However, the narrative does not continue beyond the soul's inhabitation of Themech—leading many readers to guess about the identity of her embodiment in Donne's time.[44] I join Siobhan Collins in arguing that the soul's last body is not the main focus of the poem.[45] The anti-teleological energies driving

[43] In-text citations are from John Donne, *Metempsychosis*, *The Complete Poems of John Donne*, ed. Robin Robbins (New York: Pearson, 2010), 422-60.

[44] Ben Jonson believed that Donne intended the soul's last embodiment to be John Calvin [Conversation with William Drummond of Hawthornden, in *Ben Jonson*, ed. C.H. Hereford, Percy Simpson and Evelyn Simpson, 11 vol. (Oxford: Clarendon P, 1925-52), 1:136]. Andrew Marvell claimed it was meant to be Samuel Parker [*The Rehearsall Transpros'd: The Second Part* (London, 1673)]. Some scholars have identified Donne's satirical target as Elizabeth I [Edmund Gosse. ed. *The Life and Letters of John Donne*, 2 vol. (London: William Heinemann, 1899); Herbert Grierson, ed. *The Poems of John Donne*, 2 vol. (Oxford: Oxford UP, 1912); Kenneth James Hughes, "Donne's 'Metempsychosis' and the Objective Idea of Unreason," *CIEFL* 18.1&2 (1982): 17, 37; and A.J. Smith, ed. *John Donne: The Complete English Poems* (New York: Penguin, 1996), 506]. Others have argued for Robert Cecil, Secretary of State [M. Van Wyk Smith, "John Donne's *Metempsychosis*," *RES New Series*, XXIV.93 (1973): 143; Dennis Flynn, "Donne's *Ignatius His Conclave* and Other Libels on Robert Cecil," *JDJ* 6.2 (1987); Brian Blackley, "Reading the Genres of *Metempsychosis*," *Critic* 68.1-2 (2006): 19; Lara Crowley, "Cecil and the Soul: Donne's *Metempsychosis* in its Context in Folger Manuscript V.a.241," *English Manuscript Studies, 1100-1700*, 13 (2007); and Richard Dutton, "Jonson's Metempsychosis Revisited: Patronage and Religious Controversy," *Ben Jonson and the Politics of Genre*, ed. A.D. Cousins and Alison V. Scott (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2009), 155.]

[45] Siobhan Collins, *Bodies, Politics and Transformations: John Donne's* Metempsychosis (Burlington: Ashgate, 2013), 160.

the text vitiate any stable sense of a legible, final resting point of "arrival" or accomplishment. The poem's gesture toward soliciting interest in the soul's final embodiment (i.e., the teleological topic) is situated as a parodic effect, a simulation of a cultural habit of thought that is deliberately evacuated of pertinence.

Additionally, the questionable status of the soul's final form suggests that *Metempsychosis* is an unfinished political satire. As it happens, critics have for many years debated the poem's genre, as well as its possible state of incompletion.[46] Those arguing for the poem's completed character have surmised Donne's intentions based on the text's thematic interests.[47] Those against have assumed that the plot summaries in the Epistle and the seventh stanza should be taken at face value. Both assessments reflect a critical investment in respecting the apparent integrity of the text's structure (an approach reminiscent of the New Criticism of the fifties and sixties), without necessarily attending to the vagaries of historical circumstance that inform most editorial practice of texts. For example, one reason that the ending does not match these summaries may be related to a politically charged historical event. Donne dates the poem "16 Augusti 1601," the day he circulated it "to his friends," according to the editors of the *Variorum* edition.[48] With the Bishops' Ban of 1599 in full effect, however, Donne could neither publish his work, nor circulate it to a courtly audience. Evidently, the poem may have been too dangerous to complete.

[46] See e.g. R. Hughes, 68-79; Thomas; and Carey. Blackley and Collins affirm *Metempsychosis* as a finished work (Blackley, 14; Collins, 5).

[47] Blackley, 14; Collins, 5.

[48] Ed. Gary A. Stringer et al, *Metempsychosis*, *The Variorum Edition of the Poetry of John Donne, Vol. 3: The Satires* (Bloomington: Indiana UP, 2013), 202. Donald Dickson is the editor of *Metempsychosis* for this edition.

However, the ending's unfinished appearance ultimately goes beyond any conjectured exigencies of Donne's own historical context. Just as the narrative of *Metempsychosis* deflates the cosmopoetic effectiveness of human intentionality, the ending (or lack thereof) appropriately obscures Donne's own authorial intent. As will be shown, the ending calls into question how we come to know anything, not only in its form and content, but also in the poem's sense of incompletion.

This observation dovetails with the evidence of the poem's unsettled editorial history: Scholars have been uncertain about how to generically "place" *Metempsychosis* within Donne's body of work.[49] The strand of thought that focuses on the poem's possible satiric intent seems to take for granted that the bizarre ethos depicted by the narrative must surely be a joke. In turn, this view relies on the notion that playful or ludic performativity is a nonproductive component of a developing worldview, and thus (in my terms) would be a dimension of failure—a mere bagatelle without purpose, a "minor" entry in the Donne corpus.

In terms of genre, *Metempsychosis* certainly has a satiric nature; after all, the narrative is entitled, "*Poema Satyricon*."[50] Yet, the debate around its genre has arisen because the poem itself produces multiple genres, including satire, epic, mock-epic, and allegory. The text satirizes everything within its large scope and thereby expands even as it also destabilizes what satire as a genre can accomplish. Satire is a key genre for world-remaking because it exposes failures, typically with reparative intent. However, rather than seeking to remedy the ethical failures of a satiric target, Donne converts them into threads of a larger experimental network of world-

[49] Allen, 83-99; Milgate, xxvii; Williamson, 253; Mueller, 113; Wentersdorf, 70; DiPasquale, 274, n23. The following scholars highlight the poem's epic conventions: R. Hughes; Thomas; Corthell, 101; and Carey.

[50] For an extended analysis of this phrase, which is Donne's subheading for the narrative of *Metempsychosis*, see Collins, esp. ch2.

remaking, producing an orienting field of vision that both deflates the importance of human agency while simultaneously bolstering the world-remaking effectiveness of nonhuman action; in a word, an emergent posthumanist ethos.

Many critics have judged *Metempsychosis* to be a failure because of its incomprehensibility and strangeness. I agree with Janel Mueller that critics have not sufficiently appreciated *Metempsychosis* because they have not fully understood it.[51] However, all texts evade complete critical understanding; that is what makes criticism possible. Further, it is ironic that the perceived factor of strangeness has prevented this poem from receiving the level of scholarly attention it deserves, despite the fact that strangeness has been posited as a poetic criterion by such prominent critics as Owen Barfield.[52] While the strangeness and incomprehensibility of other works may have been subsumed into scholarly orthodoxy, those of *Metempsychosis* have not. The odd demotion of the poem in critical history should make readers and scholars alert to the unacknowledged criteria of value that have elevated some works and not others. *Metempsychosis* points to the strangeness and incomprehensibility of texts that critics have, in Milton's words, "not willingly let […] die."[53]

The Posthuman Investments of Incognizance

According to Ayesha Ramachandran, early modernity marked the beginning of a "view of the world as humanly fashioned," an implicitly humanistic assertion largely based on analyses

[51] Mueller, 109.

[52] See esp. chapter XI of Owen Barfield, *Poetic Diction: A Study in Meaning* (Oxford: Barfield P UK, 1973).

[53] Milton, *The Reason of Church-Government*, *Riverside Milton*, 902-25: Book II, Introduction.

of texts that have been normalized by scholarly tradition.[54] The paradigm shift from the Middle Ages to the Renaissance works by subsuming and homogenizing strange texts, ignoring all perspectives that do not conform to the most broadly acceptable average of views on *cosmopoiesis*. However, *Metempsychosis* certainly does not adhere to such an average. As a critically neglected poem by a canonical author, its strangeness has not been normalized, and this fact makes it distinctly helpful in destabilizing androcentric categories of early modern worldmaking. In this text, the cosmopoetic relationships among the divine, human, animal, and vegetable are blurred and complicated. Together with the other texts of my study, *Metempsychosis* illustrates that the poetic, philosophical, and metaphysical scaffolding of humanism cannot fully account for the diverse views among early modern writers about how the world is recreated. The literary canon itself has never been (fully) humanist; it has always held posthumanist traits.

As such, critics have not considered that the experimental choreography of failure in *Metempsychosis* opens onto Donne's particular way of imagining posthumanist space. To begin with the obvious structural detail: Because Donne's protagonist, the great soul, primarily inhabits nonhuman bodies in the poem's narrative, and does so in no readily predictable sequence, her world-remaking (in)activity destabilizes normative hierarchies of divine, human, animal, and thing. Of course, the metanarrative figure of Destiny is everywhere in *Metempsychosis*—but its agency is dispersed across a web of connectedness that creatures (un)knowingly weave. The soul is invested and enmeshed in this world, not a higher, platonic, or heavenly world. One could say the soul is precisely this activity of investing and enmeshing. Donne's depiction of Destiny should be called a posthuman "God"—an overturning of the mimetic logic that supports both the

[54] Ramachandran, 10.

notion of God as the *deus artifex*, as well as the human as the *imago dei*. The posthuman orientation dispenses with the security of the precisely scaled mimetic guardrails, which ratify the position of humans as godlike in the created world. As a posthuman God, Destiny weaves vegetable, animal, and human modal failures into a complex tapestry that is incoherent by the standards of any traditional interpretation of ontological hierarchy (or destiny).

The soul's incognizant participation in Destiny's world-remaking scheme no doubt diminishes the cosmopoetic autonomy of human beings. Elizabeth D. Harvey has previously claimed that, in *Metempsychosis*, "the sovereignty over all living things that God supposedly conferred upon human beings is called into question;"[55] I expand Harvey's insightful logic by arguing that this diminishment in fact enables and perpetuates an expanded field of world-remaking energies as depicted by Donne. While *Metempsychosis* does indeed undercut subjects' individual agency, that very diminishment paradoxically bolsters their actions' world-making effectiveness. Because the actions and inactions of plants, animals, and humans are mobilized and repurposed by Destiny to alter the world of the poem in perpetuity, the re-creative capacity of creatures is increased by the deflation of their immediate and local intentions. The idea of capacity itself acquires new attributes, as it migrates from intentional agency to peripatetic adventure. Thus the poem's position aligns with a Pyrrhonian (and Lucretian) vantage point because it dislodges human intentionality from its privileged place in the cosmological scheme.[56] In *Metempsychosis*, world-making is a process whereby all spirits, human or otherwise, partake

[55] Elizabeth D. Harvey, "The Souls of Animals: John Donne's *Metempsychosis* and Early Modern Natural History," *Environment and Embodiment in Early Modern England*, ed. Mary Floyd-Wilson and Garrett A. Sullivan, Jr. (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007): 55.

[56] Pyrrhonian skepticism and Lucretian materialism intersect in their reliance on empirical observations, rejection of dogmatic beliefs, and a focus on achieving a sense of tranquility or contentment through understanding the natural world. See Ada Palmer, *Reading Lucretius in the Renaissance* (Cambridge: Harvard UP, 2014), esp. chapter 1, "Religion Trampled Underfoot."

in the continuous renewal of the world, without ever understanding either the causes or the effects of their own participation.

The Regression of the Soul into Parasitism

Throughout *Metempsychosis*, the soul's worldview evolves without her complete awareness or intentionality. The great soul remembers her experiences in previous lives and thereby accumulates qualities, traits, emotions, and later the desire to reform the world. Destiny influences this process by choosing bodies specifically tailored to develop the soul's characteristics. Through this process of absorption, Destiny perpetually recreates the soul's worldview. Many critics have analyzed the soul's accumulation of traits, demonstrating how it causes her character to regress.[57] Though it may seem counterintuitive, this regressive absorption, as we shall see, also points to world-remaking: The regression of the soul's inner world and the corruption of the natural world both mirror and actualize each other, concretizing the relation between self and world in *Metempsychosis*.

However, as Harvey claims, "If the soul's memory to which Donne alludes in the prefatory epistle stores its own transmigratory history, the soul is nevertheless not precisely the repository of that mnemonic faculty."[58] Harvey points to Donne's claim in the Epistle that the soul's "memory hath ever been her own" ("Epistle" 35). The soul's memory operates according to a kind of logical process, figured as a necessary principle of being—a species of a priori reasoning that is nonetheless grounded in the contingencies of the soul's specific incarnations. Although the poem satirizes the Pythagorean doctrine of metempsychosis, it consistently

[57] See e.g. Van Wyk Smith, 24; Harvey, 67; Collins, 20, 32-3, 49, 51, 71, 73, 153.

[58] Harvey, 62. See also Kenneth Gross, "John Donne's Lyric Skepticism: In Strange Way," *MP* 101.3 (2004): 372.

maintains this logic of the soul's memory and its effects on her separate transmigrations. While her memories belong to her, the process whereby she accumulates them belongs to Destiny, which mobilizes the effects of her memory to recreate the world. Further, since the soul's worldview is remade by remembrance of her previous forms, and since these regenerations are predetermined by Destiny, these local world-changes are always-already latent within her. Thus, her world-remaking is a mode always in contingent potentiality—the sense of logic mentioned above.

Donne summarizes the process of absorption in his penultimate stanza: "Keeping some quality/ Of every past shape, she knew treachery,/ Rapine, deceit, and lust" (506-8). The key word here is "some": Although the soul animates only one human in the narrative of *Metempsychosis*, most of her forms have human qualities—a partial endowment. The poem endows plants and animals with human qualities, and humans with plant and animal qualities. This unpredictable, species-shifting dynamic is the text's dramatization of the logic of contingent potentiality. There is also a generic component to consider in this procedure: Donne deflates the "great" soul through satire, which has a flattening effect—equalizing all her incarnations and thereby deemphasizing the otherwise privileged status of the human.

Initially, the soul inhabits the Forbidden Fruit, which the serpent plucks from the Tree of Knowledge. Here the soul is not the primary historical actor in this instance of world-remaking, but is acted upon by the serpent, Adam, and Eve. For Collins, "the soul's blessed existence in the apple in paradise is a privileged and golden, if unstable, moment that reflects the original intention of God's plan for humanity."[59] I agree that the Forbidden Fruit reflects God's plan for humanity, though not in the sense that Collins means. Through figurative language, the narrator

[59] Collins, 45.

describes the Forbidden Fruit proleptically: By comparing the Fruit to the "dawning morn" (81), the narrator links the great soul to Lucifer, the Morning Star, emphasizing the soul's capacity for sin and cause of sin in others. Additionally, in the verse, "Had first in Paradise a low but fatal room" (70), "fatal" is a pun on "deathly" and "fated" (Latin *fatum* contains both meanings). This pun literally makes sense because the Fruit will inevitably bring death into the world (according to the narrative logic of Genesis 3). The description of the Fruit under signs of the Fall demonstrates that, in *Metempsychosis*, God intended for the world to be corrupted. Collins's theodicean assumption leads to the assertion that "there exists a greater reality, a larger narrative, to which adherence to God's 'holie writts' can provide access."[60] However, Donne satirizes the idea of this higher history, as God's commissary, Destiny, chooses the soul's bodies to corrupt her. While the repetitive nature of the varied incarnations seems to carry teleological import, the seeming randomness of each species that materializes in the process introduces a persistent, satiric edginess to the narrative logic.

This interplay between pattern and unpredictability is underscored by the soul's passivity, which becomes instrumental to Destiny's mode of world-remaking. When she is reborn as a mandrake, "Her, her fate threw/ There through th'Earth's pores, and in a plant housed her anew" (129-30). Donne's narrator positions fate as the subject and the great soul as the object of this sentence. Yet in the very next stanza, the soul is attributed a perfect passive participle, "abled," and a past emphatic verb, "did force" (131). "Abled" is a passive state, yet it signals the potential for greater activity. In the following stanza, the active verbs "thrust" and "scattered" indicate that the soul's actions are fundamental to the mandrake's growth; she is participating in her body's generation. The narrator even claims that the mandrake-form is "built by the" soul (159). As the

[60] Ibid. 140.

narrative progresses, she gains more and more agency. Although the soul is passive in her early lives, she is no less instrumental to Destiny's world-remaking scheme than are the serpent and primordial humans. The great soul remembers her passivity as the Forbidden Fruit and this memory prompts her to become more forceful; she is "abled" by her mandrake-form (131). The very act of remembering the condition of passivity contributes to the subsequent capacity to become more forceful. That is, Donne suggests that memory itself is a species of action—as he would have known from Latin and medieval memory arts (where the distinction between natural and artificial memory is correlated with different types of action)—and is therefore already poised to alter the (remembered) condition of passivity.[61]

Thereafter, Destiny enables this growing activity by putting the soul in the sparrow, a body that "can move" (205). When her mandrake-form dies, the soul "runs/ Thoughtless of change, when her firm destiny/ Confined and enjailed her that seemed so free" (175-7). On a local level, these lines depict her transmigration from the mandrake to the sparrow; more broadly, they exemplify her incognizance of Destiny throughout the poem. Although she seems to be agential and free, she remains unaware not only of her transmigrations from past forms to new ones, but also of how the unseen operation of Destiny directs these metempsychoses. As a sparrow, the soul remembers the mandrake's emerging capability and thereby again becomes more forceful—this time as an embodiment of lust. Through memory, she retains her lustful drive in later lives.

Consider how, while narrating the sparrow's generation, the poem satirizes one of Socrates' similes in Plato's *Phaedrus*, demonstrating that the great soul is unaware of her origin

[61] See Mary J. Carruthers, *The Book of Memory: A Study of Memory in Medieval Culture*, 2nd ed. (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2008).

in eternity. According to Socrates, "Like a child whose teeth are just starting to grow in, and its gums are all aching and itching—that is exactly how the soul feels when it begins to grow wings."[62] Socrates uses this simile to describe "the experience we humans call love," which arises when earthly beauty activates a soul's memory of eternity—of what it was before embodiment.[63] However, Donne revises this simile to describe the great soul's formation of physical wings—not spiritual ones. In contrast, Socrates describes a soul leaving its body and for a time returning to eternity. Donne satirizes the platonic simile by replacing the metaphysically-oriented love of the soul with the promiscuous lust of the sparrow, as well as by reversing the soul's movement and thereby substituting the eternal with the temporal. According to Socrates, "long ago, you see, the entire soul had wings."[64] In the platonic scheme, the soul's growth of wings is actually a regeneration: the making is a remaking. Further, platonic knowledge is something one remembers of the state before corporeal existence. In *Metempsychosis*, the progress of the great soul from body to body depends on her (partial) memories of past lives, but not of her original creation *ex nihilo* by God; Donne does not go back that far.

Collins, perhaps reading rather more into the poem than the poem's discourse warrants, asserts that "the "progress of the soul towards degeneration can be countered by an active recollection of the unity that exists in all origins."[65] However, the great soul seems to have neither memory of eternity, nor awareness of her beginnings. The platonic soul's knowledge is based on remembering its origin: knowing is re-knowing. In *Metempsychosis*, the great soul

[62] Plato, *Phaedrus*, trans. Alexander Nehamas and Paul Woodruff, *Plato Complete Works*, ed. John M. Cooper and D. S. Hutchinson (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Company, 1997), 506-56: 528.

[63] Ibid. 529.

[64] Ibid. 528.

[65] Collins, 12.

lacks access to the possibility of this platonic realization. Donne's language satirizes the metaphysical moorings of "Destiny" by treating it as the empty signifier of a structural necessity. It encapsulates the directionality of movement, growth, and process, without any teleological assurances. In this regard, the poem presents the idea that immutability causes mutability as a phenomenological effect, rather than a metaphysical necessity.

After this period of scattered, exploratory activity, the soul begins to channel its energies toward a more coherent trajectory—one that the poem satirically frames as a "progress to greatness." She rebegins in a position of powerlessness: Her fourth form is "as yet/ Perchance a fish, but by no name you could call it" (229-30); it was still in the process of generation when the swan devoured it. Because the Forbidden Fruit and the mandrake were previously consumed, this marks the third time that the soul has been eaten. Nevertheless, this fish-form is a culmination of the soul's growth from passivity to activity, as the soul herself "abled" this form (227). When she had inhabited the mandrake, "abled" was a perfect passive participle attributed to her. In the description of the fish's generation, "abled" is an active verb that she performs upon her body. In other words, at the level of grammatical nuance, the poem maps scalar shifts in the transformation of the idea of potentiality from passive to active—the emergence of agential force.

Having learned from her previous forms, her second fish-body is now fast and nimble, taught by experience to better avoid predators. However, because the soul is too "doubtful of her way" (273), she is ingested yet again by a "great" creature (279): the oyster-catcher. The only exaltation she can achieve is ironic, an indication of her powerlessness: "Exalted she's but to th'exalter's good,/ As are, by great ones, men which lowly stood:/ It raised to be the raiser's instrument and food" (278-80). The critical edginess of this passage turns on more than the lines'

semantic content. Line 280 applies Latin grammar to English verse by employing an ablative absolute clause—merely a condition for the main clause. The soul is literally and grammatically powerless. The ablative absolute clause is also a suspended condition; unlike a participial phrase, it does not describe the subject. As such, the soul does not even own her own powerlessness. Further, the antecedent of "It" is the fish, though in this episode, the fish's pronoun has consistently been "her" (252, 261, 271-7). The narrator first describes the fish as "it" when the oyster-catcher sees her (276). As soon as the predator targets her, she becomes a neuter object, subtracted from the procreative "logic" of gendered identity; i.e., the "destiny" coded in the queer "reproductive" motions of the soul is not grounded in the metaphysics of gender hierarchy.

Donne's grammatical and semantic *combinatoire* of rhetorical effects offers an object lesson in early modern queering effects that do not fit into a neat historicist teleology. This feature suggests an emergent form of modern and late modern queer identitarian formations. Here, Donne anticipates Foucault's argument about the emergence of the identitarian logic of sexual identities in the 19th century. The poem also rescues that argument from late modern misreadings of Foucault's more fundamental insight about the "tactical polyvalence" of power discourses, which resist reduction into stable identitarian categories.[66] The various queering operations in *Metempsychosis* similarly sidestep the teleological argument that tends to read "emergent" categories as no more than prophetic gestures toward modern and late modern received truths or assumptions. To put the matter in the terms of Donne's metaphor in this passage, the poem's emergent traits are not a bounty gathered from an analytical fishing expedition, or merely evidence of confirmation bias. The sly substitution of "it" for "her" achieves its queering effects by stubbornly resisting referential anchorage and metahistorical

[66] Foucault, *The History of Sexuality*, vol. 1, trans. Robert Hurley (New York: Pantheon Books, 1978), 100-2.

legibility.

Notwithstanding its tactical anti-teleological gestures, the poem also entertains the satisfactions of the idea of progress or development, and so, at last, Destiny places the soul in a "great" body (330): Inhabiting a whale, she remembers the fish's innocence, vulnerability, lowness, and indecision; thus, the whale exercises its full power and capability, with its actions depicted through active verbs throughout the episode. The whale is also "like a prince" (334).[67] The word "Prince" was previously used in the description of the Forbidden Fruit (81), as well as in the simile about the soil making room for the mandrake (137). While the Fruit and the mandrake were immobile, the whale is fully active—arguably a fuller realization of prince-like character. Yet this attribute guarantees nothing.

After the whale is killed by lesser creatures, the soul is motivated to avenge her lost greatness, and not without cause. With a glancingly sardonic gesture, the narrator relates the whale's rebirth as a mouse, which retains "a little indignation" from her previous life and thus kills an elephant (372). Her new and incongruous trait of indignation is based on her "memory" ("Epistle" 35), for she is "late taught" by the experience of her previous form (379). The ironic pitch to this turn of events demonstrates, among other things, Donne's intertextual witticism. In Geffrey Whitney's popular emblem book, *A Choice of Emblemes,* the suicidal assassin is depicted as a serpent killing an elephant.[68] Donne changes Whitney's serpent to a mouse, thereby emphasizing that the assassin is not inherently evil, but corrupted by experience. The narrative logic implies that the soul's whale-body required her to consume other creatures to survive;

[67] The analogy of soul and monarch, "her Court, the brain," is elaborated by John Davies, *Nosce Teipsum* (London: Printed by Richard Field for John Standish, 1602), 331-400.

[68] Geffrey Whitney, *A Choice of Emblemes: 1586*, English Emblem Books, No. 3 (Menston: Scolar Press, 1969), 195.

inhabiting a mouse, she no longer must kill other animals to survive, but she nevertheless retains the whale's bloodlust.[69] Additionally, she learns that physical meekness does not necessitate lack of power (371-80); having been great, the transmigrated soul can be powerful, regardless of the perceived limitations of her new form. Tellingly, she hates the elephant because it brings to mind her loss, motivating her to destabilize the hierarchal world in which she has lost prestige—a resentment that anticipates Lucifer's condition in *Paradise Lost*.

Donne's narrator uses the whale episode to satirize greatness, vengeance, and even the genre of satire itself: "'Tis greatest now, and to destruction/ Nearest: there's no pause at perfection./ Greatness a period hath, but hath no station" (338-40). Lines 339 and 340 throw off the iambic meter with trochaic openings, emphasizing the imperfection inherent in the "perfection" they describe. The narrator further parodies this "Greatness" by organizing line 340 around an obvious chiasmus: If greatness has no stasis, it must of course have an end. This parody is driven home by stanza 37, which ironically bereaves the whale of its dignity by comparing it to a king, whom none will avenge. The king's heirs benefit from his death (363-5), the people have no motive for revenge (366-8), and the king's successor is disincentivized from vengeance (368-70). The narrator satirizes subjects for not avenging their king; at the same time, he suggests that the king himself is not worth avenging. In a word, the very motive for satire loses some of its edge, if the object of satire has already depreciated in value. Through their common destabilizing and self-consuming operations, the subjects, the king, and the satirical genre itself are all positioned as parasites.

[69] Early modern lore distinguished mice from rats; while not as loathed, mice were still regarded as vectors of disease and were associated with rapaciousness and thievery. See "Rats in Early Modern Life—and in Shakespeare's Plays (and Other Wild Things)," *Shakespeare & Beyond*, Folger Shakespeare Library, 28 Feb. 2017, https://www.folger.edu/blogs/shakespeare-and-beyond/rats-early-modern-life-shakespeare-plays-wild-things/.

Here, the narrative adds detail and heft to its parasitic logic. After the soul's tenure in the mouse's body—where she learns indignation, envy, and "gallant mischief" (380)—she transmigrates into a wolf. In this new form, her bloodlust is sharpened by a body that "could kill as soon as go" (403). The wolf consumes Abel's sheep by manipulating his watchdog into becoming a double agent (411–13). When Abel kills the wolf, the great soul passes into her own offspring: a hybrid pup born of the wolf and the corrupted watchdog. "This wolf begot himself" (434), a deliberately perverse conceit, reinforcing the great soul's mounting bloodlust, so that the pup "finished/ What he began alive when he was dead" (434-5). Here Donne's allusive wit carries depth charges into the hieratic associations of the descriptive language. For example, as the first shepherd, Abel traditionally exemplifies the churchman in the virtues of contemplation, pilgrimage, and sacrifice, as well as the ruler's administration and government of the flock.[70] Abel also signifies the correlative authority of both political and religious dignitaries. For Donne's first readers in 1601, the association of Abel's flock with the Christian community, Christ's sheep, would have included the more local understanding of English subjects.[71] The wolf, too, carries tactical symbolic weight, beyond its conventional predatory associations. Donne had converted to Anglicanism at some point in the years before *Metempsychosis* was written. Given the continued legibility of Catholic imagery in Reformation England—and the controversial aura of the religious order at issue—it may be noted that two grey wolves featured on the arms of Ignatius Loyola, founder of the Jesuits, with their militant mission to reconvert England to the Roman Church.[72] The ways in which strange conjunctions appear, together with

[70] Benedictus Pererius, *Commentariorum et Disputationum in Genesim* (Cologne: Apud Antonium Hierat, Sub Monocerote, 1601), 7.12 330.

[71] In Acts 20:29 of *The Geneva Bible: 1599 Edition* (McLean: Tolle Lege Press, 2006), Paul predicts that "after my departing shall grievous wolves enter in among you, not sparing the flock."

[72] Cf. Milton, *Lycidas*, *1645 Poems*, *Riverside Milton*, 31-108: 128-30, where the "two-handed engine at the door" is

the incursions of intertextual nuances (such as the sheep and wolf motifs, together with their unstable associations) illustrate how the logic of the parasite renders the strangeness apparent, on the surface of the text, but not entirely legible. The poem, in other words, stages the arbitrariness of the typically unseen or misrecognized processes that give rise to seemingly stable perceptions of reality. By calling attention to this factor of contingent foundations, the poem trains readers to be on the lookout for clandestine parasitic operations virtually everywhere.

The poem's philosophical interest in exploring the lived effects of the idea of transmigration also captures something of the spirit of the age. While the idea of transmigration was arcane and even easily spoofed, it also touched on urgent conflicts of interest and perceptions of instability, concerning the pressure placed on the felt relations between political and religious allegiances. Consider, for example, two collective preoccupations: by the turn of the century, a monarch was soon to disappear, the Succession Question loomed large, and paranoia regarding the Jesuit mission to England was cultivated. The semantic field of transmigration was arguably supple enough to include these perceptions of uncertain change.

Not coincidentally, these resonances with plots to destabilize institutions mark the great soul's first attempts to remake the world established by a human. The wolf and its offspring continue the mouse's pursuit to undermine hierarchy—only now, the great soul does so in the human world. As she becomes more corrupt, she becomes more human—and more parasitic. This process culminates in her animation of her first human-form, Themech. As we shall see, however, this seeming advance introduces complications that deflate the status of humankind in the world of *Metempsychosis*.

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poised to strike the "grim Woolf with privy paw"—a figure often read as symbolizing the threat of corrupt or predatory clergy. On the Jesuit enterprise in Elizabethan England, see John Bossy, *The English Catholic Community, 1570–1850* (London: Darton, Longman and Todd, 1975), esp. ch. 3; and Alice Hogge, *God's Secret Agents: Queen Elizabeth's Forbidden Priests and the Hatching of the Gunpowder Plot* (London: HarperCollins, 2005).

Tellingly, before Themech appears, the soul inhabits an ape. Because of the ape's humanlike qualities, the great soul preemptively destabilizes the human world, as well as natural law. Of course, contemporary anatomical lore commonly found apes to be among "such creatures that were the most like to mankind."[73] Similarity, in other words, does not necessarily trigger ontological panic. However, the great soul, in ape form, also has the distinctly human abilities to "laugh and speak" (455).[74] The poem's parasitic logic renders this unusual feature not entirely surprising, if only because it exploits a germinating conceit in the theory of metempsychosis, by treating souls' mobility as both catalyst and vehicle for permeable divisions among species. Thus, observing the theory's generative errancy, the great soul retains the sparrow's lust and is attracted to Siphetecia, a daughter of Eve. In this episode, Siphetecia's response to the ape is marked by both attraction and repulsion (485). She is drawn to its human-like features and playful mimicry, yet unsettled by the grotesque exaggeration of those traits, which mirrors and distorts her own capacities. This ambivalence reflects the poem's broader interest in unstable boundaries between human and animal, as well as the unease such proximity provokes. The ape attempts to seduce her, but is "prevented" by Tethlemite, Siphetecia's brother (489). Without Tehlemite's interference, the poem suggests, Siphetecia may have committed bestiality, for she was "willing half and more" to do so (485). In *Metempsychosis*, then, souls are corrupted by traits inherited from past lives, observing an incipient Lamarckianism, and thereby irresistibly drawn to break the "law" of "Nature" (480). Additionally, Siphetecia is implicated in this process of contamination. Parasitic logic extends beyond the transmigration thesis as such

[73] Jane Sharp and Elaine Hobby, *The Midwives Book: Or, the Whole Art of Midwifry Discovered.* Women Writers in English, 1350-1850 (New York: Oxford UP, 1999), 57.

[74] According to Aristotle and the medieval Scholastics, laughing and speaking were the attributes of humans only. See e.g. Aristotle, *Aristotle on the Parts of Animals*, Greek & Roman Philosophy, v.26 (New York: Garland Pub, 1987), 3.10 (673a7, 28).

and includes physical proximity or association.

At last, the soul animates her first human form: Themech. According to M. Van Wyk Smith, Themech is understood in cabbalism as the evil power behind Cain.[75] Her name literally means, "may she be destroyed."[76] The traits she retains from her past lives are all sins (506-9), thereby completing the great soul's regression into corruption and a distinctly cynical view of humanity. Throughout *Metempsychosis*, the soul literally moves from vegetable to animal to human; however, she figuratively "moves in a downward spiral from beast to beastliness," as Van Wyk Smith claims.[77] Because the soul's beastliness is completed in her human form, the difference between human and animal is blurred, challenging the cosmopoetic autonomy and intentionality of the human. In short, through this virtual hijacking of a cultural shibboleth—the biblically-warranted ontological hierarchy guaranteeing human dominion over all other creatures—the poem advances an emergent posthumanist intuition.

The Reader's Parasitic Participation in the Narrator's World-Remaking

According to Collins, "the close of *Metempsychosis* suggests that it is the reader who determines the end […and] has the authority to create meaning."[78] However, the ending is more complicated than this statement allows, and this feature points up the scope of the poem's parasitic investments. The final sentence of *Metempsychosis* is grammatically complex, so it

[75] Van Wyk Smith, 151.

[76] Louis Ginzberg and Boaz Cohen, *The Legends of the Jews*, trans. Henrietta Szold and Paul Radin (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society of America, 1909); Oliver F. Emerson, "Legends of Cain, Especially in Old and Middle English," *PMLA* 21.4 (1906): 831-929.

[77] Van Wyk Smith, 24.

[78] Collins, 142.

requires the reader's action to rearrange the syntax to yield a paraphrasable meaning: "Of ev'ry quality, comparison/ The only measure is, and judge, opinion" (519-20). In English grammar, this sentence can be arranged into at least three different syntaxes:

1. _____ is the only _____ (and _____ is the only _____) of every _____.
2. _____ is the only _____ of every _____, _____, and _____.
3. ____ is the only ____ of every ____, and _____ is the only ____ of every ____.

After choosing a particular structure, the reader must fill in the slots with some combination of the following five words: quality, comparison, measure, judge, and opinion. The first two syntaxes have five slots each, so determining the total number of possible sentences is a matter of mathematics: five factorial equals 120.[79] However, the third structure contains six slots; one of the five words must be repeated, thereby increasing the total number of possibilities: six factorial divided by two factorial equals 360.[80] Thus, these three syntaxes together yield 600 possible sentences.[81] The reader may randomly choose one of these combinations and find it to be illogical in the context of the stanza; nevertheless, there are still many sensible possibilities.

No matter what decision the reader makes, it will be a false choice because the sentence will be inherently untrue. Let me explain why. Donne's words "every" and "only" create an aphoristic sense of generality and stability. However, they modify nouns that are indeterminate, so the resultant ambiguity contradicts that universal sense, creating conflict between form and

[79] 5!=5×4×3×2×1=120.

[80] 6!=6×5×4×3×2×1=720. 2!=2×1=2. 720÷2=360.

[81] 120+120+360=600.

content. Thus, it does not matter which sentence the reader chooses; that choice cannot be the *only* meaning that applies in *every* situation.

This conundrum has broad consequences for understanding the poem's gambit, not least its putative investment in satire. The satiric gesture, as well as its component of Pyrrhonian skepticism, turns on the ideological solvency of grammar as an adequate mode of meaning-making and cognition. Here, however, the gnomic character of the phrase's grammatical structure ultimately evacuates the presumed thinking and speaking position of the satirist, thereby swallowing up the very possibility of sustaining anything like a coherent Pyrrhonian position. At this point, parasitic logic has literally become parasitic grammar. In essence, as Donne thinks through his specific investment in the mutable operations of the parasite, the ending's parasitic form creates an unnameable middle term, *avant la lettre,* between Derridean *différance* and Gödel's incompleteness theorem.

The final sentence further chastens any given reader's authority, for the sentence's meaning—more precisely, its capacity to yield meaning—will remain essentially the same: an acknowledgment of the subjectivity (contingently and parasitically) involved in valuation. The poem demonstrates that the reader's agency in arriving at any meaning is necessarily also involved in a species of parasitic activity. For example, my personal preference is based on the first syntactical structure: "Comparison is the only measure (and opinion is the only judge) of every quality." Yet my preference is similar to other options, such as, "Comparison is the only measure of every quality, opinion, and judge," and "The only measure of every quality is comparison, and the only judge of every quality is opinion." Although there is a conflict between form and content, the last sentence paradoxically contains a mimetic appropriateness between the slippery syntax and the meaning informed by the reader's preferential bias. Each conceivable

preference is "contaminated" or silently colonized (i.e., submitting to the parasitic operation, invariably), by semantic or grammatical zones of ambiguity.

However, Donne parodies what he purportedly claims. He states that nothing has inherent meaning; yet his statement contains inherent *meaningfulness*—or, rather, it inherently denotes the space where meaning is made or found—regardless of the reader's choice. Because the sentence will invariably demonstrate or embody a species of relativism, it is in this precise sense not as relativistic as it appears. Donne stages the illusory character of the perception of ambiguity itself; i.e., the content of thought may be ambiguous, but the act—or, better, the event—of thinking is not. By creating the illusion of ambiguity, Donne satirizes his sources in stoicism and skepticism.[82] The meta-issue here is a familiar one, although seemingly at several removes from the poem's declared preoccupations. It turns on the early modern fascination with, and anxiety about, splitting the difference between Christian doctrine and classical legacies of skeptical and stoic thought. However, its purchase in the poem is relevant, from the perspective of the vertiginous itineraries of metempsychosis in relation to fate and divine providence. After all, what difference does the power of choice make, if all options are different versions of the same thing—not the choice per se, but the choosing?

Nevertheless, the reader's decision is essential; without it, the final sentence is nonsensical. Donne's voice in the poem adumbrates Descartes's rationalism, the *cogito ergo sum* postulate, directed, however, toward decidedly posthumanist ends—the 'I' that expresses the capacity to think and engage with the world is parasitically implicated in the network of the

[82] See Robbins n520 and Rosalie Colie, *Paradoxica Epidemica: The Renaissance Tradition of Paradox* (Princeton: Princeton UP, 1966), 396-406. Colie lays out a background of linkages to stoic and skeptical sources in circulation—including the contributions of Parmenides, Zeno, and Pyrrho—as well as the paradoxes they generated for early modern Christian doctrine.

cosmos. The reader's participation actually enables, without predetermining, the ending; thus, the reader inhabits a position similar to that of the great soul. The syntax must be rearranged, but the succession of choice among alternatives will result in what appears to be, *ex post facto,* a predetermined meaning. This is not to say that a given meaning can be predicted at the outset of the reading process, but rather that, once it takes shape, the meaning's enmeshment in a prior network of contingent choices and foreclosures sinks beneath the horizon of the articulated meaning. This mimetic interdependence of fate and free will partly echoes the poem's assertions of divinity's mobilization of creaturely intentionality throughout *Metempsychosis*: The reader has some level of control in recreating the sentence, but ultimately the meaning (or, more precisely, the range of meaningfulness) is determined by the implied narrator. Just so, the great soul has some measure of control in world-remaking, but the soul's re-creations ultimately enable and perpetuate the world-remaking mode of Destiny. Here, Destiny is figured in a purely structural mode, as a parasitic matrix, rather than in a providential mode (associated with the personal God of Judeo-Christian tradition). The figure of the narrator parallels that of Destiny, for the narrator is a structural effect, produced by the overarching design of the narrative, just as Destiny is not a metaphysical author but a structural device.

The grammatical structure of the poem's final phrase and its irreducible ambiguity may be said, then, to embody or enact the principle of (divine) foreknowledge, but on a parasitical register: The structural "set," evacuated of the affective register of (divine) providential care and its metaphysical moorings, includes possible outcomes that are logically equivalent and sustained

in the atemporality of the "set," like a mathematical formula, even as the specific, chosen reading (or course of action) is necessarily temporalized, its contingency exposed.[83]

On a different register, the provocations of Donne's poem announce a problem that recurs, in a different form, in the controversies attending Charles Darwin's theory of natural selection. These controversies turned in part on the perceived decentering of the human and the non-teleological character of the adaptive processes Darwin described and generalized into a theoretical model. There is an uncanny rehearsal of these controversies in the discursive movement of Donne's poem. The question of "adaptation"—so crucial to Darwin—seems to have a precursor in Donne's parasitic patterning in the poem, in the specific sense that the "logic" of adaptation for Darwin is precisely not governed by a metaphysically guaranteed telos or paternalistic ethos (the trappings of providentialism).

Rather, this "logic" follows the course of change without effective intention, which inheres in Donne's satiric modeling of the drama of metempsychosis, as it burrows through various classical and biblical archives (as well as life forms). Now is perhaps a good time to recall the one thread linking Donne's intellectual culture to Darwin's: It is Lucretius—a figure also of paramount importance to Serres, as previously noted. Without alluding to the Roman poet and philosopher, *Metempsychosis* arguably represents Donne's most sustained adaptation of Lucretius's commitment to materialist inquiry, applying it, with characteristic Donnean wit, to the very topic—belief in the transmigration of souls—that Lucretius repudiated for its metaphysical assumptions. Because Lucretius debunked the idea of metempsychosis, Donne's Lucretian investment is part of his poem's witty engagement with another level of parasitic

[83] This ambiguity seems to be a pre-emergent form of the famous incommensurability of quantum physics and empirical/phenomenal perception.

winnowing of received assumptions.

The Parasitic Patterning of Coincidence and Interconnectivity

The process of absorption initiates a pattern of simultaneity in the world, for the great soul will accumulate traits from the souls who inhabited Adam and Eve, with whom she coexisted. Souls can thereby influence each other, according to the human-forms they previously animated and will eventually generate. At least four coincidences follow:

First, the great soul is born as a small creature (a mouse) who kills a great one (an elephant). Right after, in chiastic fashion, she is a great one (a whale) killed by smaller creatures. Chiastic discourse is important in biblical (especially Pauline) texts. In *Metempsychosis*, the implied chiasm is a discursive signal of interest in imagining the recursivity of time and history. It also conceptually relates to the biblical device of typological figuration.

Second, Donne ponders in the eighth stanza that Calvary could be the site of both the Cross and the Tree of Knowledge, a possibility he finds both compelling and plausible.[84] I agree with John Klause that this coincidence was probably "more of a bewildering than a consoling fact" for Donne.[85] Typological figuration is operative in Donne's meditation on the double nature of the image of the Cross/Tree of Knowledge. In turn, this pertains to the fascination theologians had for imagining how historical time might look from the perspective of the *Aeon*, the timeless order that "flattens" historical time into a spatial image.

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[84] For other sources of the legend, Mueller (137, n86) cites E.C. Quinn, *Quest of Seth for the Oil of Life* (Chicago: U of Chicago P, 1962), 49-101, who points to a string of Church Fathers claiming that Adam was buried on Calvary, as well as an earlier version of the legend, in which an angel placed a kernel from the Forbidden Fruit in Adam's mouth.

[85] John Klause, "The Montaigneity of Donne's Metempsychosis," *Renaissance Genres*, ed. Barbara K. Lewalski (Cambridge: Harvard UP, 1986), 440.

Third, the oyster-catcher that consumed the soul's second fish-form now, in Donne's time, possibly serves the soul as "some great officer" (300).[86] The implication is unsettling: a figure who now holds authority in the soul's contemporary world may once have devoured her in a previous incarnation. This layered relationship collapses temporal distance and blurs distinctions between predator and ally, underscoring the poem's fascination with the uncanny continuities and reversals that bind past lives to present circumstances.

Fourth and more broadly, it is coincidental that the soul is eventually born as Themech, the daughter of Eve. Previously in the poem, the great soul was eaten by her future parents, Adam and Eve; killed yet again by her future mother as a cure for her future brother, Cain; trapped by Abel, another of her future brothers; smitten with her future sister, Siphatecia; and stoned to death as a result by Tethlemite, yet another future brother.[87] Of course, in the narrative of *Metempsychosis*, Adam, Eve, Cain, Abel, Siphatecia, and Tethlemite are among the only humans in existence, so it could be said that any interaction with humans would inevitably lead to participation in the original family drama; i.e., that the idea of coincidental occurrences (synchrony defeating diachrony) may be dismissed by the apparent *genetic resemblance* between the actors. However, the accumulation of pairings or couplings in the poem includes life forms that are not readily grouped into the (genetic) logic of resemblance—and therefore present a more startling example of coincidental occurrence. Donne, of course, lacked scientific knowledge of gene theory, but he knew enough Aristotle to be conversant in ancient theories of

[86] I use the word *possibly* because, in 1601, the great soul is a high-ranking figure in Court or government; it is thus entirely possible that the officer serves her.

[87] The soul begins the poem as the Forbidden Fruit and the mandrake [the latter of which was presumably ingested by Cain (167-8)] and ends as the daughter of Adam and Eve—who are thus her producers and consumers. Later, in her ape-form, she loved Siphatecia and was killed by "Tethlemite/ Her brother" (487-8); immediately afterward, the soul becomes their sister, Themech.

biological transmission.

Further, the coincidences about the soul's birth into the first family are incestuous and strange, not only because the soul had lusted after Siphatecia, who would become her sister, but also because three of her future family members (Adam, Eve, and Cain) had previously consumed her. Additionally, as a mandrake she was ingested by Cain; as Themech, she is both "Sister and wife to Cain" (510). *Metempsychosis* defamiliarizes the first family.[88]

The entire pattern of coincidence and synchronicity is unsettling. The implication of coincidence is precisely *not* related to the recursive movement of chiasmus or the interruptive force of typology—prime textual cues of divine intervention in history. The received rhetorical and textual devices of chiasmus and typology are bracketed by the poem, shearing off from any signals that would buffer readers from the startling exposure of the radically unmotivated character of coincidences: a problem that the theory of divine foreknowledge attempts to foreclose.

These coincidences imply that Destiny is a corruptive influence—corruptive but also, following the poem's parasitic investment, untethered to specific intention. The pattern of simultaneity is organized and guided by Destiny according to the cadence of contingency; world-remaking is thereby Destiny's continuous articulation of the world, which humans, plants, and animals unknowingly weave. The great soul is a *de facto* participant in the world-remaking mode of Destiny, which seems to choose the forms that the soul will inhabit in order to corrupt her, making her culpable for the corruption of the world. In this poem, world-remaking is identical to world-corrupting—but the meaning of corruption itself is quietly defamiliarized. For example, by placing the soul in a whale, Destiny makes it so that the soul must kill to survive. Immediately

[88] For a psychoanalytic critique of *Metempsychosis*, see Harvey, 56.

afterward, Destiny puts her in a mouse; the need to kill vanishes, yet the bloodlust is remembered and retained. Destiny thereby implicates the soul in vice, even as the semantic parameters of vice are tacitly unmoored. In consequence, *Metempsychosis unnaturalizes* the law of nature. Tellingly, the poem's semantic range of natural law includes Richard Hooker's locus classicus, *Of the Lawes of Ecclesiastical Politie*; as well as, earlier, Alain de Lille's *De Planctu Naturae*, which famously depicts "Nature" as prone to perverse declensions from "grammatical" propriety and thus apt to commit actions *contra naturam* indiscriminately.[89]

Donne's figure of Destiny perpetually reweaves the world to satirize an even earlier source: the doctrines of Pythagoras in Ovid's *Metamorphoses*. The narrator ironically claims that, in Pythagorean doctrine, the regression of the soul is based on "an indisposition in the organs" ("Epistle" 28-9). In the narrative, however, Destiny advances the soul into ostensibly "higher" forms precisely because her moral and spiritual state has worsened—each promotion in form reflecting the cumulative corruption acquired from her previous lives. The reincarnations are based on a law of symbolic appropriateness; Destiny chooses the soul's new forms to create synchronicities that parody the grandiosity, theological justification, and providential assurance of interconnectivity.

But how stable is the generic framing of the soul's permutations? Mueller points to Donne's depiction of interconnectivity to argue that *Metempsychosis* bears more resemblance to Ovidian epic than to satire.[90] Citing T.E. Wright's interpretation of D.A. Slater, Mueller claims that Ovid was "influenced by the Pythagorean doctrine of the kinship of all living creatures,

[89] There is also a distant echo of this turbulence in the later standoff between Rousseau's idyllic sense of nature and Hobbes's famous view of the brutal "state of nature."

[90] Mueller, 115.

while the vast structure is harmonious through all its parts."[91] Mueller implies that Donne inherited this Pythagorean influence from Ovid; while this is plausible, it does not account for Ovid's or Donne's conflation of epic and satire. In fact, Donne satirizes this Pythagorean interconnectivity, doubling down on Ovid's own parody of creaturely kinship and worldly harmony. In other words, Donne's satire eschews the notion of the "harmonious" patterning that undergirds the Ovidian system, focusing instead on how the sense of harmony is an ex post facto, synthetic fiction that selectively foregrounds the harmonious pattern and misrecognizes the stochastic element—the problem of contingency.

Although the narrator posits that Destiny is "the commissary of God" (31), everything in the discursive structure of the poem is connected in a way that would seem to be against God in any orthodox sense. To borrow Erich Auerbach's phrase, the "magical and polyphonic cosmic coherence which arose during the Renaissance" is alive and well in *Metempsychosis*.[92] It gives guidance to all souls, but the guidance is perverse.[93] Critics have noted the perversity of *Metempsychosis*, but they have stopped short of considering its theological implications.[94] Although this text does not claim to abrogate the cosmopoetic effectiveness of God and Destiny,

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[91] Id. See David Ansell Slater, *Ovid in the Metamorphoses*, Occasional Publications of the Classical Association, no. 1 (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1914); and T. E. Wright, "The Augustan Poets," *Fifty Years of Classical Scholarship*, ed. Maurice Platnauer (Oxford: Blackwell, 1954), 413.

[92] Erich Auerbach, *Mimesis: The Representation of Reality in Western Literature*, trans. Willard R. Trask (Princeton: Princeton UP, 2013), 322.

[93] For the semantic richness of the word "perverse," especially the Lacanian notion of the perverse subject in psychoanalytic discourse, see Stephanie S. Swales, *Perversion: A Lacanian Psychoanalytic Approach to the Subject* (New York: Routledge, 2012). Lacan's framework is useful here because the perverse subject, in his account, actively seeks to sustain the Other's desire by subverting normative limits—a dynamic that resonates with the poem's portrayal of "guidance" as a deliberate misdirection that nonetheless organizes the soul's trajectory.

[94] See e.g. W.P. Wood [qtd. in A.J. Smith, *John Donne: The Critical Heritage* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1975), 274]; Samuel Johnson, *Life of Cowley, Johnson's Lives of the Poets* (London: Alfred Thomas Crocker, 1868), 9; Grierson, xx; Douglas Bush, *English Literature in the Earlier Seventeenth Century, 1600-1660* (Oxford: Clarendon P, 1945), 131; Mueller, 135; and Corthell, 101.

it nevertheless deflates their hieratic prestige. In *Metempsychosis,* God and Destiny remake the textual world into absurdity. This deflation could lead to arguments that the status of the human is raised in comparison (thus advancing a species of philosophical, but not Christian, humanism). However, regardless of Donne's own authorial intent, the poem questions the status of both creatures and creator. Although the divine still retains nominal cosmopoetic authority, the telos toward which that authority builds is figured as a perpetual regression.

The Disturbance of the Parasite

In the "Translator's Introduction" to the English translation of *The Parasite*, Lawrence R. Schehr makes a good case for noticing the third sense of the term "parasite" in French (which is lost in English usage) as a species of "noise"—that is, a disturbance or "static in a system" being examined.[95] Then, too, in view of the alimentary sense of the word (in Greek: *parasitos,* one who eats at another's table), there is the somewhat cannibalistic dimension to the presence of the parasitic element that describes how the disturbance of the parasite "consumes" the mythos of the system's transcendent status. In *Metempsychosis*, the "noise" or static produced by the parasite is the effect of Donne's appreciation of his era's *failure* to accomplish a thoroughgoing synthesis of classical philosophical traditions and Christian metaphysical and theological postulates. In other words, Donne's satiric take on not only the ethos of metempsychosis, but also the ambitions of Christian humanism to absorb and domesticate the classical philosophical past, results in a poetic enactment of the logic of the parasite. The poem's more familiar generic and discursive frames—its stoic, skeptical, and satirical conventions or "grammars of attack"—participate in Donne's prescient excavation of this logic. His treatment shows the affinity

[95] Serres, x.

between parasitic logic and posthuman investments in thinking about the tenuous link between intentional agency and contingent processes in the immersive environment documented in the poem. *Metempsychosis* demonstrates how incubating notions of the posthuman and the parasite are entirely apposite as both equipment and vehicle of world-remaking schemes, given the cosmological and theological premises that the poem satirizes.

Chapter 2. Insufficiency as World-Remaking in Marvell's "Upon Appleton House"

"Upon Appleton House" is an experiment in understanding failure. Throughout the poem, humans attempt to remake the world in conjunction with their imagined designs. Although they ultimately fail, their failures alter the world's structure in ways more capacious than intended. At the same time, the poem revisits, reshapes, and recuperates moments of human insufficiency from various traditional imaginaries, without normalizing their strangeness. Thereby, the textual world is constantly remade in an unorthodox, uncanny interfusion of various forms of failure, which none of the individual characters anticipate.

In "Upon Appleton House," world-remaking occurs by dramatic shifts, or intense periods of alteration. The units in the poem's structure correspond to different represented eras of radical change in biblical history. The Renaissance itself is based on the idea that the world is experiencing a re-nascence—an intense phase-transition from a past state to a new one.[96] Yet the phase-transitions in the poem are inexact; for example, the biblical narrative to which Marvell's allusions refer is out of chronological order in "Upon Appleton House." Thus the poem represents transitions themselves as living and elastic, rather than static or fixed.

While it would be anachronistic to suggest that Marvell's contemporaries conceived historical change in the rigid, periodized terms later codified in the 19th century, the poem nonetheless engages with the impulse—already present in early modern historiography and theology—to impose stable teleologies on the past. In this light, Marvell's sense of elastic transitions can be read as a way of probing the blind spots of eschatological history, which frames time as moving inexorably toward a predetermined end. Such flexibility unsettles the

[96] While the word *rinascita* or "rebirth" was used in the 16th century (famously by Giorgio Vasari), its application as a label for a distinct historical period emerged in the 19th century, most influentially through Jules Michelet and Jacob Burckhardt.

"grand narrative" structure that Reinhart Koselleck, in *Futures Past*, associates with the consolidation of modern historical consciousness, allowing "Upon Appleton House" to resist closure, even while drawing on biblical and providential frameworks.

Marvell may believe in something akin to paradigm shifts, but the poem posits the idea of such transitions as an unruly mode of world-remaking. Thus, "Upon Appleton House" remakes textual worlds, not in paradigmatic terms, but in modal terms: a perpetual actuality, or a continuous articulation of re-worlding. This articulation involves the poem in an experimental aesthetic design that speaks to queer and posthuman perspectives—elements arising not from *what* the poem says about the history of Appleton House, but *how* it shapes the passage of the estate and its residents through time.

Marvell wrote this strange country house poem in 1651 for Thomas Fairfax, while tutoring Thomas' daughter, Mary. In the poem, Marvell's speaker describes Fairfax's Nun Appleton estate, including the architecture of the houses, the history of the priory that previously occupied the property, and the grounds. Marvell's speaker recounts how the patrilineal machinery of the Fairfax family subsumes and militarizes the theological world of the priory—a theological world whose trappings are queer, as we will see shortly. However, that machinery cannot entirely contain the site's theological queerness, which returns in Marvell's contemporary moment, when the speaker, alone in the woods, discovers a sense of himself interfusing with the surrounding vegetation. Additionally, if Nun Appleton represents "paradise's only map" (768), then that map is a living, mercurial, organic design that cannot be pinned down by patrilineal

descent.[97] Human institutions impose themselves upon Nun Appleton, but the site exceeds their embrace and even incorporates them into its own kaleidoscopic world-remaking energy.

The estate's transformations are cued allusively to biblical episodes—Tower of Babel, Garden of Eden, Wilderness, Flood, Crucifixion, and Second Coming. The received, teleologically driven order of biblical events is rearranged according to the poem's strange biblical images as they appear to Marvell's speaker: The poem ping-pongs between Genesis and Exodus, then jumps forward to the Gospels, and concludes with Revelation. In brief, "Upon Appleton House" harnesses the world-remaking utility of biblical allusions by cumulatively demonstrating a modal perspective on human insufficiency. The poem attributes providence to the pantheistic world of Nun Appleton itself, which follows a providential scheme that is polymorphic and material, rather than hidden or fixed. A strange providence, then, directs the poem's events, whose unfolding aligns with a living and elastic version of salvation history.

The alternating topical and typological schemes, which Marvell borrows from the bible, uncannily resemble the current debate between historicism and unhistoricism. Unhistoricism designates a mode of reading that resists the linearity and causality assumed by historicism, attending instead to anachronism, repetition, and discontinuity. As Madhavi Menon cogently argues, "Positing unhistoricism as the opposite of historicism merely repeats the binary logic that has long plagued both historicism and sexuality."[98] Taking its cue from the narrative elasticity of Marvell's historicizing gestures, my argument occupies a middle ground between these approaches. While I contextualize Marvell within Nun Appleton in 1651 to make sense of the

[97] In-text citations are from Andrew Marvell, "Upon Appleton House, To My Lord Fairfax," *The Poems of Andrew Marvell*, ed. Nigel Smith (New York: Routledge, 2013), 216-41.

[98] Carla Freccero, Madhavi Menon and Valerie Traub, "Historicism and Unhistoricism in Queer Studies," *PMLA* 128.3 (2013): 782-3.

poem's nominal concerns, the poem itself—its discursive virtuosity—overweighs Marvell's putative intent, inferred from local contextual information, due to its multimodal energies that present-day readers can recognize as queer in suggestive but discursively unstable ways.

The multimodal dynamic of failure produces a range of jarring or unexpected effects, registers, and intuitions. As a result, "Upon Appleton House" displays a spectrum of queer agency, memory, and typology. The queering attribution is warranted because, collectively, these energies manifest in textual moments that are eccentric or strange across a range of behaviors and gestures—sometimes explicitly or implicitly sexual, sometime nonsexual. Through experimental play, they deform received traditions and perceived normalities, opening possibilities that do not conform to seventeenth-century social realities.

In a related vein, the poem's dense intertextuality novelly engages diachronic and synchronic orientations. It is diachronic in the sense that it grapples with interpretive traditions that arise from biblical and classical texts in a cause-and-effect sequence. Yet it is also synchronic, in the sense that the poem displaces those traditions to recuperate original textual meanings that appear bizarre or queer by mid-seventeenth-century standards of normative interpretation. The poem's intertextual gesture of retrieving peripheral or largely forgotten aspects of the earliest textual traditions is not easily coded as historically legible. Thus, the appearance of unexpected allusions seems historically ungrounded. Thereby, it can be seen as a kind of "phantom" synchronicity—with the absent historical and more familiar parameters of the given allusion.

In the context of Marvell's England, these strange meanings invest the poem with energies that are narratively illegible, but that nevertheless enable a discursive register of failure as a multimodal dynamic. The poem's failures do not correspond to moral or theological

standards, or some other metric (i.e., verisimilitude, notions of truth as a sign of adequation, etc.). Neither are the failures clearly defined as such. Instead of marking negativity, failure opens onto the implicit prospect of productivity. Nun Appleton's queerness complicates and exceeds the limits of orthodox typology, for example, without completely dissolving it. The transformation of Nun Appleton follows a recognizable biblical teleology, depicting divine *cosmopoeisis* in the past as a typological figure of human world-remaking in the present. Yet the terms appear in unusual sequences or arrays, suggesting a living and elastic process, rather than a static or fixed legacy.

A telling textual memory of a foreclosed episode in early church history occurs here. The poem's strange handling of teleology and typology echoes the kind of split vision that occurred during the high tide of the Montanist movement (late 2nd century C.E.), which was committed to the ongoing authenticity of prophetic speech. The Montanist view envisioned history as an ongoing interruption of historical time, the saeculum, by divine inspiration and prophecy—such that the *archē* of the Christian dispensation could not be confined to the apostolic age, but continued to "remake" and "re-world" historical time. The tension between the Montanist view and the emergent orthodox view resulted in a split vision, which continued beyond the historical moment of the Christian ecclesia's foundational texts.[99]

In "Upon Appleton House," such a vision fails as a species of orthodox typology, in that it does not yield a code to the poem's meaning. However, that very failure generates a parallel or adjacent sense of typological energy that echoes the multifarious speech genres that characterized the pneumatic ferment in early Christian communities. Nun Appleton remakes

[99] See e.g. R.E. Heine, *The Montanist Oracles and Testimonia* (Macon: Mercer, 1989); and William Tabernee, *Montanist Inscriptions and Testimonia: Epigraphic Sources Illustrating the History of Montanism* (Macon: Mercer UP, 1997).

itself by subsuming and transforming traditional imaginaries, which cannot contain the estate's polymorphic, materialist excess. The poem, in short, invokes a plurality of exegetical traditions, without committing to any of them, adding to its sense of instability.

Like these traditions, the poem's multiple genres are dissociated from their native habitats and recontextualized in the new manufactured environment of the poem's "world," pointing to the discursive field wherein its aesthetic of failure operates. To clarify this semantic range of failure, I turn to Giorgio Agamben's poetics of inoperativity, "which, by freeing the human creature from every biological or social destiny and from any predetermined task, make him available for that particular absence of work we are accustomed to call 'politics' and 'art.'"[100] Although Marvell's speaker celebrates the Fairfax teleology—this is, after all, the nominal occasion for the poem—the poem more importantly dwells in possibilities that suspend its forward motion. The speaker traverses a plurality of worlds organized by different genres: topographical, biblical, classical—and, especially, pastoral. The poem's generic interplay introduces a formal dimension to the idea of failure, by confusing the criteria whereby success can be measured; readers can only know if failure occurs in one of these worlds depending on its generic conformity. This polyphony is fundamentally at odds with the teleological assumptions associated with the array of biblical allusions it puts into service. To borrow Agamben's terms, success is suspended and rendered inoperative.[101] The poem thereby wrests failure from its dyad with success, and the consequence of failure—its futurity—appears undecided.

In this way, the multimodal choreography of failure yields the poem's posthumanist signature and, more precisely, opens onto Marvell's particular way of imagining posthumanist

[100] Agamben, *Creation and Anarchy* 27.

[101] Id.

space. Consider how the original textual meanings that Marvell's speaker uncannily recuperates destabilize normative hierarchies of divine, human, animal, and thing. In what follows, I locate specific textual examples of the comingled queer and posthuman energies that contribute to the poem's experimental design. I begin by following the textual clue that opens the poem: the architectural trope.

Babelic Failure of Human Architecture

A long exegetical tradition imagines the Tower of Babel as an attempt to "*reach* unto heaven."[102] However, the biblical text does not actually support such a literal interpretation. According to Robert Alter, the phrase "'Its top in the heavens' is a hyperbole found in Mesopotamian inscriptions for celebrating high towers."[103] "Upon Appleton House" circumvents the exegetical tradition to recuperate the original sense of the scriptural source: Humankind "thinks by breadth the world t'unite" (23); i.e., we attempt to remake the world in conjunction with the primeval unity of all people, announced at the beginning of the Tower of Babel story.[104] Marvell's speaker does not specify heaven as the goal of "the first builders;" he leaves the "height" ambiguous (24). By glossing "failed in height" as 'failed to reach heaven,' readers inadvertently impose traditional exegesis onto a poem that does not directly support it (24). Here the poem is queer quite simply because it is accurate; it circumvents the normative tradition by uncannily recuperating the lost scriptural meaning.

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[102] Genesis 11:4, *AKJV* [*The Bible: Authorized King James Version*, ed. Robert Carroll and Stephen Prickett (Oxford: Oxford UP, 2008)].

[103] Robert Alter, *The Hebrew Bible: A Translation with Commentary.* Vol. 1 (New York: Norton, 2019), 37-8, n11:1-9.

[104] Genesis 11:1, *AKJV.*

Marvell's Tower of Babel allusion presents the first of several modal expressions of queer energies. This species of biblical intertextuality, a short-circuiting of received scholarly traditions, serves as a figurative portal for understanding how queerness operates in the poem as a whole. In this example, Marvell does not express queer sexuality, though he will do so later; instead, this allusion is queer because it destabilizes traditional hierarchies that inaccurately normalize biblical sources. Marvell's philological acumen is queer because it exploits the contingency of received gauges of success and failure in exegetical tradition. Thus, his very accuracy is allied to the question of failure. That is, his allusion fails by the standards of the exegetical tradition; it challenges entrenched assumptions about the Babel story. Because it brackets and tacitly challenges readerly assumptions, Marvell's clandestine accuracy is an unexpected arrival in the poem's landscape, presenting a world that is at once familiar and strange.

The poem continues to queer the exegetical tradition by associating the attempt to reach heaven not with the Tower of Babel, but with the unprepossessing architecture of Appleton House. Consider the prospect offered in stanza 4,

> In which we the dimensions find
> Of that more sober age and mind
> When larger-sized men did stoop
> To enter at a narrow loop;
> As practicing, in doors so strait,
> To strain themselves through heaven's gate.
> (27-32)

The description directly alludes to a touching episode of familial alliance in book VIII of *The Aeneid*.[105] It also invokes the Nephilim, the giant offspring of male gods and mortal women in

[105] When Aeneas visited Evander's house, "Evander said: 'The victor Hercules/ has stooped to cross these thresholds […]'/ […] He spoke and then beneath his simple roof/ he led the great Aeneas" [Virgil, *The Aeneid*, trans. Allen Mandelbaum (New York: Bantam, 2004), 8.475-82].

Genesis 6:4 and Numbers 13:33.[106] God sees this intermingling of human and divine as crossing a necessary line of human limitation.[107] Although Marvell's speaker depicts these large men practicing humility, heaven's gate is figured as another kind of "Babel," which could be an Akkadian word for "gate of the god."[108] The poem reshapes and redeploys the exegetical tradition to subtly critique Marvell's patrons, by implicitly associating Appleton House—through the glancingly perverse sobriety of its architectural form—with the attempt to reach heaven, as well as by comparing Thomas and Anne Fairfax to the Nephilim. Such an association is daring, since the Nephilim are not only remembered for their prodigious size and hybrid parentage, but also for their infamous fate. They are linked to the corruption that provoked the flood in Genesis and later recalled in Numbers as formidable enemies of the Israelites, obstacles to the providential inheritance of Canaan. To cast the Fairfaxes in this shadow is therefore politically charged, aligning them with figures marked in scripture as both doomed to extinction and as adversaries of God's chosen people.

For all the allusion's edginess, the scriptural source itself is ironic, however, because it names neither Nimrod nor any of the first builders of the Tower of Babel. As Alter notes, "to make or leave a 'name' for oneself by erecting a lasting monument is a recurrent notion in ancient Hebrew culture."[109] Because the text does not name the builders, it creates an irony that

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[106] In Genesis 6:4 of *AKJV*, the Nephilim are described as "mighty men that were of old, the men of renown," born from the union of the "sons of God" and the "daughters of men." In Numbers 13:33, *AKJV*, the Israelite spies report encountering the Nephilim in Canaan, likening themselves to grasshoppers in comparison to these formidable giants. Both passages, though brief, became focal points for later theological speculation about the hybrid nature and excessive stature of these beings, and here serve as a biblical analogue to the hyperbolic "larger-sized men" in Marvell's depiction.

[107] Genesis 6:1-4*, AKJV.*

[108] Alter, 38, n3.

[109] Ibid., 37-8, n11:1-9.

flattens them out, just as God disposes of their attempt at verticality (reaching "up" to the status of divine agency) by scattering them horizontally over earth. The exegetical tradition undoes this textual irony by naming Nimrod as the Tower's primary builder. Marvell recuperates the irony of the scriptural source by withholding the builders' names. By the time of Marvell's writing, it should be noted, Nimrod was considered the main builder, as well as a biblical representative of monarchal tyranny.[110] Marvell neither names Nimrod, nor associates him with tyranny—a strange omission for a poem celebrating a parliamentarian patron. Instead, Marvell eschews the normative procedure and subtly associates the Tower with Appleton House, as previously argued. It is not just kings, but all humankind that attempts to impose imagined designs upon a world that exceeds our grasp.

In this way, "Upon Appleton House" creates a flattening effect; i.e., the poem's allusive tactics quietly disturb the normative scales of value and judgment that appear to operate in the specific narrative context. The flattening effect carries a queer import because it swerves out of received categories of authority, rather than simply attacking them. This type of failure creates a double vision, in the sense that the poem's topical gestures toward political sovereignty do not adopt any normative appearance. This trait speaks to the poem's general depiction of failure as inherently ambivalent and ambiguous. Failure necessarily becomes a recurrent question informing the poem's discursive structure, rather than a de facto category; accidental traits are marked with narrative consequence. Thus, the poem reconsiders what success might be, by refusing to confine teleology or narrative meaningfulness to any a priori category of thought.

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[110] "He was a mighty hunter before the LORD: wherefore it is said, Even as Nimrod the mighty hunter before the LORD" (Genesis 10:9, *AKJV*). The Geneva Bible glosses "mighty" as "a cruel oppressor & tyrant" and the entire verse as, "His tyrannie came into a proverbe as hated bothe of God and man: for he passed not to commit crueltie even in Gods presence" [Genesis 10:9, *The Geneva Bible: A Facsimile of the 1560 Edition* (Madison: U of Wisconsin P, 1969).]

This dimension of queer textuality opens onto an emergent, posthumanist ethos, giving present-day readers the opportunity to see how the decentering energies of this ethos work in the poem to complicate its ostensible celebration of human agency. For this reason, I look to the anamorphic codes enabled by Marvell's world-remaking project, as well as to the dominant symbolic topoi—especially classical and biblical—to which these codes allude but do not subscribe. Consider that the poem conjures the image of builders, who create monumental architectural achievements, wherein they "themselves may lose" (20). The curious line flags the poem's parodic target, Ben Jonson, Marvell's greatest English predecessor in country house poetry. In Jonson's "To Penshurst," the estate is the perfect artifact of the owner's grandiosity and authority.[111] Marvell subtly critiques such pretension by overblowing the scale of the house to dwarf the human, who may become lost in his own creation—a discrete yet potent instance of Marvell's playing with anamorphic projection. Marvell's architectural joke also introduces a playful allusion to the Daedalus myth. Here, not even the architect can retrace his fabulous design.

In this way, "Upon Appleton House" reframes the topographical genre by overemphasizing its modesty topos, natural imagery, and painterly references. Jonson's "To Penshurst" uses the modesty topos to flatter Robert Sidney. Building on this convention, Sir John Denham's *Cooper's Hill* (1642) continues using landscape to meditate on family history; however, in Denham's poem, the River Thames threatens to ruin the mowers' work, while the flood and Windsor Forest strive against each other.[112] Thereafter, Richard Lovelace's

[111] Ben Jonson, "To Penshurst," *The Complete Poems*, ed. George Parfitt (New Haven: Yale UP, 1975), 219-23.

[112] John Denham, *Cooper's Hill*, *The Poems and Translations of Sir John Denham*, ed. Theodore Howard Banks (New Haven: Yale UP, 1928), 47-63.

"Amyntor's Grove" (1649) praises Endymion Porter's family members and estate—especially with reference to painting.[113]

Marvell adheres to these conventions to the point that they become absurd: He jokingly overdoes Jonson's modesty topos, recasting humans as no more than things within Appleton House. Additionally, Marvell's Wharfe out-floods Denham's Thames, for water engulfs the mowers' work. "Upon Appleton House" also ironically insists on Lovelace's references to painting, reinforcing the flattening effect that levels human cosmopoetic authority. In stanzas 56-57, the landscape is figured as "A levelled space, as smooth and plain / As cloths for Lely stretched to stain" (443-4)—and as a "painted world" (455). By presenting the scene as a two-dimensional canvas, a "naked equal flat," Marvell reduces the world-remaking power of poetry or politics to a mere pictorial effect, flattened into representation, rather than realized as a generative force (449).

In these instances, the distortive effects recall the visual dynamics of anamorphosis, where an image only achieves coherence from an oblique or distorted angle. Translated into Marvell's poetic idiom, these effects arise through a double mechanism: on the one hand, through descriptive detail that warps perspective (flattened landscapes, inverted hierarchies, exaggerated dimensions), and on the other, through intertextual allusion that skews generic convention (mixing satire with devotional, epic with pastoral). Marvell repurposes this visual logic by inflating the conventions of topographical praise, until they collapse under their own weight, thereby parodying both the genre and the perspectival tricks that sustain it. In blending visual (descriptive) distortion with generic (intertextual) distortion, the poem enacts a literary analogue of painterly anamorphosis—an effect that unsettles the reader's sense of orientation and

[113] Richard Lovelace, "Amyntor's Grove," *Lucasta*, ed. C. H. Wilkinson (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1930), 47-54.

authority. “Upon Appleton House” is so successful within the topographical genre that it breaks its limits and spills into absurdity, turning success itself, anamorphically, into a form of failure.[114]

Queer and Patrilineal Edens

The poem redeploys Genesis by contrasting two versions of paradise: the queer theological world of the priory in 1518 and the patrilineal garden overseen by the Fairfax family in 1651. Both the early Cistercian priory and the garden under Fairfax are militarized *horti conclusi* that attempt and fail to defend themselves against the outside world. The priory is coded in terms of feminine figures of war, especially the “Amazons” (106). When William Fairfax takes over the estate, he re-militarizes it in terms of masculine codes of war. The sapphic theological world of the nunnery is indeed subsumed by the dominant machinery of the Fairfax family’s patrilineal descent. However, the latter cannot fully suppress the memory of the former, largely because it represents a queer theology that the Fairfax family garden cannot narratively fulfill, convert, or redeem. This is so because the priory’s mode of being is—through a characteristically Marvellian paradox—resiliently unstable.

While the queer paradise of the priory is a perverted *hortus conclusus*, it nonetheless also recalls and amplifies the paradoxes of human origins in Genesis, such as the tension between the two creation accounts. In Genesis 1, humanity is created simultaneously in God’s image, while in Genesis 2, woman is created second from man’s rib. “Upon Appleton House” embodies these

[114] This posthumanist intuition would later reemerge in Pope’s “Windsor-Forrest,” whose setting dwarfs the human. Alexander Pope, “Windsor-Forest,” *The Poems of Alexander Pope*, vol. 1, *Pastoral Poetry and An Essay on Criticism*, ed. E. Audra and Aubrey Williams (New Haven: Yale UP, 1961), 161-203.

paradoxes most vividly in the figure of the nun who attempts to persuade Isabel Thwaites to join the Cistercian priory. I will return to this point.

To return to the Edenic trope, it is important to note that the biblical Garden story creates ambiguities that destabilize the later, traditional dichotomy of pre- and postlapsarian worlds. "[T]he woman saw that the tree […] *was* pleasant to the eyes, and a tree to be desired to make *one* wise."[115] The King James Version renders the Hebrew term *ta'awah* as "pleasant," but Alter translates it more literally as "lust."[116] The serpent has just promised that Adam's and Eve's eyes will be opened; in the narrative, they will be opened chiefly to see nakedness, so it follows that here they are linked to desire. Further, although the King James Version translates the verb *lehaskil* as "to make one wise," the Aramaic Targums of Onkelos and Yonatan ben Uziel render it as "to look at."[117] This translation is credited by the internal parallelism it enables in the verse, which Alter construes thus: "And the woman saw that the tree […] was *lust to the eyes* and the tree was *lovely to look at*" (my emphasis).[118] This parallelism intensifies the tree's association with carnal sexuality, further undermining traditional binaries separating innocence and fallenness. Appropriately, Fairfax's garden attempts to refortify this tradition. Walking in the garden in the summer of 1651, Marvell's speaker laments the loss of an imagined golden age in England before the Civil War (321-44). The playfully militaristic imagery of this garden carries a

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[115] Genesis 3:6, *AKJV*.

[116] Alter, 16.

[117] J.W. Etheridge, *The Targums of Onkelos and Jonathan Ben Uzziel on the Pentateuch: With the Fragments of the Jerusalem Targum from the Chaldee* (New York: KTAV Publishing House, 1968).

[118] Alter, 16. Augustine interprets this passage through the category of *concupiscentia oculorum* ("the lust of the eyes"), which he identifies as one of the threefold temptations in 1 John 2:16. See Augustine, *Confessions*, trans. Henry Chadwick (Oxford: Oxford UP, 1991): 10.35.53; and *Homilies on the First Epistle of John*, trans. John Gibb, *St. Augustine: Homilies on the Gospel of John and Homilies on the First Epistle of John*, ed. Philip Schaff, NPNF1 7 (Peabody: Hendrickson, 1994), 467-548: 2.15.

subnote of anxiety, by conjuring the genuine violence that could enter Nun Appleton.[119] Like the biblical garden, Fairfax's paradise can only be viewed under signs of its potential loss. Ironically, the codes of war seem safer for Fairfax than the codes of sapphic love. Lethality (and its presumably virile associations) trumps the perceived perversity of *contra naturam* behaviors.

In any event, while the priory is discreetly coded in terms of war, it is primarily coded in terms of queer sexuality. To Isabel Thwaites, an unnamed nun delivers an elaborately seductive oratory on the virtues of convent life. Thereby, the nunnery recovers the sensual and sexual connotations of the forbidden fruit, from a perspective that ecclesial orthodoxy either condemns or cannot recognize. Within the patrilineal project and perspective ostensibly celebrated by "Upon Appleton House," the nun evokes the serpent, while Isabel Thwaites correspondingly evokes Eve. However, the world-logic of the priory conflates symbolic registers, scrambling the episode's referential axes and rendering the nun as a queer Eve and Thwaites as a forbidden fruit—a consumable object of desire. "So through the mortal fruit we boil/ The sugar's uncorrupting oil:/ And that which perished while we pull/ Is thus preserved clear and full" (173-76). The nun likens spiritual purification (and hence immortalization) to preserving fruit by boiling it in sugar. The nun's recipe functions as an ironic joke on what poetry accomplishes: It removes objects from their natural domain and alters them in order to preserve them. The nun has just promised Thwaites that they will make tapestries of the Virgin Mary by using Thwaites's likeness as a model (129-36); thus, the nun offers embroidery—the traditional "woman's work" of the domestic sphere—as an alternative form of immortality, whereby Thwaites herself becomes the fruit of the Tree of Life, rather than the Tree of Knowledge.

[119] N. Smith, *Poems*, 212.

Further, the poem's discourse conspicuously fails to align the nun's diffuse erotic idiom with the craft of embroidery. The priory episode thus leaves unresolved the question of sex's purpose—whether it is tied to procreation or displaced onto the commemorative work of embroidery. This slippage is queer because it detaches sexual language from reproduction altogether, suggesting that "immortality" may be pursued through aesthetic or memorial practices rather than biological lineage.

By linking embroidery to sexuality and self-preservation, the nun also alludes to Homer's *Odyssey.* The priory becomes a romantic space repurposed from epic, a place like Ogygia or Aeaea that attempts to seduce the hero from his quest; the Marvellian difference is that the sirens tempt Penelope, not Odysseus. Thwaites would ward off all male suitors and inspire a tapestry marked by steady, irreversible progress, rather than one undone each night. In line with Fairfax's patrilineal project, the priory appears as a romantic space that resists or defies the power of "fate" (247). Yet within the nun's world-logic, the priory echoes other parts of Homer's narrative design, notably the use of descriptive pauses that momentarily suspend epic teleology. For example, in a moment of stalled destiny in *The Iliad*, as Achilles chases Hector around Troy's gates, the narrator describes the washing pools, where Trojan women "would wash their glistening robes in the old days,/ the days of peace before the sons of Achaea came."[120] Like Homer's account of the washing pools outside Troy, the priory provides a peaceful or pleasurable alternative to the dominant narrative frame, a space in which to dwell in possibilities outside of war and conquest. This sense of a queer or peaceful space both within yet beyond the patrilineal machinery will return in the crucifixion scene in the woods.

[120] Homer, *The Iliad*, trans. Robert Fagles (New York: Penguin, 1998), 22.186-7.

The priory represents a form of doctrinal failure: it resists the Reformation's emphasis on marriage and patrilineal succession. By contrast, the Fairfax garden initially appears as a triumph of Reformed theology, its symbolism tied to the family's victory over the abbey. Yet even here, the success is limited, for the garden does not measure up to the deeper theological paradox of *felix culpa*—the idea that true renewal arises not from orderly reproduction but from redemptive loss. The memory of the priory still haunts the garden, precisely because the poem's narrative does not attempt to redeem or fully integrate the priory episode. Instead, the description of the estate moves directly from the nuns' world to the cultivated garden, as if the priory had never existed. This narrative displacement leaves the priory as a kind of unassimilated remainder, a failure the garden cannot absorb or overwrite. In fact, the priory will merely serve as a type-scene that Fairfax's garden will reenact. Consider the circumstances. Marvell wrote "Upon Appleton House" from late June to late August of 1651.[121] The Civil War would not officially end until September. As far as the occupants knew, literal violence could still enter the estate. Additionally, the anxiety of the patrilineal project is obliquely present in the poem, in view of its historical references to the Fairfax family. Even if Thomas Fairfax's daughter, Mary, had passed down the estate, it obviously would not have been in her father's name. However, Mary was childless. After her death in 1704, Nun Appleton was eventually sold; subsequent owners would alter the estate.[122] After becoming the property of various families, the house is currently fenced off, empty, unused and deteriorating.[123] The imagined theater and conduit of the Fairfax family's patrilineal power has become a barren ruin, like the priory in 1651. Appropriately, Nun Appleton

[121] Ibid. 210.

[122] Grace Newton, "Nun Appleton Hall: The Abandoned Yorkshire Estate that's Shrouded in Mystery," *The Yorkshire Post* (22 July 2019) <https://www.yorkshirepost.co.uk/heritage-and-retro/heritage/nun-appleton-hall-abandoned-yorkshire-estate-thats-shrouded-mystery-1752676>.

[123] Id.

today is a literal *hortus conclusus*, enclosed within a wall and ironically signaling the contemporary vacuity of the *hortus conclusus* trope as a cosmopoetic tool.[124]

In the poem, the priory is presented as a doctrinal failure, since it repeats—and unsettles—the paradoxes of Genesis. That is, the theological world of the priory is doubly queer, not only in terms of its sapphic or nonreproductive sexuality, but also because it reproduces the doctrinally awkward ambiguities of the scriptural source. Characteristically, Marvell queers the bible by remaining faithful to it. In the context of the estate's subsequent history, Fairfax's garden fails also as a species of normative typology; it merely repeats the history of the priory, rather than narratively fulfill it. Normally in the genre of the country house poem, the great house is the symbol of stability and self-consistency, representing the entitlement of owners who attempt to control their future reputation. Fairfax's garden is in some ways a doctrinal success, notably by aligning itself with providential futurity. Nevertheless, it is haunted by the anxieties of the potential to fail in the patrilineal project, which would indeed occur. This haunting surfaces in the shadow of the priory's collapse, which hovers over the Fairfax garden as a cautionary precedent. The poem's divided optic, I have been claiming, is the crux of the poem's argument. Because Fairfax's garden is figured as both a success and a failure within the poem's theological frame, its significance cannot be reduced to a simple binary. Rather, the garden dramatizes the tension between providential, patrilineal futurity—imagined as divinely sanctioned and eschatological—and the unpredictable contingencies of historical circumstance, which continually threaten to unsettle that providential design. In this sense, world-remaking appears less as a stable achievement than as a precarious, modal process, suspended between competing claims of permanence and fragility.

[124] Id.

In this regard, Fairfax's retirement forms part of the larger question of failure as a multimodal dynamic. In June 1650, Fairfax resigned as chief commander of the parliamentary forces and withdrew from public life; as a result, some parliamentarians perceived him as abandoning his duty.[125] However, because "Upon Appleton House" depicts a dizzying array of generic worlds, Fairfax's retreat can only be understood as a failure depending on the criteria of one world at a time. Within the pastoral world of Fairfax's garden, the genre-conventions celebrate his retreat from active life. However, within the epic logic of Fairfax's patrilineal project, the retreat fails to fulfill the codes of masculine authority. These worlds do not add up to a coherent depiction of Fairfax's retreat. Instead, the poem's contradictory possibilities yield not a simple binary of success or failure, but a shifting framework in which the same action can register differently depending on the interpretive "world" through which it is viewed. What looks like providential triumph in one frame, for example, may read as historical failure in another. In this way, the poem demonstrates how its world-remaking gestures are multimodal—operating across overlapping but incommensurable logics—rather than reducible to a single perspective.

Thestylis in Sinai

The poem's ostensible historical chronicle tries to advance, but Thestylis intrudes near the poem's midpoint to halt the narrative, disrupting any sense of a stable referent (401-8). Marvell pointedly borrows this figure from Virgil's second eclogue, where Thestylis appears as a servant preparing food for reapers, thereby importing the pastoral register into the estate poem

[125] See N. Smith, *Andrew Marvell: The Chameleon* (New Haven: Yale UP, 2010), as well as Derek Hirst and Steven N. Zwicker, *Andrew Marvell, Orphan of the Hurricane* (Oxford: Oxford UP, 2012). Additionally, Julianne Werlin explores the question of Thomas Fairfax's participation in national affairs in her chapter on "Upon Appleton House" in *The Oxford Handbook of Andrew Marvell*, ed. Martin Dzelzainis and Edward Holberton (Oxford: Oxford UP, 2019), 481-98.

and further unsettling its historical frame.[126] Virgil's poem is primarily concerned with unrequited male homoerotic desire, to which Thestylis is an obstacle; she wants Corydon's two fawns, which he keeps for his love, Alexis. Marvell's Thestylis is also an intrusive figure, though not in the same way as her classical namesake. Importantly, Marvell's Thestylis is queer, not because she evokes a poem about male homoerotic desire (a normative theme within the classical tradition), but because she disrupts the narrative on several registers. Like the operations of anamorphic distortion we have looked at, her queerness is *structural*.

This becomes evident not only in her disruptive entrance but also in her speech, which confounds expectations by layering classical and biblical registers. For example, Thestylis is a classical character who nonetheless evokes the bible in her language, further unsettling the poem's generic and temporal frames. This sense of being a latecomer from the wrong tradition creates a jarring effect that disrupts the poem's flow. In this sense, Thestylis functions as a lay echo of the nun, a revenant of the priory's world whose sudden appearance and hybrid speech haunt the poem's later scenes. As previously argued, the nun represents a disruptive, queer sexuality that threatens the Fairfax family's patrilineal machinery. Thestylis embodies a disruptive, queer poetics; however, her queerness is nonsexual. Simply by entering a narrative wherein she does not belong, she threatens to disrupt the Fairfax project's teleology. Additionally, her very position in the episode is queer because she is depicted as actually hearing and responding to Marvell's speaker. After claiming that the mowers "seem like Israelites" (389), the speaker reports the speech of Thestylis, who "cries, 'He called us Israelites;/ But now, to make his saying true,/ Rails rain for quails, for manna, dew'" (406-8). Her narrative intrusion is of course legible as a familiar metafictional device; after all, many characters in early modern

[126] Virgil, *The Eclogues and the Georgics*, trans. C. Day Lewis (Oxford: Oxford UP, 2009), 2.10-11.

drama conventionally address the audience. That said, Thestylis' meta-fictionality warrants being understood as queer because her fracturing of the diegetic boundary is jarring in the immediate narrative context. No other character has been able to hear, much less respond to, Marvell's speaker. In effect, Marvell breaks the implicit narratological rules established at the outset of "Upon Appleton House" and Thestylis is the figure of that violation or failure.

In keeping with Marvell's procedure of queering scripture, Thestylis also converts an omen of death into a queer mark of grace. Before her appearance, a mower has accidentally killed a bird with his scythe; his accidental victim becomes to him a portent of a like fate that will befall him, invoking the normative, medieval European figure of death wielding a scythe (397-400).

> But bloody Thestylis, that waits
> To bring the mowing camp their cates,
> Greedy as kites, has trussed it up,
> And forthwith means on it to sup:
> When on another quick she lights,
> And cries, 'He called us Israelites;
> But now, to make his saying true,
> Rails rain for quails, for manna, dew.'
> (401-8)

Thestylis' appearance is announced with the conjunction "but," indicating that she contradicts the mower's mourning of the bird as a portent of death, which Thestylis converts into a strange sign of God's active election and intervention. She builds upon the speaker's allusion to Exodus by adding two more scriptural resonances: The rails have replaced "quails,"[127] while the morning dew has replaced "manna."[128] In Exodus 16, God responds to the Israelites' complaints by covering the Sinai desert with large flocks of migratory quail and edible granules—

[127] Exodus 16:13, *AKJV*.

[128] Ibid. 16:15, 31, 33, 35.

demonstrating to the people that God brought them "out from the land of Egypt."[129] In Marvell's allusion, Thestylis recuperates from Exodus the palpable tension between the celestial and terrestrial realms, as God's numinous presence is manifested in the rain of dead birds. Marvell's Thestylis recovers the sense of God's miraculous "rain" as uncanny or "bloody" (408, 401). When in the Wilderness narrative, God says, "Behold, I will rain bread from heaven for you,"[130] the promise of divine benefaction may have a double edge; according to Alter, "previous uses of this verb, *mamtir*, have been associated with God's showering destruction on humanity—in the Flood story, the Sodom story, and the Plagues narrative."[131] In fact, Marvell's version of divine rain resembles the Plagues narrative, for dead birds rain uncannily and bloodily upon the mowers, in keeping with God's fearsome power to combine the meteorological and zoological realms.

In this episode, the failure arises primarily from Thestylis' position on the limbus between two contradictory traditions. She is a Virgilian character who uncannily works against the pastoral mode by reappropriating Hebrew scripture; and her ironic mixture of generic framings troubles any monolithic understanding of the poem's genre or semantic center of gravity. Due to her ambivalent status, she fails according to the criteria of both traditions. Because Thestylis so easily derails human cosmopoetic teleology, the poem presents human limits as simply another feature of Nun Appleton's world-remaking. The estate incorporates human designs into its landscape, whether or not the designers realize it. In Marvell's imaginary, the estate gestures toward forms of agency that exceed individual human control. Rather than

[129] Ibid. 16:6.

[130] Ibid. 16:4.

[131] Alter, 279, n4.

presenting the estate simply as a projection of Fairfax's will, the poem suggests that its operations are entangled with forces that disrupt or complicate human authorship.

"The river in itself is drowned"[132]

Marvell continues to queer Genesis by ironically omitting the rainbow, the sign of God's covenant after the Flood. In the biblical narrative, the rainbow is both a meteorological event (diachronic, tied to a specific moment in time) and a symbolic guarantee (synchronic, functioning across time as an emblem of divine promise). It crystallizes providential history by linking a fleeting natural phenomenon to the enduring assurance of God's covenant—guaranteeing the future, provided humans act in accordance with divine command. Precisely because it secures this predictive framework, the rainbow is absent from "Upon Appleton House," where providence operates less as a stable guarantee than as a site of uncertainty and slippage.

This is the first time in the poem's biblical recuperation that it actively omits a key symbol of the scriptural source. The poem's discursive tactics circumvent covenant theology, according to which God's promises bind not only humans but also Himself. Marvell is less interested in the normative depiction of God as reasonable, than in his own pantheistic sense of the divine that saturates the re-creative environment. As we shall see, the omission leads the way to the speaker's state of interfusion in the incarnational scene, which eliminates suffering from the crucifixion.

[132] Marvell, 471.

Once again, the poem blurs the categories of divine, human, and thing.[133] The flood episode echoes the biblical flood myth's insistence on adulteration; "the sons of God" couple with "the daughters of men," producing the mythical Nephilim.[134] The episode marks a transgression of the boundary between the divine and the human, and the resulting offspring embody this violation. Earlier in "Upon Appleton House," the speaker had subtly compared both Lord and Lady Fairfax to the Nephilim; Thomas Fairfax had implicitly crossed the divine-human boundary in his allusive connection to these antediluvian "giants."[135] In the flood episode, the theme of adultery is reframed through tropes of transgressive desire, effectively coding it in terms of queer sexuality. Nun Appleton—the estate figured as Fairfax's "mistress"—provokes envy in Denton, his older and more expansive property. The rivalry is not between Fairfax's wife Anne and a romantic rival, but between the two estates themselves, personified as competing women. In this way, Fairfax becomes akin to a son of God, and Nun Appleton corresponds with a daughter of men. Interestingly, the Denton estate maps onto Yahweh's position. Although Fairfax is given God's title of "Lord," God's jealousy is attributed to Denton, which is "jealous of its Lord's long stay" at Nun Appleton (469). In Exodus 34, when Yahweh calls Himself "a jealous God,"[136] the next verses thrice invoke the metaphor of whoring to represent idolatry;[137] thus, Yahweh's jealousy is quasi-sexual. Yahweh implicitly represents Himself as Israel's husband and lover. When the Israelites betray Him by worshipping other gods, they go

[133] For a discussion of liquid assemblages of humans and things, see Duckert, *For All Waters: Finding Ourselves in Early Modern Wetscapes* (Minneapolis: U of Minnesota P, 2017).

[134] Genesis 6:1-4, *AKJV*.

[135] Ibid. 6:4.

[136] Exodus 34:14, *AKJV*.

[137] Ibid. 34:15-16.

"whoring" and are unfaithful. In "Upon Appleton House," Denton is ungendered by Marvell's speaker (469); the estate itself becomes Fairfax's lady and lord. This blurring of titles, genders, and roles quietly destabilizes the hierarchy of property and owner.

Although Marvell explicitly distances himself from the radical politics of the "Levellers" (450), the poem lingers on their imagery of flattened space—"this naked equal flat" (449)—to stage a different kind of leveling.[138] In this context, the estate's landscape becomes a figure for Marvell's queer poetics, where hierarchies of order and meaning are unsettled not through political revolution, but through aesthetic distortion. Within this "levelled space" or "table rase," humans are equalized with animals and vegetables (443, 446). The landscape subtly undermines the cosmopoetic importance of the human in general—and the patrilineal machinery in particular—without directly challenging either. Here, I take a middle ground between the claims of Matthew Ritger and Katie Kadue. Ritger argues that Marvell's poetics are both disruptive and queer.[139] In my view, while Marvell's poetics are narratively queer and disruptive, they are not systematically so. I join Kadue in arguing that the cumulative effect of Marvell's queer tactics serves to sustain, rather than threaten, heterosexual norms.[140] I build on her insightful logic by claiming that queerness in "Upon Appleton House" points to an excess outside the patrilineal structure that deflates its importance, though the structure need not recognize the excess as a

[138] The Levellers were radical Puritans in London and the New Model Army. They campaigned for religious toleration and political liberties. Fairfax played a significant role in crushing their mutinies in 1649. However, some Levellers remained active in the 1650s, close to Nun Appleton (N. Smith, *Poems*, 212).

[139] Matthew Ritger, "Marvell's Double Negatives: Oliver Cromwell and 'An Horatian Ode,'" *ELH* 85.3 (2018): 631-67.

[140] Katie Kadue, "Sustaining Fiction: Preserving Patriarchy in Marvell's *Upon Appleton House*," *Studies in Philology* 114.3 (2017): 641-61.

threat. While Marvell's poetics ostensibly serve the norms, they implicitly level their ideological consequence, without forcing that insight.

One could argue that the deflation of the human is itself disruptive. However, while the deflationary tactics may subtly critique the Fairfax machinery, they do not pose a threat in the same sense that the priory does. The difference between the disruptive queerness of the priory and the nondisruptive queerness of Marvell's deflationary poetics is analogous to the difference between Ovid and Virgil in Roman literary and political history. Like the priory, Ovid directly threatened the extant imperial power structure, so he was exiled. Like Marvell's speaker, Virgil may have subtly critiqued this structure, but he ostensibly praised it, so exile was not a predictable outcome. This tension between critique and conformity also has a concrete analogue in the Fairfax family's own history, where apparent piety and obedience masked coercion and disruption. It is important to remember that William Fairfax was forced to obtain an order for Isabel Thwaites' release and thereafter to seize her by force.[141] Thus, in the poem the priory episode becomes a localized semaphore for disruptive agency in the Ovidian mode. No such action was required of Marvell in his service to the Fairfax family; not only did he tutor Mary Fairfax, but he continued to thrive even in the Restoration. The poem's deflationary gesture reactivates Virgil's rhetorical imaginary, opening alternative queer intuitions within the imperium. In this way, the multimodal dynamic of failure reclaims the Virgilian tradition of caution, prudence, and pragmatism.

Building on the poem's Virgilian reflex, which favors containment over outright disruption, the queering of the Judeo-Christian tradition in the flood episode illustrates another mode of constraint. Within this register, the poem's flood narrative fails as a type of covenant

[141] Marvell, *The Complete Poems*, ed. Elizabeth Story Donno (New York: Penguin, 2005): 249, n90.

theology, producing a queer version of the covenant that warrants the rainbow's absence. This failure also produces a pantheistic version of God in Nun Appleton, saturating the environment that He remakes and thereby destabilizing the hierarchies of the normative, juridical, jealous God of Exodus and Deuteronomy. Marvell's pantheistic sense of divinity is a doctrinal aberration (a failure, if you will), but it yields queer energies that level the importance of the power-structure that the poem ostensibly praises. Although Marvell's deflation is nondisruptive, it reveals intuitions that invoke a memory of Virgil's career, revealing hidden folds in the world that dwarf the cosmopoetic project of the Fairfax patriarchs. Because Marvell succeeds according to the Virgilian tradition, yet fails by post-Reformation doctrinal standards, "Upon Appleton House" further demonstrates world-remaking as a modal, rather than binary concept.

The Woods as Crucifix

The militant machinery of the Fairfax project cannot contain the intuition of theological queerness, which returns later in the crucifixion scene, coded in homoerotic terms that make Marvell's speaker one with the woods. When the speaker commands the briars to "nail me through" and "stake me down" (616, 624), the scene of Jesus nailed to the cross migrates into codes outside of more orthodox theologies. Instead of imposing a preordained structure upon the world, Marvell's speaker yields himself to Nun Appleton's woods and thereby participates in its state of interfusion. The speaker celebrates becoming part of the woods, as received distinctions separating humans, plants, and animals are levelled by this world.

What was previously a deflationary gesture here becomes a poetics of elasticity—the capability of human world-remaking to be simultaneously inflated and deflated. The scale of being itself becomes unstable in the woodland setting. In this scene, the crucifixion imagery

mirrors the unsettling hierarchy glimpsed earlier in the meadows: there, humans were merely equal to the landscape, but in the grass they are shown as lower than plants and insects (369-76). Here in the woods, the speaker is deflated in the sense that he is not the prime world-remaker—the woods remake themselves by incorporating him. Simultaneously, the speaker's status is inflated in the sense that he becomes a crux of the landscape's self-remaking, which is impossible without him as a receptive participant.[142]

This inflation also points outward, toward a larger interpretive frame. David Caroll Simon cogently argues that the through-line of "Upon Appleton House" is what he calls "careless receptivity," for the carelessness of Marvell's speaker intensifies his receptivity to phenomena; thus Simon argues that in the poem, "seeing the world as it is means taking it as it comes."[143] I extend Simon's insightful logic by claiming that the speaker's careless receptivity and elastic poetics allow him to participate in Nun Appleton's sui generis instrumentation of divine world-remaking. Rather than impose new designs upon the world in the manner of the Fairfax family, the speaker loses himself and engages in paradise here in this world, not some higher platonic or heavenly world. By merging with the woods, he sees the world anew and thereby participates in its state of interfusion. Like careless receptivity, Marvell's elastic poetics allows insight into this state. The speaker's inflationary gesture crescendos when he himself becomes godlike; the speaker practices and imitates Christlike virtues such as humility, the ethical manifestation of Christ's self-emptying gesture in the Philippians hymn.[144] At stake in his

[142] For a discussion of environmental ethics in relation to classical philosophy, see Robert Bringhurst and Jan Zwicky, *Learning to Die: Wisdom in the Age of Climate Crisis* (Regina: U of Regina P, 2018).

[143] David Carroll Simon, "Andrew Marvell and the Epistemology of Carelessness," *ELH* 82.2 (2015), 556.

[144] See e.g. Dorothea Bertschmann, "Is There a Kenosis in This Text? Reading Philippians 3:2-11 in the Light of the Christ Hymn," *Journal of Biblical Literature* 137.1 (2018), 235-54.

Christ-like associations is a decidedly idiosyncratic reshaping of the incarnational mystery. This godlike attribute is Marvell's poetic imagining of an immersive incarnational theology that fails as a species of doctrinal theology, but provocatively introduces an alternative, typologically resonant phenomenology of a polymorphic, materialist, paradisal condition.[145]

Let's consider the specific incarnational doctrine at issue here. According to the early heresy of Docetism, Christ was not crucified, but God permitted a simulacrum or *imago christi* to die. Docetism reflects the perception of scandal within dominant early Christian understandings of the Messiah's nature. In doing so, this heresy violates the normative sense of divine alterity that grounds orthodox theology, as well as the Jewish understanding of Messiah as a political and historical leader. Docetism thereby demonstrates the aberrant character of incarnational theology, positing the crucifixion as a failure that must be narratively converted.

Marvell takes up this problem by allowing the crucifixion scene in the woods to narratively fulfill the earlier queer type-scene of the priory. Whereas the priory's queerness destabilized Fairfax's project by exposing its theological and patrilineal blind spots, the woodland crucifixion reframes such disruption as a paradoxical good. In this way, the woods accomplish what Fairfax cannot: they successfully recapitulate the queer energies of the priory. Here, the fault becomes "fortunate" not in the sense of an orthodox *felix culpa* that culminates in assured redemption, but in the stranger suggestion that human insufficiency—absorbed into the queer, nonhuman life of the woods—can itself become the medium of renewal.

Marvell's poetic, queer, typological imaginary illuminates how failure and disruption drift from normative semantic orbits into supple variations of sense and orientation. In turn, this

[145] The rhetorical figure for such a perspective is chiasmus, which is important in Pauline theology and speaks to Nun Appleton's state of interfusion. Maurice Merleau-Ponty theorizes that humans intertwine with everything wherewith we come into contact [Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *The Visible and the Invisible, Followed by Working Notes*, trans. Alphonso Lingis (Evanston, Northwestern UP, 1968), 130-55].

drifting produces a Marvellian appropriation of incarnational theology in the liminal environment of the poem's imagined world. Human world-remaking effectiveness is only possible through participation in Nun-Appleton's world-remaking. Tellingly, Marvell eliminates from his crucifixion scene the purposeful suffering of Christ on humankind's behalf and replaces it with queer and posthuman pleasure—that is, pleasures derived from forms of embodiment and relation that deviate from reproductive or salvific teleologies, and from the dissolution of human centrality into the larger vitality of plants, insects, and landscapes. This scene fails as a doctrinally legible type of Christological hermeneutics, yet retains what such hermeneutics posit as the consequence of suffering: the perception of the true nature of reality; as well as giving up the self, becoming nothing, and conforming to the will of a higher authority.[146]

Queering the Apocalypse

In the penultimate stanza, the speaker calls Nun Appleton "paradise's only map" (768), which charts a "decent order tame" (766), instead of a world of disorientation. As Simon notes, "It's hard to think of a less apt description of Marvell's Nun Appleton."[147] Simon's observation raises the question of the speaker's tone. According to Ian C. Parker, the engaged detachment of Marvell's speaker is emphasized by his ironic playfulness.[148] I agree with Parker overall, but I would add that in Marvell's apocalyptic vision, the playful tone offsets his genuine fixation on the apocalyptic vision. If we take the speaker at his word, then his view of paradise is

[146] Two prominent medieval theologians who posit such hermeneutics are Gregory the Great, *Moralia in Job: or Morals on the Book of Job*, vols. 1-3, trans. James Bliss (Scotts Valley: CreateSpace, 2012); and Henry Suso, *Henry Suso: The Exemplar, with Two German Sermons*, trans. Frank Tobin (New York: Paulist Press, 1989).

[147] Simon, 553-88.

[148] Ian C. Parker, "Marvell's 'Upon Appleton House' and Spenser," *Notes and Queries* 63.1 (2014), 48-52.

characterized by an excess that cannot be contained by a static or fixed map. Perhaps Nun Appleton serves instead as a living map of paradise, which the human architectural imagination cannot fully circumscribe. In the speaker's vision, the world to come may be characterized by mutability on a scale previously unimagined, rather than changelessness. "'Tis not, what once it was, the world/ But a rude heap together hurled" (761-2). The world has lost its prelapsarian harmony and fallen into chaos, but Nun Appleton is a world approximating a strange sense of harmony and serving as an ever-shifting map of the world to come (768).

If we take seriously the claim that Nun Appleton is "paradise's only map," then Marvell's apocalyptic world is characterized by an interfusion that is kaleidoscopic, disorienting, mercurial, and mutable, wherein different forms of matter are entangled—as in the crucifixion scene, when Marvell's speaker becomes chiastically interwoven with the woods (585-648). The eschaton in Marvell's apocalyptic vision is both now and recurring. I agree with Ryan Netzley that Marvell renders the experience of apocalyptic change in the present;[149] however, I disagree with his surmise that Marvell calls for physically changing the world, rather than merely seeing it anew. Again, Marvell's poetics are queer, but they are not disruptive. Similarly, I join D.K. Smith in arguing that the instability of English Civil War politics is reflected by the instability of the Nun Appleton landscape,[150] yet the latter's instability deflates the epochal importance of the former, as previously shown.

This deflation destabilizes the androcentric focal point for perceiving and addressing the effects of change. The patrilineal project, which upholds Mary Fairfax as Christ, fails to

[149] Ryan Netzley, *Lyric Apocalypse: Milton, Marvell, and the Nature of Events* (New York: Fordham UP, 2015).

[150] D.K. Smith, "'Tis Not, What Once It Was, the World': Andrew Marvell's Re-Mapping of Old and New in 'Bermudas' and 'Upon Appleton House,'" *Seventeenth Century* 21.2 (2006): 215-48.

understand its role within Nun Appleton's alternative, queer typological energies. However, these energies are not set aside because of human obliviousness. Nun Appleton indeed upholds Mary as a Christ figure, though not in the sense that the Fairfax project intends. Mary cannot fulfill her father's patrilineal intent, so she cannot convert the priory's doctrinal failure in any normative or doctrinally legible way. Instead, symbolizing the failure of human cosmopoetic intent, she becomes the embodied signifier of a posthuman Christ, who is upheld by Nun Appleton's pantheistic divinity because she is powerless to impose her will upon it. She thereby incarnates a Marvellian figure of kenosis, emptied out, deflated, and yet thereby simultaneously inflated as the landscape's crowning feature. "Nature, in respect / To her, itself doth recollect" (657-8), so that she becomes less an actor than the still point around which the cosmos reorganizes. Her movement through the evening "doth hush / The world" (681-2), even as "Nature is wholly vitrified" (688), suggesting that her very passivity—its charisma, if you will—transforms creation into glass-like purity. She is coronated not of her own doing, but because "The garden" presents "flow'rs to crown her head" (700). And in a final emblem of her emptied yet exalted condition, she appears "like a sprig of mistletoe / On the Fairfacian oak" (739-40), fragile and dependent yet sacred and chosen. In these ways, Mary embodies the paradox of power through self-emptying. The patrilineal failure is redeemed by Nun Appleton, which converts the Fairfax project of domination and exploitation into an organic part of the interfused world. Because the failure of human intent can be invested in such powerful energies, the multimodal dynamic of world-remaking failure and success cannot be dichotomous; it must be modal—open to an unknown future.

Chapter 3. Queer Whiteness and Double Focalization in Cavendish's The Blazing World

The early modern period's literary practices actively formulated the very subject position from which contemporary political and creative categories emerged. As such, this period is an essential site for interrogating these categories' queer and racial fallout. Accordingly, several queer theorists and critical race scholars have taken up serious interrogations of Renaissance literary traditions in recent years. Yet, despite the significant work done on this front, one area remains chronically understudied: early modern writers' use of queering operations to formulate whiteness as a racial and epistemological category.

Whiteness does not begin in contradistinction to blackness; the ubiquity of this endlessly repeated provenance is part of whiteness's ideological obfuscation. As such, how can we now use queer intervention to begin thinking outside the seeming omnipotence and omnipresence of whiteness, its casual and insistent self-identification as an essential property of (human) beingness? In this regard, the fundamental ambiguity of queerness as a critical tool is tactically productive. This ambiguity encompasses the term's three valences: 1) the older, more generalized sense of queer as anything that troubles the seemingly coherent and normalized, or naturalized, shape of the real; 2) the more recent ascendancy of the word's sense as a marker of sexual orientation and attachment; and 3) the political entailments of such affiliations.

The preceding analysis of "Upon Appleton House" already illustrates some of the diffuseness of these queer tactics. Yet, because the poem's intertextual machinery is rooted in biblical typology, classical allusion, Civil War polemic, and patrilineal concerns, its queerness remains largely detached from the problem of whiteness. This detachment, however, clarifies the stakes of the present inquiry. If Andrew Marvell's poem shows how queerness can operate without confronting whiteness, Margaret Cavendish's work raises the inverse issue. How can the

very queerness that was formative to the development of early modern whiteness now reveal the best critical and theoretical practices to make the tactics and vectors of contemporary whiteness legible and, crucially, disrupt it?

To answer this question, I analyze Cavendish's *The Blazing World* (1666), a utopian romance whose articulation of the default position of white subjectivity is shaped by the convergence of queer and imperializing tactics of its protagonist, the Empress. I seek to understand this text as a generative site for the study of the co-insistence of queerness and racializing political ambitions in early modern contexts. Whiteness, I argue, operates both inside and outside *race*, in that the emergent concept of whiteness attempts to construct and perpetuate a fantasy of unmarked, transcendent "racelessness." This property makes whiteness rather dangerously elusive in the ways we approach it and come to understand it epistemologically and phenomenologically—both as an object of historical inquiry and as an informing element that may be present and visible without being legible. In this regard, whiteness shares space with queerness, in that both attributes achieve functional potency in the early modern period before they acquire conceptual clarity and the denotative power of a name. Because whiteness (uncomfortably) shares space with queerness in the era, I am motivated to examine how both attributes begin to be shaped by Cavendish's imperial world imaginaries.

My focus on the emergent politics of whiteness in *The Blazing World* opens fresh ways of thinking about the queerness that informs key parts of the narrative. Specifically, whiteness tangentially helps emphasize the culturally and historically unstable operations of "queer" practice in the era. Cavendish's engagement in the tactics of whiteness dovetails with her investment in queering the representation of her characters' desires and behaviors. In this way, the same narrative strategies in her speculative fiction serve two interests that appear at odds: 1)

the incipient privilege of whiteness, which circulates as a cultural given, before it turns into a taxonomic and instrumentalized category of human identity; and 2) the nascent scandal of queerness, which operates as a random attribute of singularity or eccentricity, before it is isolated as a distinctive and essentialized component of psycho-sexual identity. Thus, *The Blazing World* performs diverging yet overlapping ideological codes in the ascendancy. A fascinating kind of chiastic energy is at play in Cavendish's romance, whereby "white" is "queer" and "queer" is "white" (with the sense of each term shifting as it changes position in the chiasmus—revealing how emergent categories "float," functionally effective without being fully intelligible, before they become dominant).

I adopt an intersectional approach to modify and complicate my treatment of Cavendish's racial and queer world-remaking strategies. To this end, my approach builds on work by theorists who have understood early modern culture as a site of production for racial categories and systems of power (Arthur L. Little, Jr., Ian Smith, and Stephanie H. Jed, to name just a few). Like these scholars, I approach Renaissance literature as a potent site for critical race studies. I emphasize the power of queer intervention as a key element in early modern *cosmopoiesis*; i.e., the motives and tactics whereby world-remaking schemes take shape.

The subjects of *The Blazing World* are racially diverse in two different senses: they have skins of varying colors and they belong to different species (163).[151] In addition to skin color and other phenotypical markers, the Empress's formulation of whiteness manifests through a biopolitical schema. According to Alexander G. Weheliye, race functions "not as a biological or cultural descriptor but as a conglomerate of sociopolitical relations that discipline humanity into

[151] In-text citations are from Margaret Cavendish, *Paper Bodies: A Margaret Cavendish Reader*, ed. Sylvia Bowerbank and Sara Mendelson (Peterborough: Broadview, 2000).

full humans, not-quite-humans, and nonhumans."[152] Whiteness is thereby constituted through power relations that are reproduced epistemologically and materially within legal, political, and religious structures.

As demonstrated by Little, the early modern period does not precede whiteness, but is instead formative to its development; for Little, much of the early modern period's acclaimed self-fashioning was in fact white self-fashioning.[153] Thus the desire to establish and institutionalize the currency of whiteness is a primary aspiration of early modern Europeans. This aspiration is reflected by the "white" character of the Empress's world-remaking agenda that often goes unremarked, an act of unseeing or erasure that, as Smith observes, "enables the normative invisibility of whiteness, which is a sign of its hegemony."[154] By interrogating the Empress's transfiguration of her subjects' marked bodies, my argument helps to make two inscriptions legible: not only the informing whiteness of Empress's world-remaking project, but also the racially inflected operations that seek to unmark and universalize whiteness. Building on Little and Smith, I analyze cultural zones where the invisibility of whiteness is not yet normative. I inspect Cavendish's discursive tactics for signs of an interest in depicting the emergence of "normative invisibility."[155]

In this regard, my argument also extends the insights of Mieke Bal's foundational sense of how focalization operates; i.e., how a text constructs its own sense of an appropriate context

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[152] Alexander G. Weheliye, *Habeas Viscus: Racializing Assemblages, Biopolitics, and Black Feminist Theories of the Human* (Durham: Duke UP, 2014), 3.

[153] Arthur L. Little, Jr., "Re-Historicizing Race, White Melancholia, and the Shakespearean Property," *Shakespeare Quarterly* 67.1 (2016), 89.

[154] Ian Smith, "We are Othello: Speaking of Race in Early Modern Studies," *Shakespeare Quarterly* 67.1 (2016), 107.

[155] Id.

(or ideological lens) wherein it represents itself.[156] One of the signature features of this narratological technique is that it is not constrained by the casually psychological and humanistic associations of the more traditional categories of "first-person," "second-person," and third-person" narration. Instead of concentrating on the characterological underpinnings of perspective, Bal's ideological understanding of focalization underscores that all discursive elements frame how the sensory experience of contact with or immersion in a represented world is possible. The technique focuses on a wide array of compositional tactics that show how things or events come into the condition of (in)visibility. For this reason, Bal's handling of focalization helps locate further nuances in Cavendish's own narrative technique, which I call double focalization.

Double focalization signposts the ways that *The Blazing World* produces entanglements of queering and whitening gestures and then demonstrates how a single set of behaviors and aspirations may be viewed differently from disparate ideological vantage points. As we shall see, something like this double focalization tactic occurs in contemporary travel narratives and romance literature. Cavendish's double focalization seems ripe for interrogation as a technique illustrating an awareness that cultural zones, as coded in early modern European texts, are not "always already" immersed in covert and hegemonic whiteness, but rather are engaged in "pre-emergent" sensitivities to this drama of hegemonic posturing.[157] The reason why this is useful is partly a methodological matter—in that the "invisible" quotient of whiteness, if it is to be differentiated from a type of metaphysical thinking that essentially equates the invisible with the

[156] Mieke Bal, *Narratology: Introduction to the Theory of Narrative*, 3rd ed., trans. Christine van Boheeman (Toronto: U of Toronto P, 2009), 145-62.

[157] For a discussion of the slippage between "emergent" and "pre-emergent" dimensions of a culture's symbolic codes, see R. Williams, 126, 132.

hegemonic at all points in the archive, must necessarily yield scenes or moments before or outside the hegemonic orbit. Cavendish's narrative design shows an intuitive grasp of how double focalization, rather than simple perspective, orchestrates (in)visibility.

While scholars have long emphasized *The Blazing World*'s cosmopoetics as revealing Cavendish's stance on science and epistemology, I join Nathaniel Likert in arguing that the text illuminates her revisions of literary tradition.[158] I build on Likert's insight by claiming that Cavendish's world-remaking operations indicate new forms of literary self-consciousness or self-reflection on what counts as "natural," raising the question of how such textual moments carry ambivalent effects: What imagined power or opportunity does the estranging effect of otherwise "natural" or received representations of how the world works and looks bring with it? The political ambivalence of Cavendish's royalist career is related to this question. If the world (or the received *sense* of the world) is a manipulable object, then which path should one take: enter it so as to take advantage of what it affords, or participate in its radical transformation—and to what ends?

Using *The Blazing World* as a case study, I inspect how a range of technical features of early modern literary experiments with the cosmopoetic ethos give witness to radical shifts in the cultural understanding of how "worlds" come into being and are sustained. To better contextualize the dramatic turn exemplified in Cavendish's work, I engage the polyglot world of Thomas Underdowne's translation of Heliodorus of Emesa, the simulated New World contact of

[158] Nathaniel Likert, "The Counterfactual Fictions of Margaret Cavendish," *ELH* 88.1 (2021), 57. For Cavendish's critique of experimentalism, see Elizabeth Spiller, "Books written of the wonders of these glasses: Thomas Hobbes, Robert Hooke, and Margaret Cavendish's theory of reading," *Science, Reading, and Renaissance Literature: The Art of Making Knowledge*, 1580-1670 (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2004); Frédérique Aït-Touati, "Margaret Cavendish: The Battle of Instruments," *Fictions of the Cosmos: Science and Literature in the Seventeenth Century* (Chicago: U of Chicago P, 2011); and Liza Blake, "The Grounds of Literature and Science: Margaret Cavendish's Creature Manifesto," *The Palgrave Handbook to Early Modern Literature and Science* (New York: Palgrave, 2017).

Thomas More, the philosophical world of Edmund Spenser, the trans-worlding imaginary of Christopher Marlowe, and the colonial *cosmopoiesis* of Richard Haklyut. Although many classical texts engage in world-remaking mythologies (such as the Myth of Er in Plato's *Republic*), the *Aethiopica* initiates this list because it is undergirded by the idea of imperial expansion—the mode of world-remaking that informs the other texts and connects them to *The Blazing World*. Together, the *Aethiopica*, *Utopia*, *Cantos of Mutabilitie*, *Tamburlaine the Great*, and *Principal Navigations* form the background of narrative strategies for representing the complicity of imperializing and cosmopoetic schemes in an increasing momentum of texts engaged in world-remaking.

The apparent difference between the tactics in Underdowne's Heliodorus, More, Spenser, Marlowe, and Haklyut on the one hand and in Cavendish on the other indicates an important aspect of the historical, cultural fascination with cosmopoetic schemes in late sixteenth- to late seventeenth-century England. Notably, a shift occurs when texts dealing with cosmopoetic speculations begin to include meta-critical tactics that show incipient awareness of the critical value of representing the "familiar" contours of the inhabited world as "strange" or queer and thus available for new forms of scrutiny and transformation.

Cavendish's self-referential strategy specifically involves *mise en abyme. Mise en abyme* is a broad term for embeddings of self-reflexivity within various forms of art. A standard literary example is the play-within-the-play in *Hamlet*. This embedding serves as an alternative register of reality that consequently fractures the text's naturalized codes of realistic representation—even after (in a telling textual irony) Hamlet directs the players "to hold as 'twere the mirror up

to Nature."[159] The technique breaks the fabricated illusion of the represented world's observance of inherited or naturalized norms for thinking about how fictional representations of the world honor mimetic conformity to the "real" world. Cavendish's *mise en abyme* devices exemplify this reorientation or deformation of representative, narrative protocols. Cavendish deploys *mise en abyme* to play with double focalization—with how things become visible. As will be shown, the technical rapport between *mise en abyme* and double focalization is based on the intersection of the former's "repetition with difference" and the latter's sense of "scale."

I begin with Heliodorus's *Aethiopica*, an ancient Greek romance that demonstrates incipient awareness of what would become Cavendish's double focalization technique. As Jack Winkler, John Morgan, and more recently Niall Slater have pointed out, the *Aethiopica* self-reflexively raises issues of translatability in its late antique understanding of cosmopolitanism.[160] Such problems inhere not only in the characters' misunderstandings, mistakes, and uncertain interactions, but also in the text's imposition of Greek thought-structures onto a context that exceeds their embrace. For example, at the moment of Charicleia's conception, the Ethiopian queen Persinna glances at a painting of Andromeda, naked and light-skinned, on the ceiling. The vision impresses itself upon the unborn child, causing Charicleia to be born light-skinned in semblance of the picture.

In this scene, the double focalization operates at the level of literary tradition and language. After all, Andromeda, an Ethiopian princess with a Greek name, originates in Greek

[159] Shakespeare, *Hamlet* 3.2.21-22. See Lowell Gallagher, "*Mise en Abyme*, Narrative, and the Ethics of Mimesis in *Hamlet*: Gertrude Talks," *Genre* 28 (Winter 1995), 513-41.

[160] Jack Winkler, "The Mendacity of Kalasiris and the Narrative Strategy of Heliodorus' *Aithiopika*," *Yale Classical Studies* 27 (1982), 93-158; John Morgan, "History, Romance, and Realism in the *Aithiopika* of Heliodorus," *Classical Antiquity* 1 (1982), 221-65; and Niall W. Slater, "And There's Another Country: Translation as Metaphor in Heliodorus," *Metaphor and the Ancient Novel*, vol. 4 (2005).

mythology. The text self-consciously engages in Greek tradition and language, positioning (that is, focalizing) Charicleia as a literary character who looks like (a painting of) a previous literary character. As Tim Whitmarsh shows, "Charicleia can almost be said to be a walking ekphrasis, an embodiment of the illusory traps of the unreal."[161] She and the other Ethiopian characters in the novel are no less Greek impositions on sub-Saharan peoples than Andromeda, or the very term Ethiopia itself—a Greek compound-word meaning "burnt-face," a racialized, linguistic extension of the Phaethon myth.

In addition to overlaying Greek cultural artifacts onto the Ethiopian narrative, the double focalization also becomes a Greek medium or filter on the apparently alien world of Ethiopian culture. Heliodorus, a Syrian of the Roman Empire, replicates the Attic dialect (though the regnant Greek dialect of his day would have been koine) to create the linguistic frame and focalizing medium of the represented worlds. As such, the *Aethiopica* self-reflexively plays on the fabricated reality and limited cultural scope of ancient Greek categories. While the text sees Ethiopia through "Greek-colored glasses," this Greek filter or referential code in the story does not have the same ideological intensity as Cavendish's double focalization; i.e, Heliodorus's filtering effect is not an argument, but an assumption that Greek culture is the default.

The incipient double-focalization of this scene is further brought out in English translation. Thomas Underdowne's 1587 translation, the first in English, gives a marginal gloss on the scene of Charicleia's conception, explaining "Why Persina being blacke, brought forth a white daughter."[162] Underdowne doubles down on the language of whiteness in his rendering of

[161] Tim Whitmarsh, "Written on the Body: Ekphrasis, Perception and Deception in Heliodorus' *Aethiopica*," *Ramus* 31.1-2 (2002), 111-25: 111.

[162] Heliodorus, et al. *An Æthiopian History Written in Greek by Heliodorus / Englished by Thomas Underdowne, Anno 1587 ; with an Introduction by Charles Whibley* (D. Nutt, 1895), 4.108.

the scene: "But thou werte borne white, which couler is strange amonge the Aethiopians."[163] While Underdowne uses the word "white," Heliodorus uses the word λουκημ (Attic: λευκην), which, in the context of the novel, can be more literally translated as "light-skinned."[164] While the double focalization in Heliodorus's story involves the painting's depiction of Andromeda as light-skinned (indexing the incommensurability of Mediterranean and sub-Saharan contexts), the double focalization in Underdowne's translation inheres in the painting's depiction of Andromeda as white (indicating the slipperiness of grafting emergent early modern European racial categories onto an ancient Greco-Phoenician text). Whiteness is automatic for Underdowne because an ideological shift has already started to occur.

Like Underdowne's translation of Heliodorus's *Aethiopica,* More's *Utopia* problematizes Eurocentric perspectives on a foreign cultural world. Specifically, *Utopia* exemplifies European views on the impersonality of indigenous peoples, by modeling the Utopians not as individual subjects, but as presences that lack interiority. The only Utopian whom Raphael Hythloday names is the mythical founder, Utopas, while the only time that Hythloday depicts Utopian dialogue is the scene in which the mother and son are speaking about the ambassadors in gold.[165] It is a conjectural scene because Hythloday describes it in the subjunctive mood: "You might have seen children […] say," and "the mother […] would answer."[166] In addition to these conjectural Utopians, the island itself becomes a speaking subject—the surrogation emphasizing

[163] Ibid. 4.107-8.

[164] Heliodorus Emesenus, *Ἡλιοδώρου Αἰθιοπικῆς Ἱστορίας Βιβλία Δέκα. = Heliodori Historiae Aethiopicæ Libri Decem, Nunquam Antea in Lucem Editi* (ex Officina Hervagiana, 1534): 4.81.

[165] Thomas More, *Utopia*, trans. George M. Logan and Robert M. Adams, 3rd ed. (New York: Norton, 2011): 57.

[166] Id.

the irony that European travel narratives rarely give direct voice to indigenous peoples.[167] The purported voice of the island is "translated" as a Latin quatrain, satirizing the authenticity of European translations of indigenous languages.

Hythloday attempts to grant gravitas to Utopia through comparisons to ancient Mediterranean sources. However, by overstating the case of this similarity, *Utopia* devolves into silly mimicry of these societal models. This mimicry is especially apparent in the Utopian foundational myth; the establishment of Utopia by Utopas (Mr. Utopia himself) seems to parody Rome's legendary founding by Romulus (Mr. Rome himself). Additionally, Utopas is depicted with neither origin nor background; he seems to have appeared *ex nihilo*. The ancient Romans at least attempted to suture the Romulus and Aeneas myths together (however imperfectly) to provide a sense of historical continuity and feasibility. Virgil, for example, links Aeneas to the eventual founding of Rome by tracing a line of descent from the Trojan exile through Alba Longa to Romulus and Remus. This narrative stitching does not erase the contradictions between the myths, but it allows them to coexist within a shared providential frame. Hythloday, by contrast, makes no such attempt to reconcile the inconsistencies in his account of Utopia. Thus, the primary agency represented in Utopia's model of history is overtly fabular. Further, before Utopas conquered the country, it was a peninsula called Abraxa.[168] Evidently, the natives had named it after Abraxas, the highest heaven postulated by Basilides, a Greek Gnostic of the 2nd century C.E.

This aping rather than production of classical culture suggests the essentially derivative nature of the "found" world, which is deformed at the outset by Eurocentric focalization. The

[167] Ibid. 68.

[168] Ibid. 39.

representation of Utopia is further satirized by the monkey that mutilates the Greek book, *On Plants*.[169] This text on botany can symbolize the aspiration for productive growth, but in Utopia, botched botany would merely reproduce a Greek original. The fact that a monkey mutilates the book may symbolize that mimicry can only mutilate the aspiration for productivity. Thus, the monkey stands as a figure for debased imitation, or imperfect transmission. The over-similarity of Utopia to European societies calls into question the Eurocentric lens through which European travel narratives depict indigenous peoples, who cannot be exactly like Europeans.

While early modern travel narratives rely on first-person witness or narration, *Utopia* subverts the authority of this perspective. Because the name Hythloday can be translated as "nonsense-peddler,"[170] *Utopia* engages playfully in the limits of trusting Hythloday's report. His name is one of More's in-jokes for the community of humanists who study Latin and Greek. Only learned people could understand these jokes and read More's Latin text before it was translated. Thus, while *Utopia* destabilizes classical sources, it ironically also reinforces their authority. Hythloday's vision of the New World is contained in a text that simultaneously questions yet partakes in a conditioned, Eurocentric focalizing scheme—tacitly acknowledging that both critique and participation are situated and, in this capacity, not truly totalizing views. This suggests a species of skeptical thought that may indeed derive from classical sources, but is not reducible to the genealogical account of such a perspective.

In contrast to More's *Utopia*, Spenser's ideas of world-remaking in the *Cantos of Mutabilitie* are based on invisible operations for which epiphenomenal appearance cannot account. After rebelling against Jove and altering "the worlds fair frame," Spenser's Titaness,

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[169] Ibid. 67.

[170] Ibid. 7, n8.

Mutabilitie, submits to a judicial hearing presided over by Nature, who paradoxically affirms the cosmic cycle and ubiquity of transformation, while technically denying the totalizing claims of Mutabilitie's suit.[171] The pathos in Spenser's idiom stems in part from the difficult merger of Aristotelian entelechy and Christian eschatological providentialism in Nature's cosmological vision. According to Nature, "all things" retain their original state, yet are perfectible and fated to enlarge their own beings; thus, the world remakes itself through a process enabled by Mutabilitie, over which all things in the world "raigne."[172] Mutabilitie must work in conjunction with changelessness; she is thereby integrated by Nature as a condition affording cosmic perpetuity. In this way, the failure of Mutabilitie's case—the limit Nature's judgment places on the focalizing pretensions of Mutabilitie's argument—is dialectically converted into an organic fold within the dynamism of mutability. Nature's and Mutabilitie's positions are based on different scales of vision; according to Nature, Mutabilitie's focalized assumption is narrow, not wrong. Nevertheless, Mutabilitie's and Nature's arguments represent two ways of focalizing the cosmos, so that double focalization acquires the new modality of competing filters. Thus Spenser's double focalization tactic builds on Heliodorus's filtering effect by staging the conflict of competing ideological assumptions as a philosophical problem (rather than, as in Heliodorus, a function of cross-cultural dissonance).

Unlike the *Cantos of Mutabilitie*, Marlowe's *Tamburlaine the Great* depicts world-remaking as productive beyond the bounds of divine subsumption. Tamburlaine dies having failed "to conquer all the world," enthralled to an idea of "the world" whose horizon extends

[171] Edmund Spenser, *The Fairie Queene*, 2nd ed., ed. A.C. Hamilton et. al. (New York: Routledge, 2013): 7.6.6.

[172] Ibid. 7.7.58, 64.

beyond his imperial desire, without referring to a ground of metaphysical ultimacy.[173] Although Tamburlaine's project fails, there is no sense that a divinity subsumes his failure into an overarching plan of world-remaking. In short, Tamburlaine's failure does not confirm an overarching providential scheme or metaphysical order of truth. Instead, Marlowe's text includes nuances—notably, historical inaccuracies—that downplay the productivity of divine subsumption to emphasize human potential in this world, not some higher, heavenly world. For example, while Marlowe's Tamburlaine burns a copy of the Qur'an and declares himself greater than God, the historical Timur did not reject divine authority but instead rooted his legitimacy within it. As a practicing Sunni Muslim, Timur carefully styled himself as a defender of the faith and as a ruler whose victories proved he was chosen and empowered by God. Rather than openly profaning scripture, as Marlowe's character does, Timur presented himself as a vessel of "supernatural personal power" ordained by God.[174]

What Marlowe's text makes visible is not a hidden, governing perspective, but the sheer effect of an ideological differential between Islamic piety and Christian triumphalism. Tamburlaine's profanation of the Qur'an is not represented on its own Islamic terms, but refracted through a European lens that treats the Muslim holy book as if it were the object of a zealous Christian polemic. In this sense, European Renaissance humanism shapes the focalization: Marlowe's Tamburlaine heroically defies divine law, but in a manner legible to a Christian audience, rather than to the Islamic world, which the act ostensibly targets.

[173] Christopher Marlowe, *Tamburlaine, Parts One and Two*, ed. Anthony B. Dawson (New York: Bloomsbury, 2003): 5.3.124.

[174] Beatrice Forbes Manz, "Tamerlane's Career and Its Uses," *Journal of World History* 13 (2002), 3.

From this perspective, it is possible to see how Marlowe's imagined, literary contact outside Europe, as depicted in the fictional world of *Tamburlaine the Great*, produces different inflections of the Timurid Empire that do not adhere to the standards of Timurid Renaissance Islam and uphold instead those of European Renaissance humanism—a perspectival orientation that speaks to Marlowe's relative disinterest in historical or ethnographic accuracy. Tamburlaine's status here is a telling instance of what Mary Louise Pratt has called a "contact zone"—an encounter between worlds, here personified as a dramatic character who is at once an "infidel" and an exemplar of Western European humanist aspiration.[175] Instead of inviting recognition of the cultural code of divine subsumption, *Tamburlaine the Great*'s productivity lies in its act of *horizonal* translation, from one culture to another, converting the scale and metric of judgment to a trans-worlding canvas.

Marlowe's disinterest in historical accuracy and his interest in literary contact zones (Christian West/Muslim East) open a window onto the technical suggestiveness of devices like focalization. The play's inaccuracy is technically a type of focalization because the Marlovian "world picture" is limited by a specific, culturally and historically framed set of interests. For example, the zones of overlap between the descriptive details in *Tamburlaine the Great* and those found in contemporary travel narratives are fairly limited. Such narratives may well illustrate instances of complex focalization that Marlowe's texts lack—to the degree that they show dawning awareness of the gaps between the adventurers' habitual lens for apprehending the world and the lenses that inform the worlds they encounter in the voyages of exploration. In

[175] For her foundational study of "contact zones," see Mary Louise Pratt, *Imperial Eyes: Travel Writing and Transculturation*, 2nd ed. (New York: Routledge, 2007).

other words, Marlowe's double focalization is primarily an unintended effect of the complacent eurocentrism of his worlding technique.

The co-implication of conflicting ideological lenses thereby opens a critical prospect onto an emergent type of cosmopolitan literacy. Arguably, such literacy entails Marlowe's seeming wager that educated audience members and readers will understand the double focalization here and thus appreciate how a single character can be interpreted differently from separate cultural viewpoints. However, Marlowe's disinterest in Sunni Islam (and in ethnographic vantage points in general) demonstrates how the question of cosmopolitan literacy—and the fact that Tamburlaine's career takes on more than one valence, depending on the variance of focalizing frames—is an accidental consequence of Marlowe's discursive tactics rather than an assimilated ideological stance.

As a transitional zone between Marlowe's play and Cavendish's romance, Richard Hakluyt's *Principal Navigations* occupies a decisive place in the extending domain of the biopolitics of whiteness. Unlike many of its predecessors in the colonizing literature, *Principal Navigations* demonstrates wonder and curiosity about alien cultural practices that are not (deliberately) marked negatively. However, this general ethos of curiosity is interrupted by the following proto-racialized scene: Richard Eden, who narrates two of the text's most prominent accounts of Africa, breaks off his report of a voyage to Guinea to "speake somewhat of the countrey and people."[176]

> It is to be understood that the people which now inhabite the regions […] of Guinea, and the middle parts of Africa, as Libya the inner, and Nubia, with divers other great & large regions about the same, were in old time called Aethiopes and Nigritae, which we now call Moores, Moorens, or Negroes, a people of beastly

[176] Richard Haklyut, *The Principal Navigations, Voyages, Traffiques & Discoveries of the English Nation*, 12 vols. (Glasgow: James Maclehose and Sons, 1903-05), 163. This and all other references to the *Navigations* refer to volume VI.

> living, without a God, lawe, religion, or common wealth, and so scorched and vexed with the heat of the sunne, that in many places they curse it when it riseth.[177]

As Emily Bartels notes, "[n]ot only are the native peoples identified by broad categories […] but also how these categories are constituted and differentiated is neither stable nor clear."[178] For example, Eden obfuscates any possible difference between Moors and Negroes by recalling the admittedly obsolete terms of Ethiopes and Nigritae back into currency for seemingly no reason. Although the text's racial categories are unstable, its focus on classifying blackness implicitly renders whiteness invisible. As previously stated, early modern whiteness does not begin in contradistinction to blackness. Instead, *Principal Navigations* is an early participant and crafter of whiteness's ideological obfuscation. Ironically, the text obfuscates whiteness precisely by obfuscating blackness, rendering whiteness invisible by fabricating an inconsistent, incoherent taxonomy of African peoples.

Underdowne's Heliodorus, More, Spenser, Marlowe, and Haklyut exemplify modes of cosmopoetic interest that serve as foils to the dramatic turn that happens decades later in *The Blazing World.* Cavendish experiments with cosmopoetic failure and success in a way that posits narratological reflexivity as a mode of world-remaking. For example, while *The Blazing World* seems to establish at the outset that Cavendish's protagonist, the Empress, stands in for Cavendish the author, the story breaks its own narratological rules by introducing Margaret Cavendish, "the *Duchess of Newcastle*," as a character separate from the Empress (208). The disruption may take the reader out of the narrative's diegetic framework, but that may be the point. Because the reflexivity destabilizes the reader's sense of distance or proximity to the

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[177] Id.

[178] Emily Bartels, "Imperialist Beginnings: Hakluyt and the Construction of Africa," *Criticism* 34.4 (1992), 520.

represented story, the narrative disruption stages a discursive failure. In this regard, failure becomes a phenomenological problem, as much as a structural one. Not every form of deviation from a generic norm automatically falls into the omnibus category of failure; i.e, failure is not simply a matter of violating a rule, but the way in which the deviation appears and becomes legible or meaningful. As such, failure is a deeply contingent phenomenon, which only makes sense by being immediately contextualized. Here, the discursive failure extends Cavendish the author into Cavendish the fictional character, in a telling instance of *mise en abyme*. This specific modality of *mise en abyme* turns the reader's position into something like a black hole. Temporarily, the reader loses orientation within the fabricated reality of *The Blazing World*. The usual experience of fictive immersion—that sense of being safely "inside" the represented world—disappears. Instead, the text forces us into an unstable position: we are aware of the fiction as fiction, yet without an alternative vantage point from which to stabilize our reading.

By following the migration of these referents, the reader's imaginary movement from the narrative world back to the real world invertedly reflects the power of the Empress and Margaret Cavendish (the author and the character) to stand authoritatively on the limbus between fantasy and reality, to exist both inside and outside the narrative. Margaret's disruption of the narrative serves the teleology of the Empress's self-assertive project, as the similarity and body-sharing of the two characters reinforces the original status of the Empress as a version of Cavendish the author. A failure by the standards of implicit narratological rules becomes the basis of success according to the imperial narrative (and ideological commitment) that the Empress premeditates and performs. The performance of power is indistinguishable from power itself, in the sense that authority is constituted through its display, rather than existing as an independent essence. The ability of the text to push the reader out of the narratological safety zone makes Cavendish's

three incarnations more powerful by comparison. Thus *The Blazing World*'s discursive failure remakes the conditions and definitions of world-remaking success. Cavendish's *formal* experimentation—the devices that prompt recognition of "failure" on structural or generic grounds—dovetails with *ideological* "success," or successful disruption in the narrative.

Recall the *Cantos of Mutabilitie*, in which Nature's argument is relevant for Cavendish's technique, as Nature posits that Mutabilitie's radical materialist claim of entelechy is limited by its reliance on epiphenomenal appearance. According to Nature, Mutabilitie is correct if one accounts only for sensory perception and ignores all invisible operations. This limitation in Mutabilitie's argument follows from Nature's assigning two different types of visibility to the polar ontological registers of "becoming" (i.e., mutability) and perfected "being." Nature's focalization *localizes* the general claims of Mutabilitie's argument. In effect, Nature claims to see Mutabilitie's angle of vision, what that angle does not see, and how it fits into the larger aggregate of perspectives. Nature casts the empirical evidence of mutability as mere appearance, while demonstrating the "invisible" character of *being* as a conceptual reality untethered to empirical measures. Implicitly, Nature trades on the ambiguity of "seeing" as a gesture that means both sensory perception and understanding. The fact that Nature gives "understanding" the winning hand sets the stage for the more urgent operations concerning invisibility in *The Blazing World*. The interesting dance between Platonic idealism and Aristotelean realism, which surfaces in Nature's argument, is realized as a powerful element of Cavendish's technique of double focalization. In *The Blazing World*, tellingly, the dialectic operation of (in)visibility becomes specifically ideological—a challenging, literary and philosophically charged contact zone of different modes of *cosmopoiesis*.

The shift in Cavendish to a specifically ideological critical purchase on double focalization is related to the fact that Cavendish's work operates in a more obviously secularized context. The destabilized position of the reader (via Cavendish's *mise en abyme* tactics) opens readerly awareness of the "fictional" (ideological) underpinnings of the "real" world—i.e., the historical, secularized world, untethered to metaphysical guarantees. *The Blazing World* is like the world Reinhart Koselleck describes in *Futures Past*, wherein providential predictability (and a corresponding culture of trust in long-range assurances) is replaced by a calculus of probable short-term outcomes, disintegrating the grand-narrative model of historical time by decoupling it from any overarching sense of eschaton or telos.[179]

Because the modern tactics of probability and planning are immanent rather than saturated with metaphysical grounding, the ideological purchase of Cavendish's work functions as a window on the transition that Koselleck discusses. Part of the background to Koselleck's argument involves the shift from a vision of the world informed by systematic philosophy to one informed by the intuition of split subjectivity, heralding the onset of modernity. Both Plato and Aristotle belong to worlds committed to the synthetic procedures of systematic philosophy—something that changes with the Pauline intuition of the fractured nature of the Christian subject, which announces the secular subject. To be clear, such an event is part of the legacy of Pauline discourse, not an affirmative postulate in Paul's letters.[180] Destabilized and alienated, the split subject creates and sutures a symbolic order that is not given—resulting in the ideological component whose ascendency can be glimpsed in Cavendish's double focalization tactic (an

[179] See esp. chapter 1 of Koselleck.

[180] On the Pauline legacy and the emergence of the secular subject, see Alain Badiou, *Saint Paul: The Foundation of Universalism* (Stanford: Stanford UP, 2003); Agamben, *The Time That Remains: A Commentary on the Letter to the Romans* (Stanford: Stanford UP, 2005); and Jean-Luc Nancy, *Dis-Enclosure: The Deconstruction of Christianity*, trans. Bettina Bergo, Gabriel Malenfant, and Michael B. Smith, vol. 1 (New York: Fordham UP, 2008).

ironic gesture, as *The Blazing World* purposefully renders that component invisible). Cavendish is aware of how narrative can show the emergence of ideology, an Enlightenment artifact, and why its signs must be erased. Because Spenser is committed to the systematic philosophies of Plato and Aristotle, Mutabilitie cannot win the argument against Nature. In contrast, Cavendish rejected the Aristotelianism and mechanical philosophy of many of her contemporaries, preferring a vitalist model and stoic doctrines. Because Cavendish lacks Spenser's commitment to systematic philosophy, she can see (in a way that he cannot) the fictionality of not only Nature's Platonic idealism, but also Mutabilitie's Aristotelian realism. Cavendish is far more sensitive than Spenser to the fictionality of the secular world's ideological attributes. Consequently, *The Blazing World* pushes further than the *Cantos of Mutabilitie* can, in interrogating the emergent force of the secular, split subject's critical capacity.

After Marlowe's *Tamburlaine the Great*, we see an increasing self-consciousness about the ideological gambit of double focalization. Marlowe's cosmopolitan literacy is an accident that his text produces and that Cavendish's text strategizes. *Tamburlaine the Great* has ideological implications, but no ideological argument like the one that *The Blazing World* mobilizes. Cavendish's *mise en abyme* technique demonstrates her awareness of the fracturing of the representational code of reality. Like Marlowe's unintended cosmopolitan literacy, Cavendish's *mise en abyme* technique turns on canny double focalization. Her double focalization tactic (including *mise en abyme*, which helps her technique emerge) demonstrates the nature of *The Blazing World*'s literary contact zone. As a proto-science fiction author, Cavendish writes like an ethnographer, exploring what it might be like to engage aliens as interlocutors. Marlowe's casual inaccuracies, on the other hand, point up the distance separating the type of imaginary contact found in *Tamburlaine the Great* from that in *The Blazing World*.

Unlike Marlowe, Cavendish leaps into alterity and the alien elements of the familiar. Thus Cavendish more deliberately codifies the Blazing World as an imagined contact zone where separate scales of vision overlap in an immersive environment. *Mise en abyme* creates this immersive environment and breaks down the walls between registers of reality. Cavendish's evident experiment in treating how queerness and whiteness intermingle is related to her text's double focalization, as queerness and whiteness (two related, yet divergent attributes) become legible in the narrative's different scales of apprehension. The text organizes these ideological scales so deliberately that, even as the problem comes into visibility, whiteness becomes invisible or unmarked.

By contrast, More's *Utopia* approaches alterity in a markedly different way. Hythloday's testimonial shows more interest in forcing the New World into procrustean European categories than in representing the Utopians with any specific ethnographic detail. Utopia comes into view through the buffer of eyewitness reportage, resulting in a pictorial flatness to the represented world. Because Hythloday codifies the Utopians as objects of his report, rather than as biopolitical subjects, *Utopia* is not fundamentally engaged in the problem of whiteness. The problem is inherent in the text, but More neither deliberately renders it invisible, nor erases its signs in the systematic way that Cavendish will later do in *The Blazing World*. While Cavendish intuitively engages the ideological stakes of whiteness—showing how whiteness must be both mobilized and unmarked—More does not simulate Utopia with the same ethnographic detail or curiosity as Cavendish simulates the Blazing World.

Additionally, Cavendish revises Haklyut's imperializing idiom by clarifying a method of classifying alterity. *The Blazing World*'s inhabitants share the common trait of being only half-human; the other half (e.g. bear, worm, fish, bird, fly, etc.) marks their species, which in turn

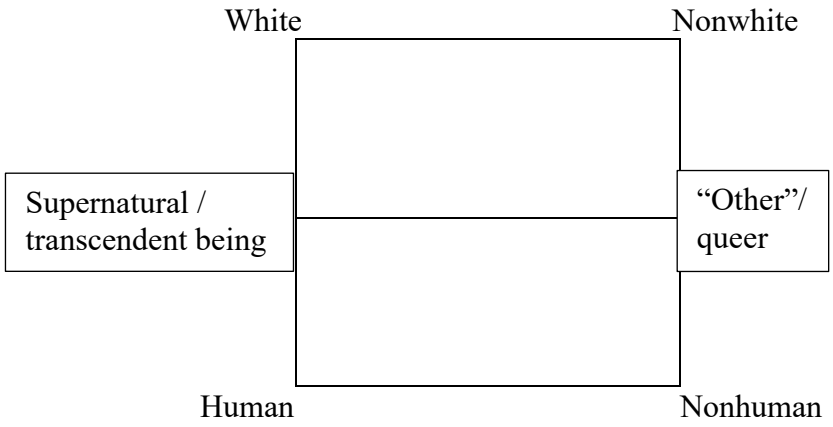
predicts their profession: "[O]f these several sorts of men, each followed such a profession as was most proper for the nature of their species, which the Empress encouraged them in" (163). The text thereby essentializes race to such a degree that phenotypical markers flawlessly indicate vocational ability. The Empress aids the biopolitical process by encouraging her subjects to adopt their naturally endowed, species-specific roles. Of course, Cavendish can collapse the inhabitants' interiors and exteriors so straightforwardly because she applies ethnographic codes to a literary world—a controlled experiment.

In contrast, Haklyut depicts a reality that necessarily exceeds his imperial descriptions, which are merely codes for negative judgements. Thus, precisely by fictionalizing ethnographic discourse, *The Blazing World* systematizes white, biopolitical world-remaking in a way previous travel narratives barely suggested, rendering the ideological operation of biopolitical tactics available for critical observation. However, as I will demonstrate, although Cavendish's classification of the alien subjects is much more straightforward than Haklyut's on the surface, The Empress's biopolitical schema of whiteness is complicated by the double focalization of the vexed assimilability of the aliens' polymorphous bodies.

As previously argued, whiteness is not a racial category at all for Heliodorus, whose Persinna is more concerned with her daughter's skin color as a (false) marker of her own adultery. However, Underdowne's sixteenth-century translation already shows burgeoning awareness of whiteness as a racial identity, though it is not yet biopolitical or explicitly ideological. The sense that Underdowne's "Cariclia" is marked as white demonstrates that whiteness is not yet a classification of biopolitical subjectivity to be purposefully rendered invisible—a process that would be most transparently taken up by Cavendish.

We are now poised to see how double focalization is related to the text's supple queer-whiteness dynamic, which *The Blazing World* renders invisible. *Mise en abyme* forces a double vision or vertigo effect; the reader momentarily falls outside the realistic apparatus, while still remaining in the story, so that a torque is built into the narrative. The narrative protocols are queer (strange and anomalous), but not totally disruptive. Although they disrupt the reading experience, they reinforce the power of the Empress and Cavendish (author and character) to stand both inside and outside the narrative, so that the narratological queerness quietly serves the textual project of imperializing whiteness. However, if the *mise en abyme* empowers the Empress and Cavendish in this way, it also empowers the reader. Although the *mise en abyme* does not entirely push the reader out of the narrative, the technique destabilizes the partitions that divide the fictional world from the historical world. Because the reader's position is unclear, the narrative referents are also floating. Suddenly, the fictionality of the ideological attributes that undergird the textual world and the historical world—wherein *The Blazing World* circulates—become available for critical observation. Thereby, the instability of the reader's location and the adjacent *mise en abyme* elements (in a potent textual irony) gesture toward the artificiality of the biopolitics of whiteness, even as the narrative attempts to render it invisible.

Throughout Cavendish's text, the Empress struggles to realize a fantasy of the transcendent possibilities of her subjects' bodies. However, the inhabitants of *The Blazing World* are not (yet) biopolitical subjects; their corporeal appearances and habits are too polymorphous to fit into specific positions within a racialized schema. In brief, the ontological hybridity of the alien subjects does not easily coalesce into the categorical assurance that tacitly underwrites the racializing agenda. A semiotic square best illustrates the agenda at issue here:



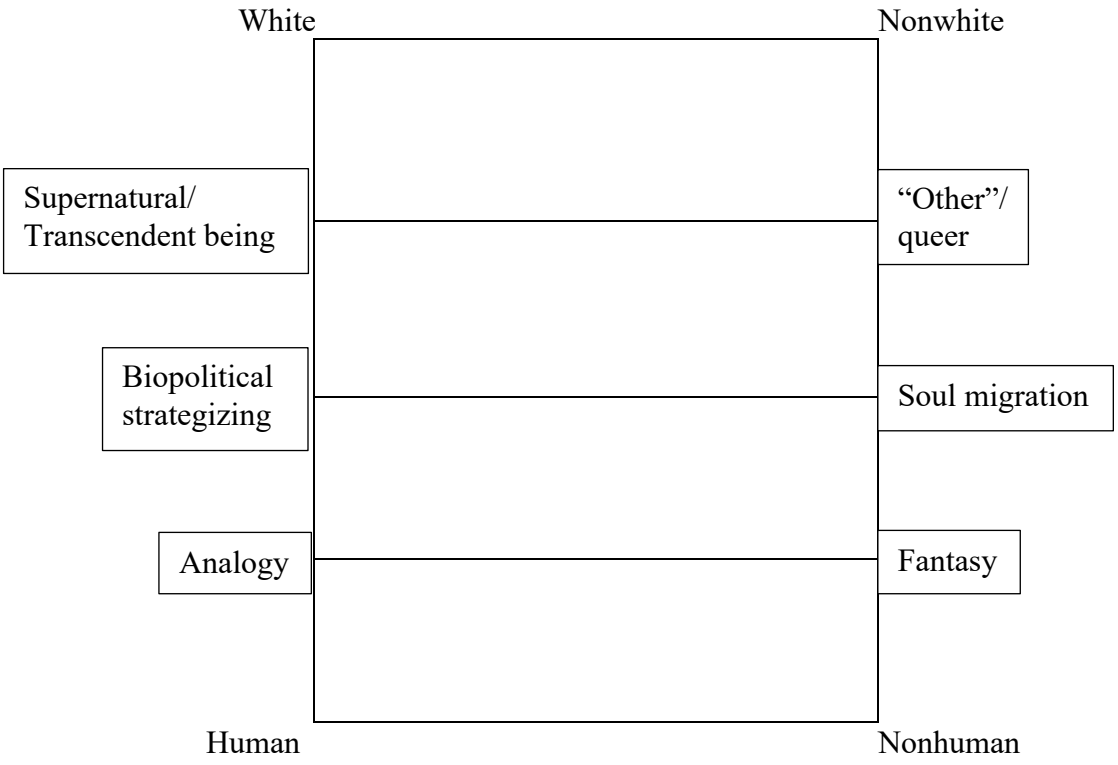
Without the middle grid (Supernatural/transcendent being—"Other"/queer), the semiotic square would straightforwardly reflect *The Blazing World*'s racializing agenda as a legacy of the Great Chain of Being. However, the hybridity of the Empress's subjects troubles this agenda by introducing the middle grid, according to which the aliens and the Empress herself can be classified by both terms. They are all supernatural, transcendent beings and "other"/queer, depending on the scale of vision. With the text's introduction of the middle grid, all three categories on the right of the semiotic square (nonwhite, "other," and nonhuman) become types of queerness. Just as Marlowe's Tamburlaine is both an "infidel" and a humanist, Cavendish's characters exemplify her text's double focalization, which destabilizes its own biopolitical project.

In order to circumvent the problem of the body and its resistance to categorical conscription, the Empress attempts to absorb her subjects into a biopolitical system. She does so by leading an invasion to confound the enemies of her homeland at the end of the text. Through her strategic spectacle of military power based on her subjects' abilities, she imagines converting their bodies into biopower; as a result, her subjects must understand themselves as biological property. Within the Empress's fantasy, they are nothing until she speaks them into an instrumentalized type of being. She also fetishizes white corporeality in a singular way, by

incarnating the fantasy of whiteness as a dematerializing signifier—an aptitude for transcending the body altogether. Thus, the Empress's soul can leave her own body and encounter the body and soul of the author, Margaret Cavendish, "the *Duchess of Newcastle*" (208). With the ability to leave her own body and enter the bodies of others as she pleases (in episodes that suggestively queer received notions of domestic intimacy and affective possibilities), the Empress approaches the transcendent whiteness for which she yearns. Rather than the physical body as such, the double-edged ethics of the (dis)posable body enables and perpetuates the Empress's biopolitics, which constructs her sovereign authority as the unmarked (white) position endowed with the self-ordained power to determine the status and value of the subjects held in her gaze.

The Empress's power tactics imagine a condition of symmetry between her transmigrational ethos (her desired habit of being) and her ability to quite literally stage dramas of conflict and conquest (i.e., posing and deploying bodies en masse in strategic ways). Thus there are additional sets of binary operations to add to the semiotic square above. These are based on the relation between the Empress's two decisive activities: the biopolitical strategizing (the spectacle of military might) and the power of soul migration.[181] The former works narratively as a mechanism for closing the distance between the alien world of the romance and the "real" world of Cavendish the author on the principle of *analogy.* The latter works narratively as a mechanism for declaring the "reality effect" of *fantasy*, such that the distance between analogy and fantasy is deliberately confused. *The Blazing World* adds this blurring effect—another instance of *mise en abyme*—as an additional tactic in the arsenal of whiteness's ideological obfuscation.

[181] Cf. my discussion of Donne's *Metempsychosis* (1601) in Chapter 1. Cavendish's version of soul migration operates at a very different register. Whereas Donne stages the conceit of transmigration as a satirical and metaphysical experiment, Cavendish mobilizes it as a materialized tactic of authorship and empire.



Readers recognize the Empress's militarism as realistic or analogous. However, Cavendish's *mise en abyme* devices reveal this analogy to be a form of fantasy—a revelation central to the ideology of whiteness. *The Blazing World* alienates the familiar and forces militarism and soul migration into the same representational register. Ironically, the text's queering tactic thereby naturalizes its white biopolitical fantasy—making it invisible as fantasy. Cavendish's process of normalization makes the aberrant work by making its strangeness disappear. Yet the strangeness persists: as with the previous semiotic square, the righthand categories of this square (nonwhite, "other," soul migration, fantasy, nonhuman) become types of queerness in Cavendish's double focalizing operation.

The difference traveled here in relation to Marlowe's type of double focalization constitutes an interesting "hinge" moment in the colonizing adventure. For Cavendish, The Empress's endgame seems to evince no interest in imagining the traumatic fallout from the tactics of constructing such an unmarked position. In contrast, the fallout becomes more evident

in Daniel Defoe's *Robinson Crusoe*, whose self-referential techniques (like *mise en abyme*) are more closely linked to its ironic engagement with the depicted story or fabula. Cavendish's experiment in *The Blazing World* primarily reduces the alien subjects to either interlocutors whom The Empress engages, or bodies that she poses. In contrast, Defoe's imaginary world in *Robinson Crusoe* fleshes out the main biopolitical subject, Friday, as a dramatic character, whose "redemption" implicitly critiques the process of assimilation into Crusoe's culture. Crusoe also explicitly wrestles with cultural relativism as a problem of perspective, whereas *The Blazing World* renders this issue invisible by filtering it through the lenses of double focalization. What Cavendish depicts narratologically, Defoe stages characterologically. However, because *Robinson Crusoe* is where this story becomes our story, the question of traumatic fallout belongs not to 17th-century *cosmopoiesis*, but to a later era of modes of world-remaking.

Chapter 4. Staging Silences in Shakespeare's Measure for Measure

At the end of *Measure for Measure*, Duke Vincentio imperfectly manages to correct Vienna's social turbulence, for which he is partly responsible. This has led to various readings of the play's investment in structures of sovereignty and political theology, which have become the dominant critical paradigm for analyzing the text.[182] Extending the insight of critics who have claimed that *Measure for Measure* is concerned with political theology, I argue that the idea of monarchical sovereignty (a species of political theology) breaks down under the exposed, emergent idea of cosmopolitan plurality. This is so because the play's discursive texture cascades with revelations of unfinished business—abortive thoughts and intuitions—beyond the epideictic legacy of political praise or blame. In fact, *Measure for Measure*'s staging of accumulated failures silently reconceives the parameters of social and political livability.

Famously, the play depicts established human institutions (both secular and religious) as impositions on human wants and needs. Lucio's freewheeling, satirical idiom arises from the world of the brothel, where speech is shaped by appetite, wit, and improvisation rather than by moral or legal regulation. By contrast, Isabella's highly overdetermined language reflects the convent, where her desires are subsumed under the discipline of religious vows. The sharp discrepancy between them illustrates how institutions mediate and constrain what characters can want and how they can speak.

Moreover, the sheer diversity of the characters' idioms exhibits the dramatic potency and critical ferment inherent in Mikhail Bakhtin's notion of speech genres.[183] Tellingly, the diverse

[182] See e.g. Lake and Questier; and Shuger.

[183] As Bakhtin explains, speech genres are "relatively stable types of utterances" shaped by specific spheres of human activity, and they encompass both everyday and literary forms [Mikhail Bakhtin, "The Problem of Speech Genres," *Speech Genres and Other Late Essays*, ed. Michael Holquist and Caryl Emerson, trans. Vern McGee

idioms on display—modes of participating in and inhabiting a world—function as radically dissonant speech genres that mark distinct partitions in Vienna and characterize the urban space as a tenuous and unpredictable confluence of worlds—as ripe for comic sparring as for danger. The play begins as a grid of strictly defined worlds: a troubled aristocratic enclave, the difficult life in Vienna's streets, the rural "else-world" of Mariana's house outside the city, the stringent (and mostly cloistered) convent organized around the status of the virginal body, a desperate subculture that arises in a prison, and the shadow of the world of pirates and commerce cast by the sudden, and dramatically pivotal, appearance of Ragozine's head. All of these worlds are loosely held together by the mythos of monarchy, with Duke Vincentio embodying the idea of the sovereign head of state. The first trigger of the action is the substitution of Vincentio for Angelo. According to the fantasy of the totally administered world, chaos should erupt when the monarch moves out of place. However, the other microcosmic social worlds do not fit into the idealized mythos of the just ruler. This is the second trigger.

They do not conform, as the saying goes, to the rules of the game. Delineated by distinctive speech-acts and -genres, each of these worlds has its own game-logics, rules, and exceptions. Indeed, as expressed in Shakespeare's Vienna, Bakhtin's notion of speech genres implicitly speaks to elements of game theory. There will be more to say about this link below. For now, one basic tenet common to both theories—Bakhtin's polyphonic speech act theory and game theory—holds that the strategies of one game do not work in situations underpinned by different standards of language. This breakdown demonstrates the chameleon-like capacity of language to de-anchor characters from their sources of authority, including class and gender.

(Austin: U of Texas P, 1986), 60]. In this sense, they identify a component of world-remaking, since each utterance situates speakers within, and remakes, the conditions of social life.

Mistakenly, Duke Vincentio believes that he can have it both ways—that he can be both game-maker and monarch. However, *Measure for Measure* asks its audience to see the ambiguity inherent in this fantasy, beyond which game theory allows us to appreciate the nascent yet unrealized possibilities the play posits.

Because speech genres outline a given world's parameters and localized sense of situation, they open *Measure for Measure*'s world-remaking experiment by pluralizing the play's sense of what a world can be—the life-scripts it holds, the futures it anticipates. Duke Vincentio operates in a unitary world-model, organized by layers of subservience and ultimately based on the received premodern notion of the Great Chain of Being. While the Duke's world is organized vertically, the other characters' multiple, divergent speech genres posit the question of different possibilities in an unfinished, horizontal scheme. These genres ultimately comprise competing or, in less stark and less predictable ways, even noncompetitive and coadjacent cosmopoetic agendas that can be usefully mapped out by elements of game theory. By drawing on elements from game theory to interrogate the processes whereby language in practice, considered as a tactical operation, makes and remakes worlds, this chapter shows how *Measure for Measure* pays lip service to the idea of the world as unitary, while prioritizing intuitions of irreducible plurality. In this specific sense, the play exhibits a signature trait of secular modernity.

These intuitions are not confined to specific characters' imputed perspectives but arise instead through the play's dramaturgical machinery. Consider, for example, the case of Angelo. Deputized as Duke Vincentio's surrogate, Angelo attempts to subordinate and forcibly unify Vienna's constellation of worlds in accordance with his draconian legal mandate; yet he fails to observe the strict codes of conduct he imposes. Character-driven readings of the play note the irony of the Duke's either reckless or cynical unleashing of Angelo's tactics to restore the

semblance of political order. However, these readings miss the irony's larger career here, for Angelo's very failure constitutes a mode of world-remaking—not for Angelo but for the Duke, who subsumes his deputy's failure into his own overarching world-remaking ambition, an ingenious but not immaculately executed scheme that aims to combine spectacles of justice and mercy to reform—in effect, re-world—Vienna. Notably, Shakespeare complicates any straightforward model of strategy, failure, and subsumption, as the Duke's manipulations turn out to be responsible for most of the play's ethically dubious solutions of "Craft against vice" (3.1.533).[184]

Thus, Duke Vincentio's attempted *re-worlding*—his effort to rehabilitate Vienna as a coherent social and political entity—turns into something else: a *trans-worlding* dynamic, via the tacit operations of circumstances (i.e., the principles of game theory). Instead of a world reshaped by a single, sovereign author, the Duke's strategies produce ironic impressions of both divine *cosmopoiesis* and human world-making. The aggregated idea of "world" now includes the prospect of negotiable commerce between social, religious, and political institutions—commerce untethered to any sense of collective teleological or providential assurance.

The Posthumanism of Casuistry, Situational Ethics, and Game Theory

Although much critical work has been done on the characters' silences at the end of *Measure for Measure*, especially that of Isabella, scholars have not fully accounted for the ways in which other types of silence point up the play's investments in slippages and failures.[185] While

[184] In-text citations are from Shakespeare, *Measure for Measure*, ed. A.R. Braunmuller and Robert N. Watson (New York: Arden Shakespeare, 2020).

[185] See e.g. Suzanne Tartamella, "Female Silence and Poetic Authority in Jonson's *Volpone* and Shakespeare's *Measure for Measure*," *The Ben Jonson Journal* 31.1 (2024), 52–71; Elisa Oh, "The Silences of Elizabeth I and Shakespeare's Isabella," *English Literary Renaissance* 45.3 (2015), 351–76; and Jerald W. Spotswood, "Isabella's

Measure for Measure gives the audience one story, the dramatic action works situationally through a set of problems that are undeclared because the diagnostic language to name and assess them did not yet exist.

This feature appears through a discreet metadramatic device with the pivotal impact of a putatively minor character, the prisoner Barnadine. Most of the characters in the play do not know or care about Barnardine and his impending death sentence. This omission produces an enveloping silence that remains undramatized and outside the social reality depicted in the play. Yet the silence with which Barnardine refuses the attempt of Duke Vincentio (disguised as Friar Lodowick) to have him executed is a powerful speech-act. It is not grounded in any traditional, received discourse of a prisoner, but in an anomalous, parasitic position that subverts the Duke's social game from within. Because Vincentio is seduced by his own ideological commitments, he is unable to step outside the game. He believes that Barnardine's soul is just a chess piece to be deployed in a game that he, the Duke, imagines he commands.

However, Barnardine's refusal discloses Duke Vincentio's blind spot. The rules of the game, which the Duke thinks he has been playing, have changed—simply by Barnardine exposing the unsaid and unthought element in the rules. The Duke is blindsided by his own belief in the idea that, as sovereign with the power over life and death, he is responsible for the fate of Barnardine, who will not submit to his order. Vincentio suddenly perceives the "tain of the mirror" in the idea of political sovereignty—the unspoken assumption that sovereignty includes accountability for those unwilling to accept the ground rules guiding the monarch's tactical maneuvers. Although the improvisational, fluid dimension of language pluralizes the

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'Speechless Dialect': Subversive Silence in *Measure for Measure*," *Explorations in Renaissance Culture* 20.1 (1994), 107–26.

play's worlding operation, this dimension is tagged as dangerous in certain situations, exemplifying how worlding strategies (do not) work in different contexts.

Barnardine's refusal to participate in the Duke's plot, dramatically potent within the secluded prison scene in Act 4, functions at large in the unfolding drama as an unseen, tacit, yet agential dimension that operates as a ghost in the machine. This element recapitulates—and virtually incarnates—the play's literal (and more obviously character-motived) silences. Barnardine's effective silence—including the atmosphere of unaccountability that brings him into play in ways that are both crucial yet also evanescent—displays *Measure for Measure*'s impulse to think about what it means to be a moral agent, in a world where human agency and, more specifically, the conditions for human agency, move out of normative frameworks.

Because of such undramatized elements, the textual production of silences speaks to *Measure for Measure*'s ultimate investments in the operation of what will later be termed game theory. To clarify this connection, I turn to materialist critical concepts associated with Pierre Macherey's theory of textual production and Raymond Williams's account of cultural productions' historical indices. From the vantage point these concepts afford, I locate traces of antecedent dispositions of game theory's operative effects in Shakespeare's play.

First to Pierre Macherey's theory of textual production and its essential ties to the unsaid. According to Macherey, because texts' representational strategies are mediated by ideological postures toward the world, their inevitable silences and fissures provide a framework for the circulation of unsaid ideas in communication.[186] *Measure for Measure* illustrates this dynamic. As an ideologically unstable literary text, produced at an uncertain time of political transition and social anxieties, *Measure for Measure*'s evident linguistic features harbor silences and unthought

[186] Pierre Macherey, *A Theory of Literary Production* (London: Routledge, 1978), 85.

elements. By opening a framework for interrogating different categories of silence, Macherey's theory emphasizes the difference between what the play's semantic features seem to mean and what they accomplish.

The play's unthought elements gesture toward emergent intuitions, which are unidentifiable by the received standards of Jacobean England, yet retroactively nameable in late modern critical discourse. As such, the text's emergent intuitions are not yet full-fledged concepts—a species of silence in line with Raymond Williams's theory of cultural history. Williams differentiates among three interactive sets of cultural elements: dominant, residual, and emergent.[187] The latter can be detected in "structures of feeling," which are lived forms of social experience that have not yet hardened into fully articulated ideology, but nonetheless can be traced in cultural production.[188] In Williams's terms, I argue that late modern critics can now detect emergent "structures of feeling" within *Measure for Measure*'s various omissions and unsaid intuitions, which work against its own dominant, normative codes. For example, through Shakespeare's dramatization of slippages, misunderstandings, and failures in intentional action, the idea of the just ruler migrates toward its modern valence of tyranny; moral theology figures hypocrisy; and conscience harbors the prospect of rupture, whereby an individual agent gains autonomy, thinks beyond normality, and thereby dramatizes both the adventure and the palpable costs of ethical attunement. Because such concepts demonstrate the natal senses of late modern ideas, their actual, historical names—such as justice, virtue, and conscience—inaccurately or only partially depict their slippages from 17th-century normality.

[187] R. Williams, 121-7.

[188] Ibid. 128-35.

Notably, these slippages contribute to the play's dramatization of an emergent posthumanist ethos, as the play decenters the ontological hierarchies that comprise Duke Vincentio's dominant ideological framework. The other characters' thoughts and actions, which break out of traditional deontology and its regulatory precepts, serve as perturbations in the Duke's established scheme, disrupting the complacent political theology that he attempts to reinforce. It's important to recognize, however, that the play's emergent posthuman intuitions do not presciently announce a chronological development from humanism, but instead map out spaces for deviation from within early 17th-century humanistic norms—spaces whose ligatures only become legible belatedly. As such, the play's posthumanist traits serve as a spectral umbrella category for three interrelated fields of inquiry: casuistry, situational ethics, and game theory. Together, these fields help articulate the decentering and destabilizing actions that testify to the play's posthuman sensibilities.

Of these three elements, only casuistry is legible in the text itself; the other two must be inferred from the play's dramatic action and semiological unfolding. In this way, what critics can now recognize as *Measure for Measure*'s posthumanist intuition is based historically on controversies over casuistry, a scandalous exercise in moral theology and the direction of conscience from the church hierarchy's perspective in Shakespeare's era.[189] Appropriately, the text registers this scandal in religious characters' reactions to casuistical reasoning. For example, in Act 3 Scene 1, Claudio discloses that there may be a way out of his death sentence—a case-by-case, consequentialist thought-process that shocks Isabella's normative, deontological stance. Claudio's halting thought-process depicts the adventure and scandal of casuistical reasoning, as

[189] For an intellectual history on casuistry, see Albert R. Jonsen and Stephen Toulmin, *The Abuse of Casuistry: A History of Moral Reasoning* (Berkeley: U of California P, 1988).

well as its aptitude for treating crises by locating loopholes, blind spots, and virtual "black holes" in the ideological scaffolding of dominant codes of moral action. I will return to this point.

Similarly, Duke Vincentio avoids scandalizing Isabella by explaining his own casuistical logic as if it were rule-based ethics. Yet the Duke's political theology is itself casuistical, as it ultimately leads to decisionism and suspension of the law in favor of emergency powers, while masquerading as traditional, universal deontology. Therefore, in addition to the case of Barnardine, the Duke's casuistical tactics palpably demonstrate the text's range and types of silence. The silence here is the floating "unsaid" proximity of the Duke's tactics to Claudio's reasoning process. Therein arises the distinction between silences that are easily converted into characterological assumptions about possible motives and goals—and silences that are sensed only in the aggregate of dramaturgical details (not specifically related to a given character's imagined intentions).

Casuistry is genealogically connected to what would become situational ethics, insofar as casuistical reasoning adopts a posture of attunement to the exigencies as well as the play of indeterminate contingencies that obtain in a given case or situation. In accordance with its Latin root *casus* (fall or accident), a case falls out of normality. Neither an example nor an exemplar, a case is a problem caused by an anomalous situation; its constituent parts do not add up to something obviously solvable. Historically, casuistry creates a cultural disposition to think of ethics in an ungrounded manner; it uses the resources of what would be called situational logic to think outside normality, and this includes learning how to think through routes—plot-lines—toward a viable solution or endgame that may or may not conform to starting premises.[190]

[190] The concept of situational ethics is a late modern descendent of casuistical logic. It is associated with 20th-century Anglican theologians; see esp. Joseph Fletcher, *Situation Ethics: The New Morality* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1966).

Because casuistry serves as a figure of this emergent ethical sense, situational logic can retroactively help explain the ethical operations of *Measure for Measure*.

Although casuistry relies on the same ratiocinative process as political theology, the former leads away from the consequences of the latter. For example, the Duke's tacit reliance on casuistical thinking informs his ultimate, spectacular commitment to political theology's drama of the "exception" in the play's denouement. Casuistry lends itself necessarily to exigent circumstances that may or may not fall into the purview of legal codes. While casuistical reasoning trades on a structurally analogous investment in the notion of the exception, it is not anchored to the same hierarchical and theocratically inflated notion of the sovereign's right. Instead, the exception is resolutely pitched toward ever-shifting circumstances, which arise from a given "case" (or situation) and generate highly fluid cost-benefit assessments on the part of the casuistically literate subject. (This is one of the reasons why the entire casuistical project carries a queer dimension.) Thus, casuistically inflected ethical responsiveness and political theology's associated strategies for installing political order effectively pluralize the play's understanding of social community.

To clarify, my interest in the play's pluralizing feature does not necessarily redirect attention away from political theology, which is the culturally dominant ethos in *Measure for Measure*, as well as the established critical framework for reading the play. Instead, I recontextualize political theology as one of the play's polar energies, in opposition to the discernible effects of casuistry—thereby reflecting the historical tension between the two in Stuart England. While political theology accounts for the Duke's dogmatic understanding of world-order, casuistry promotes a nondogmatic ethical responsibility to the exigent circumstances of a case, which are aberrant or unusual and require exceptions.

In the play, all the characters behave and speak either in conformity with, or in satirical (or critical) relation to, political theology. However, only the Duke wields the power of this ethos "authentically." Casuistry, on the other hand, is used by several characters who find themselves in difficult situations. Like the possibilities enabled by speech-genres, casuistry travels horizontally—drawing out transient associations among characters from different worlds—across the overall play-world. In this regard, casuistry anticipates Gilles Deleuze's and Félix Guattari's idea of "deterritorialization."[191] By contrast, political theology imagines and relies on a strictly vertical social organization, exemplified by the Duke's unitary world-model.

The unresolved tension between these two polar energies fuels the play's experiment in thinking about how to live in a pluralized community. Although political theology plays a powerful role in the text's unusual ethical operations, it does not dwell on the situational ethics that prompts its own interventions. Put differently, it simply does not see the full scope of the dilemmas and crises that arise in its ambit. This blind spot enables the situationist moorings of the Duke's reparative tactics to remain invisible—a silent partner—within the realm of the play's dramatic action. So it is that the gaps or ironies in the political triumphalism at the play's end leave a "silent" question that opens space for the intuition of the role that situational ethics has played in complicating the play's commerce between coadjacent worlds.

To map out *Measure for Measure*'s emergent situational ethics, I turn to elements of game theory that help clarify the characters' ethical operations. Although it emerged in the 20th century, game theory finds evidence of its practice in early modern European thinkers, such as

[191] Deleuze and Guattari define "deterritorialization" as the process by which established structures, meanings, or territories are displaced, destabilized, or set into new relations. See Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, trans. Brian Massumi (Minneapolis: U of Minnesota P, 1987), esp. 508-10.

Gerolamo Cardano, Blaise Pascal, and Christiaan Huygens.[192] Game theory also has pre-echoes in the antecedent forms of casuistry that are historically closer to Shakespeare's era. Even Pascal, who opposes casuistry, reasons in a way that can be explained and codified in terms of game theory's situational ethics. Famously, Pascal's wager is itself an imperfect-information game, based on cost-benefit analysis.[193] Ironically, Pascal compels readers against casuistry's hypocrisy by using casuistical logic. Like Calvin, Pascal's argument is structurally rational, but its content is irrational. The wager circles back to the rationalist procedure of an overdeveloped, labyrinthine conscience seeking the easiest way out of a moral problem—away from the original intentions of Pascal's morbid, Jansenist Christianity and the complexity of experience.

Behind all this were two legacies of the medieval church in Catholic devotional life: the sacrament of auricular confession and the examination of conscience. While these practices were either eliminated or radically modified in the reformed faith, they were nonetheless still recognizable cultural shibboleths in Tudor-Stuart England, not least for their associations with the "papist" threat of casuistical reasoning. By setting the play in a predominantly Catholic world (Vienna), Shakespeare eschews confessional controversies per se. At the same time, this setting allows him to deliver wide-ranging and searching interrogations of the sheer unruliness, which casuistical reasoning could generate, in the complex social worlds depicted in the play.[194]

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[192] See Gerolamo Cardano, *The Book on Games of Chance (Liber de Ludo Aleae)* (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1961); and Christiaan Huygens, *Christiani Hugenii Libellus de Ratiociniis in Ludo Aleæ. Or, the Value of All Chances in Games of Fortune; Cards, Dice, Wagers, Lotteries, &c. Mathematically Demonstrated*. (London: printed by S. Keimer, for T. Woodward, near the Inner Temple-Gate in Fleetstreet, 1714). For Blaise Pascal's contribution to the problem of expected value in probability theory, see Ore, 409-14.

[193] Blaise Pascal, *Pensées and Other Writings*, trans. Honor Levi (New York: Oxford UP, 2008), § 233.

[194] On the cultural scandal of casuistry in early modernity, see Gallagher, *Medusa's Gaze: Casuistry and Conscience in the Renaissance* (Stanford: Stanford UP, 1991). Gallagher argues that the unsaid scandal of casuistry lay precisely in its ability to "unpack" the theological and metaphysical assumptions undergirding structures of social and political power in sixteenth-century culture.

Crucially, casuistry and game theory share the assumption that there is no single egalitarian or universal game to explain human behavior in the abstract. Devising what are arguably discursive descendants of the archive of sample cases in penitential manuals, game theorists have formulated various scenarios to explain behavior in the context of multifarious, probable cases. Applying scenarios of game theory to the play enables me to interrogate how the text works, instead of what it means. In brief, my argument changes the emphasis in analyzing *Measure for Measure* from interpreting its meaning to describing the tactical gestures that inform the play's converging social worlds. For example, by interrogating what the Duke does (or aims to do) and the effects of his actions, instead of what he represents characterologically (or allegorically, as a personification of an abstract idea), we can track what happens to political theology in a realistic, ambiguous situation. In its posthumanist character, the play represents plural worlds that coalesce in ways that do not line up with the intentions of specific actors, but in ways legible to game theory. The local itself is already a mesh of converging worlds, some of which rehearse affects not yet fully discernible in the play's depiction of various cultural literacies. The play's worlds thereby correspond to different games, complete with rules and allowed exceptions.

By constantly creating and responding to aberrant situations beyond the bounds of *a priori* ethics, the characters provide different and shifting answers to the play's overarching question: How do subjects sustainably inhabit a world of situational ethics? Matthew Kendrick and Julian Lamb conclude that such an ethics emphasizes subjects' agency.[195] I argue instead that subjects' unwitting participation in the Duke's world-remaking scheme diminishes their

[195] Matthew Kendrick, "Refusal in *Measure for Measure*: Shakespeare with Zizek," *Angelaki* 25.6 (2020), 37-50; and Julian Lamb, "Finding the Remedy: *Measure for Measure*, Puns, Rules," *Shakespeare Quarterly* 68.4 (2017), 374-92.

cosmopoetic autonomy. Yet this diminishment in fact enables and perpetuates a field of world-remaking energies as depicted by Shakespeare. While *Measure for Measure* does indeed undercut subjects' individual agency, that very diminishment paradoxically bolsters their actions' world-remaking effectiveness. Because their actions are mobilized and repurposed by Vincentio to alter Vienna, their re-creative capacity is actually increased by the deflation of their immediate intentions. The idea of capacity itself acquires new attributes, as it migrates from intentional agency to peripatetic adventure.

This shift in perspective and scale points up an alternate model of early modern ethical imagining—a model that recognizes the play's investment in understanding forms of failure as authentic modes of world-remaking, which are attuned to political insights otherwise coded as illegitimate or dangerous. Because the inhabitants of Shakespeare's fictive Vienna contribute to ethical situations of which they are unaware, none of them fully owns the social and political consequences of their thoughts, choices, and behaviors. Tracking these discrepant scenarios clarifies the play's contribution to a posthumanist ethos arising by textual inference from the play's interrogation of recurrent irruptions calling for the resources of situationist ethics.

While situational ethics posits an imaginary field wherein agents make ethical decisions that do not defer reflexively to deontological principles, such an ethics nonetheless prioritizes human agency. In contrast, posthumanist ethics decenters the human agent as a moral arbiter, a decentering that is already assumed in game theory. So, too, in the dramaturgical game of *Measure for Measure*, agency is no longer an individual operation. The game itself, with its moving possibilities, becomes a nonhuman and nondivine form of agency, which human choices do not determine, but comprise in ad hoc aggregates. The God-role is deflated, so that it occupies, at most, the same level of play (or operative force) as human agency—subjected to the

larger architectonics of the game-logic. The saving plot device of Ragozine's head, the ethical noncommitment of Barnardine, and the failures of Isabella's and the Duke's strategies open various possibilities beyond the bounds of individual human and omniscient divine agency or intentionality. Read through the lens of game theory, these dramaturgical turning points map out the play's transformation of situational ethics into the unthought yet nonetheless discernible practice of posthuman ethics, as failure by the standards of one game can help articulate the rules of a new game, wherein failures by seemingly default standards succeed by other measures—ones that are not yet named or codified. This is related to the way the play stages different species of "silence"—the obvious, character-driven type, and the less obvious but more provocative silences that constitute the play's investment in the fissures, the unsaid, and the ironic displacements of characterological intention from outcomes. *Measure for Measure* ultimately enlarges its own sense of what it means to be in community or sociality, insofar as the insights of its game-logic push toward a newfound appreciation of participation or membership.

An Accident that Heaven Provides

The Duke appears to recognize that the doctrine of the king's two bodies is ideologically bankrupt, so he tries to invest it with new meaning by using spectacle. At the end of *Measure for Measure*, he literalizes the allegory of the king's two bodies by disrobing as Friar Lodowick and resuming his identity as Duke Vincentio. The simulacrum of this doubling renews the received cultural assumption of the doctrine—as the rationale for the Duke's sovereignty. The spectacle makes political theology "real." However, it does not solve the issue because it does not account for the play's overarching drama of ethical responsiveness.[196]

[196] The Duke's reliance on spectacle is connected to the late modern politics of diversion. For example, Donald Trump notoriously generates distractions to deflect the American public's attention from any potentially career-

Throughout *Measure for Measure*, the characters' world-remaking goals are subsumed by the Duke's experimental social plan; yet they do not know how their actions will advance it. Ironically, Vincentio himself misunderstands how their actions demonstrate a drama of ethical responsiveness. In effect, the play's tacit structural game-logic deflates the importance of the Duke's world-remaking designs. Although Vincentio mistakenly views himself as the game's rule-maker, he is in fact just another player in *Measure for Measure*'s ongoing drama of situational ethics. The ironic dimension is that, unless we count the invisible hand of Shakespeare (or, more to the point, the fiction of total authorial control), *Measure for Measure* (referring to the convocation of worlds the play puts on stage) has no game-master. The exemplar may be seen in the play's convenient plot device, "[t]he head of Ragozine" (5.1.533). Ragozine, a pirate scheduled for execution on the same day as Claudio, dies of a fever in prison. To avoid executing Claudio, the Duke substitutes Ragozine's head for Claudio's, thereby preserving the illusion of justice, while disrupting the expected sequence of punishment. This sudden availability of a spare head underscores the contingency at work. A chance event outside the characters' control becomes decisive for the play's resolution. Ragozine's head functions as a wildcard or move by nature, a random player that has no stake in the game's outcome, yet nonetheless contributes to it.[197] Unsurprisingly, the Duke silences this feature by taking it as "an accident that heaven provides" (4.3.75).

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ending scandal. Of course, this comparison has limits; the Duke is hardly as corrupt as Trump. Nevertheless, *Measure for Measure*'s theatrical logic anticipates later political tactics that weaponize diversion.

[197] For detailed explanations of moves by nature, see e.g. Drew Fudenberg and Jean Tirole, *Game Theory* (Cambridge: The MIT Press, 1991), 8; Martin J. Osborne and Ariel Rubinstein, *A Course in Game Theory* (Cambridge: The MIT Press, 1994), 305-11; and Yoav Shoham and Kevin Leyton-Brown, *Multiagent Systems: Algorithmic, Game-Theoretic, and Logical Foundations* (New York: Cambridge UP, 2009), 158-9, 184.

Yet the Duke speaks more truly than he realizes. In *Measure for Measure*'s theological satire, "chance" and "providence" are not contraries. Instead, providence is replaced by the diversity of worlds, organized by different genres and narrative outworkings. This secular form of providence harnesses the dramatic energy of chance, not by making things happen, but by enabling possibilities. The availability of Ragozine's head is not "planned" or "by design," but the Duke improvisationally recognizes its dramatic potential for staging his simulacrum of the king's two bodies. He repurposes a human body part as a move in a game, ignoring the customary partitions between human and nonhuman. Ragozine's head is, in this sense, more than a mere *deus ex machina*. Rather, it introduces a narratively crucial feature of the play's strangely provocative and emergent understanding of the dynamic field of nonhuman agency, which posthumanist thought recognizes and the humanist tradition would pass over as meaningless.

In this regard, the Duke himself does not observe traditional codes of deontological ethics. Like the other characters, such as Isabella and Mariana, his strategies are explainable through the lens of evolutionary game theory. His machinations evolve over time, as the rules change. Further, he plays neither a perfect- nor complete-information game. As he learns more information, he lies, improvises, and alters his strategy of manipulation accordingly.

The Prisoners' Dilemma

Aspects of the Duke's social experiment anticipate the now-classic game of prisoner's dilemma. An example *par excellence* of this game involves two suspects who are arrested for a serious crime. The police do not have enough evidence to convict them on the main charge but can do so on a lesser charge. They are interrogated in separate rooms and cannot communicate with each other. Each prisoner is given the same deal: If one betrays the other ("defects") by

testifying that the other committed the crime, while the other remains silent ("cooperates"), the betrayer goes free, and the silent accomplice receives the full sentence. If both prisoners "defect" by betraying each other, they both receive a moderate sentence. If both "cooperate" by remaining silent, they both receive a light sentence. The prisoners' "dilemma" arises because each must choose between betraying the other, or remaining silent without knowing what the other will do. The optimal choice for each prisoner, in terms of minimizing their own sentence, is to betray the other. Rational self-interest leads both prisoners to betray each other, resulting in both serving moderate sentences, even though mutual cooperation (both remaining silent) would result in a better outcome. Ultimately, the game is based on the conflict between individual rationality and collective benefit.[198]

Vienna's prisoners inadvertently participate in this game, according to which Claudio and Barnardine defect if they choose to live, and cooperate if they choose to die. As a rational actor, Claudio's strategy alternates between defection and cooperation as he learns new information about his current situation. Yet Barnardine, a seemingly irrational actor, neither cooperates nor defects in the Duke's game-world. According to the Duke, Barnardine is "Unfit to live or die" (4.3.62). A random player who has no stake in the game's outcome, Barnardine does not play in any straightforward or normative sense. Instead, his function in the play is to contribute to its overall emergent posthuman ethics, as his technical failure by the Duke's game-logic opens space for the displacement of human agency.

It bears noting as well that the element of silence is associated with scandal in the casuistical practice of mental reservation—a concept in moral theology (particularly within the context of Catholic probabilistic ethics) where a person deliberately uses ambiguous language to

[198] Robert Axelrod, *The Evolution of Cooperation* (New York: Basic Books, 1984).

convey a truth, while mentally withholding part of it to technically avoid lying.[199] In *A Treatise of Equivocation* (c.1598), Henry Garnet argued for the moral permissibility of using ambiguous language to protect oneself and others under persecution.[200] This document became widely scrutinized after Garnet's arrest in the wake of the Gunpower Plot. When asked if they were priests, criminalized Jesuits could follow the casuistical advice of saying "no" to the (putatively illegitimate) presiding officer, while addressing the silent, suppressed "yes" (the mental reservation) to God (the transcendent interlocutor)—producing an example of an ethically responsive speech-act that sounds like a lie. For this reason, mental reservation could be easily abused in an assault on the body politic, wherein no one could be trusted.[201] This sense of paranoia fuels the Porter's famous speeches on equivocation in *Macbeth*.[202] In the context of *Measure for Measure*, equivocation and mental reservation create a scaffolding for a species of silence that is unpredictable: invisible but present.

At the very end of *Measure for Measure*, the characters' silences inform further modes of participation in the Duke's version of prisoner's dilemma. This element of silence is radically recalibrated, from the perspective of game theory, to include the unsaid (and unthought by a specific actor or moral agent) dynamic or elastic operation of the game. In the most famous instance, in the closing moments of the play, Isabella's silence demonstrates a potential mental

[199] See esp. chapter 10 of Jonsen and Toulmin, 195-215.

[200] Henry Garnet, *A Treatise of Equivocation: Wherein Is Largely Discussed the Question Whether a Catholike or Any Other Person before a Magistrate Beyng Demaunded Uppon His Oath Whether a Preiste Were in Such a Place, May - Notwthstanding His Perfect Knowledge to the Contrary - without Periury ... Answere, No, Wth This Secreat Meaning Reserued in His Mynde, That He Was Not There so That Any Man Is Bounde to Detect It*, ed. David Jardine (London: The Camden Society, 1851).

[201] Peter Holmes, *Elizabethan Casuistry* (Cardiff: Catholic Record Society, 1981).

[202] Shakespeare, *Macbeth*, ed. Sandra Clark and Pamela Mason (New York: Arden Shakespeare, 2015): 2.3.1-43.

reservation, in that she conspicuously does not say yes to the Duke's marriage proposal, and this demurral raises the question of what her verbal consent, after everything she has undergone and learned, might harbor. But Isabella is not alone: Mariana's acceptance of the Duke's arrangements, despite their humiliating dimensions; Angelo's muted submission to the Duke's final judgment; and Lucio's forced marriage to Kate Keepdown, a prostitute with whom he has fathered a child, all mark forms of silence, coerced assent, or forced acquiescence. Collectively, these responses illustrate a fragile, uneasy cooperation that papers over dissent rather than resolving it.

The characters' compliance explains the ambivalent sense of the denouement's mere spectacle of stability. The Duke alone obviously cannot maintain authority by physically controlling each of his subjects. Instead, they are assumed to expect each other to follow his orders, such that he maintains authority through their normative social expectations. His subjects' coordinated communication to replace him is barred, since conspiracy to overthrow him is punishable as a crime. Thus in the end, most of the characters remain silent, unless the Duke addresses them directly. In a process that can be modeled by a multi-player prisoner's dilemma, no rational subject will move to replace the Duke, even if they would benefit by acting collectively.

Thus, the ending appears to be an instance of what is called a Nash equilibrium in game theory. A Nash equilibrium arises when each participant's strategy is the best they can adopt, given the strategies of the others, so that no player can improve their individual outcome by changing course unilaterally.[203] Crucially, this does not mean that the collective outcome is

[203] John Nash, "Equilibrium Points in N-Person Games," *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences* 36.1 (1950): 48-9.

optimal or just. Rather, it is (or seems) stable, since every participant expects the others to adhere to their chosen strategies. The Duke's subjects illustrate this logic: Isabella's silence, Mariana's acquiescence, Angelo's submission, and Lucio's coerced marriage all represent forms of compliance sustained not by individual conviction, but by mutual expectation. Each character tacitly assumes that resistance would be futile unless coordinated with others, but the risk of conspiracy is foreclosed by law. As a result, no one deviates, even though collective action could alter the outcome. The apparent stability of the denouement thus masks the coercive mechanics of a Nash equilibrium, where silence and uneasy cooperation enforce the persistence of the Duke's authority.

Regardless of this simulacrum of a satisfying denouement, each character has travelled far by the end of the play. Isabella and Angelo, for example, initially belong to the convent and the court, respectively, two symmetrically positioned expressions of regulated hierarchy. However, in the play's finale, both inhabit a new common space, organized generically by the wedding trope and the legal spectacle of the Duke's cleverness as the organizer and manager of a (partly improvised) game. Ethics seems no longer to be based on the effective plotting of individual agents, but on the situations that arise from such games. The ideological myth that suffuses the conclusion involves a new sense of participation, but the play withholds what that organizing principle might be. Perhaps this is *Measure for Measure*'s most provocative staging of silence, belonging to no one or to nothing other than the spectacle, the play's machinery.

Claudio's Chaotic Theology

To gauge the distance the play's experiment has achieved with the final revelations, let us turn to consider Claudio's career. Claudio's actions and beliefs fail according to Christian

morality; instead of adhering to the posture of obedient submission, he eventually responds to his sense of impending death in a situational manner unlimited by a priori ethics. At the beginning of Act 3, he inhabits a balanced and adroit ethical stance of hope and readiness: "I've hope to live, and am prepared to die" (3.1.4). Yet this stance alters after the Duke (disguised as the friar) advises him to die: "To sue to live, I find I seek to die,/ And seeking death, find life. Let it come on" (3.1.42-3). In paraphrasing Matthew 16:25, Claudio briefly articulates traditional Christian morality.

However, while speaking with Isabella, he almost entirely addresses her with questions. Between lines 54 and 118, Claudio asks her ten questions and makes eight declarative statements, indicating his uncertain epistemic and affective stance in searching for a way to prolong his life. When he learns of Angelo's proposition, Claudio at first makes three declarative statements that demonstrate traditional deontology. However, he soon resumes questioning Isabella as he rationalizes his way to a new vitalist ethics, according to which his sister's potential crime is only criminal insofar as the state's deputy, Angelo, recognizes it as such. Isabella becomes hysterically, morally outraged because she quite rightly sees Claudio drifting out of zero-sum logic and traditional deontological ethics. However, according to Claudio's emergent posthumanist ethical position, Isabella's loss is not really a loss if it prolongs his own life.

Claudio rebuilds his inner world with only half-awareness and limited intentionality. He speaks of possible afterworlds, including "fiery floods" and a "region of thick-ribbed ice" (3.1.126-7)—a vividly fleshed-out version of Hamlet's vague "undiscovered country."[204] Claudio's possible worlds are more concrete because death is more imminent to him than to

[204] Shakespeare, *Hamlet* 3.1.80.

Hamlet, who only points to the idea of incomprehensibility, not a system for describing it. Claudio attempts to adhere to the Christian ethic of self-abnegation, but his "fear of death" will not align with his wish to relinquish his worldly desires (3.1.136). As is the case for Hamlet, something in Claudio will not play along with what he wants for himself. In Claudio's "Ay, but to die" and Hamlet's "To be, or not to be," which occur in Act 3 Scene 1 of their respective plays, the thing that will not play along is the visceral fear of death. Death motivates their world-remaking—by precipitating the ambition to exert some measure of control in staving off the threat of something uncontrollable. Claudio simultaneously wants to be and not to be, but the instinct of self-preservation overweighs his wish for self-abnegation. Claudio's unsettled ruminations illustrate how the play's dramaturgical machinery decenters human cosmopoetic autonomy, by depicting worldviews as processes that evolve, without the complete understanding of their participants.

However, as soon as Duke Vincentio (disguised as Friar Lodowick) lies about Angelo's offer, Claudio's stance immediately reverts to normative religiosity: "I am so out of/ love with life that I will sue to be rid of it" (3.1.176-7). Nonetheless his utterances of self-abnegation are never as convincing as his demonstrations of self-preservation. He responds at the appropriate time in the appropriate situation according to his own morality based on a fluid ethical stance. Thereby, his compromises or failures to adhere to a fixed ethical position productively demonstrate the adventure of situational ethics.

Claudio's reflections notably shear off from a prescriptive Christian understanding of mortality as death seems to approach him, though his imagined possible afterworlds ironically

allude to biblical and patristic sources.[205] In closer focus, his reflections also indicate inter-confessional fissures: Failing by the ascetic standards of Catholic ethics, his oscillation between self-abnegation and -preservation resembles Protestant anxiety over salvation in a reformist world separated from the full panoply of Catholic sacramental resources and assurances. Yet he also fails according to then-current articulations of Protestant ethics, as his search for solutions to his predicament leads him beyond the scope of any dominant Christian understanding of the afterlife into "lawless and incertain thought" (3.1.131). In effect, Claudio's unruly heuristic touches on another emergent posthumanist intuition, by gesturing toward an understanding of life on earth as an immanent paradise.

Tellingly, this emergent character announces itself through the recollection of a classical touchstone. While the afterworlds Claudio posits are versions of hell and purgatory, the only "paradise" he can imagine is a "worldly life" (3.1.133-5)—a sentiment he shares with the ghost of Achilles.[206] This allusion functions here as more than a nod to the dominant early modern culture's reception of classical literature. Rather, it introduces an overlay of meaning in the immediate context, which is governed neither by the Homeric worldview, nor by Renaissance humanists' literacy in this regard, but by Claudio's visceral terror of facing death. As a kind of Tudor-Stuart "everyman," Claudio frantically searches for relief, pulling him away from the triumphalism of the Reformed geography of the afterlife—toward a world attuned to the appreciation of immanent life, without the assumption of a metaphysical destiny.

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[205] For biblical, classical, and patristic backgrounds of Claudio's speech, see John E. Hankins, "The Pains of the Afterworld: Fire, Wind, and Ice in Milton and Shakespeare," *PMLA* 71 (1956), 482-95.

[206] In the underworld, after the still living Odysseus attempts to console Achilles, the spirit responds, "No winning words about death to *me*, shining Odysseus!/ By god, I'd rather slave on earth for another man —/ some dirt-poor tenant farmer who scrapes to keep alive —/ than rule down here over all the breathless dead" [Homer, *The Odyssey*, trans. Robert Fagles (New York: Penguin, 1996): 11.555-58].

Claudio's turn "backwards" to Homer is also a turn "aside," away from the normative Christian teleology of sin and salvation. His delirious enumeration of afterworlds ethically fails by the standards of Christian doctrine, since he clings to a fallen, carnal attachment to "worldly life" (3.1.133). Yet Claudio's failure coincides with an epiphany. He implicitly collapses the distinction between body and soul by describing the body in vitalistic terms—"This sensible warm motion" (3.1.124)—and the soul in affective terms—"the delighted spirit" (3.1.125). Claudio imagines his soul as just another kind of corporeality: a receptacle of pain in "fiery floods," "ice," or "winds" (3.1.126-8). He uses the conjunction "or" twice in his speech, each time separating one possible afterworld from another (3.1.126, 130). Thereby, Claudio flattens the ontological hierarchy that privileges the importance of the afterlife above "worldly life" (3.1.133), which he calls "a paradise" (3.1.135). Intuitively, Claudio's monologue unfolds into a sensuous love for organic, lived experience.

From a normative theological perspective, this is an ethical lapse. However, from an emergent posthumanist perspective, the lapse looks like an ethical awakening. It gestures toward a framework, in which bodily experience is continuous with, rather than inferior to, spiritual experience. Claudio does not sound like an early precursor of Bruno Latour or other late modern posthumanist theorists, but his imagination does depart from the totalizing pretensions of the Christian worldview. He "fails" to let go of the paradisical condition of the creaturely world. His failure, in this sense, momentarily exposes the scaffolding of what critics can now recognize as a posthumanist ethics.

Angelo's Zero-Sum Logic

Throughout *Measure for Measure*, Angelo continuously plays zero-sum games with the other characters. Until the conclusion, Angelo does nothing but "defect" in various games; he only ever chooses to serve his own self-interests. Although his tactics against Isabella differ from those he designs against others, such as Claudio and Barnardine, his behavior is nevertheless informed by the same zero-sum logic. While Isabella appears to "cooperate" within the Duke's larger game—submitting to his designs for restoring order in Vienna—her stance amounts to "defection" from Angelo's perspective. Angelo expects her to yield to his sexual bargain, interpreting her virtue as a resource he can convert into victory. But Isabella refuses his terms, thereby breaking the logic of his predatory gambit. In game-theoretic terms, Angelo seeks to mobilize his prior successes (his judicial authority, his manipulation of Mariana, his temporary dominance over Claudio) as tactical assets to force Isabella into compliance. Her refusal undermines these accumulated advantages and exposes the instability of Angelo's strategy.

One of Angelo's most valuable assets is his public appearance of ethical purity:

> My unsoiled name, th'austereness of my life,
> My vouch against you and my place i'th'state
> Will so your accusation overweigh
> That you shall stifle in your own report
> And smell of calumny.
> 2.4.155-9

In Angelo's game-world, the spectacle of ethical purity is a limited resource that he ably traffics in, by shoring up his imagined immunity as the Duke's surrogate. Given the zero-sum logic that informs his game-world, it is no surprise that he considers others to be either pure or impure. This circumstance famously leads to a doubly ironic outcome. When Isabella's ethical purity tempts him, he fails according to his own strict standards. Yet his failure does not force him to reconceive his moral stance; instead, it strengthens his dichotomous purity-test. By breaking his own rules, he merely reinforces them, as he is the exception that proves them.

Though different from the game that Angelo plays with Isabella, the game that he originally played with Mariana in the text's reported backstory reveals the same zero-sum logic. Marianna's poverty became a move by nature, a wildcard that made her lose the resource of social standing. As soon as her value as a coplayer diminished, she became a liability rather than an asset to Angelo; thus he defected against her by fleeing his engagement.

Angelo's eventual apparent guilt results from his cumulative sense of having inhabited a contradiction: failure according to the laws of one game (traditional deontology) and success by the rules of others (his zero-sum games with Marianna and Isabella). Reflecting Macherey's understanding of ideology, Angelo performs an ideological script without articulating it. Except in private moments, he would never admit that he is a monster because he is suffused with ambition, envy, and pride. Crucially, his self-staging of guilt in the denouement orchestrated by the Duke does not result from the recognition of transgression, but from inconsistency; that is, his voiced sense of guilt reflects a structural defect, not a moral lapse or transgression. Quite simply, he sees he has no more moves to make.

Arguably, shame is the operative term in Angelo's world—shame being primarily shaped by public perception and judgement of the moral actor's failure. Tellingly, he does not experience shame until the end of the play, when Vienna recognizes his loss in the first game, and he is forced to admit defeat in the second. Even then, he views the exposure of his deontological failure in terms of dichotomous, zero-sum logic, as the Duke's victory requires Angelo's defeat on Angelo's own terms. Tellingly, Angelo would rather die than continue living in the shame of such overwhelming loss. By figuring deontology through the logic of a zero-sum game, Angelo may exemplify Shakespeare's possible critique of Puritan hypocrisy, as numerous critics have argued, but he more importantly crystallizes *Measure for Measure*'s ambiguous

perspective on codes of dutiful observance. Although deontological ethics need not constitute a zero-sum game in an ideal world, it must do so in a world organized by a combinatorial, imperfect-information, multiagent game, which is informed by wildcards, moves by nature, and both rational and irrational actors—an aggregate lacking any probably optimal strategies.

Angelo's failure nonetheless becomes ethically productive precisely because it demonstrates the drama of situational, ethical responsiveness. Failure and success in the converging game-logics of the play depend on the rules promulgated or implied by each game-master. Winning or losing depends on the rules of the particular game, whether or not the player realizes he is playing. Just as Claudio is unaware that he is a bargaining chip in Angelo's game against Isabella, Angelo himself is unaware that the Duke has been playing him. Angelo contributes to a new sense of a communal world, without realizing it. These incongruences illustrate how *Measure for Measure*'s posthuman ethical intuition decenters human agency from its place in the era's received ontological hierarchy. Instead, the play depicts human agency as one element among others in a novel, one might say acephalous, world-remaking apparatus.

Strange Ethical Attunement

The deflation of the characters' immediate intentions becomes ethically productive in surprising ways. Not only do their re-creative capacities swerve from their projected goals, they also do not fit into the Duke's triumphalist narrative.[207] For example, while Vincentio and Angelo are beholden to legal codes of justice, Escalus, Lucio, and Isabella demonstrate patience,

[207] Like many critics, I begin with the premise that the play's interests do not align with its conclusion: See e.g. Peggy A. Knapp, "Love and Death in *Measure for Measure*," *English Literary Renaissance* 49.1 (2019), 97; Sarah Beckwith, *Shakespeare and the Grammar of Forgiveness* (Ithaca: Cornell UP, 2011), 59; and Jill Levinson, "Comedy," *Cambridge Companion to English Renaissance Drama*, ed. A.R. Braunmuller and Michael Hathaway, 2nd ed. (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2003), 289.

necessity, or courage in their attunement to contingencies outside the law's embrace. Their violations of normality introduce strange, idiosyncratic, and context-bound forms of ethical intuition. Historically, this slippage or break identifies the perceived scandal of casuistical reasoning, as well as casuistry's adumbration of situational ethics. The irony of Vincentio's hypocrisy—as well as the pressures of situational ethics that work against his teleological redeployment of the law—fractures the social world of Vienna, but does so in a productive manner, albeit a manner that serves no player's declared interests. By shifting the audience's interest to alternate possibilities throughout the play, the discreetly ironic cast to the ending opens a possible, more habitable world that is never realized within *Measure for Measure*, but that could potentially be realized. As such, the play rethinks the parameters of ethical attunement, separating itself from traditional codes of dutiful observance.

In a helpful critical tangent for assessing this feature of the play, Michael Booth cogently analyzes Shakespeare's skill at semantic recategorization, whereby any one coherent system of meanings might suddenly leap across semantic boundaries to merge with another.[208] My argument builds on Booth's work by showing how Vincentio's conceptual blending of incongruous viewpoints renders him an unwitting participant in *Measure for Measure*'s world-remaking experiment. In keeping with the textual evidence for elements of game theory at work in the play, Booth's argument demonstrates Shakespeare's ability to combine and recategorize conflicting concepts. I extend the point by suggesting that such recategorization frames *Measure for Measure*'s world as a casuistical series of situations that call for innovation, not strict deontological organization. Rather than weave the various voices into a polyphonic cosmic

[208] Michael Booth, *Shakespeare and Conceptual Blending: Cognition, Creativity, Criticism* (Switzerland: Palgrave Macmillan, 2017).

coherence, Vincentio imposes his problematic and cacophonous design upon his subjects. However, the play's putative resolution merely exposes fundamental contradictions and blind spots in the Duke's effort to bring difference into unity. That said, precisely by failing in his role as Vienna's world-remaker or inspired architect, Vincentio unknowingly participates in its state of cosmopolitan plurality.

The ironic distance between the conspicuously engineered "happy endings" of the dénouement and the elliptical trajectories of the characters' actions demonstrates the drama of ethical responsiveness, rather than the solvency of political sovereignty. The register of ethical attunement introduced by the world-remaking scheme quietly challenges the potency of the idea that the play is about politics as such. Rather, *Measure for Measure* displaces the world of political theology, opening a different kind of world where authority is not divinely endowed. When Vincentio performatively reinstalls quasi-divine sovereignty, he merely demonstrates the difference between reality and his own legal and religious ideals; he cannot see the productivity of failure, of activities that are coded as sinful and illegal. In sum, the play's world-remaking energies open space for emergent literacies inside the dominant cultural disposition of the era. Within the grand narratives of worlds, with their designs of providential predictability, *Measure for Measure* tolerates unsettled ambiguity. Failure becomes a mode of attentive patience that does not prematurely create categorical propositions about the shapes the world must take. Because the play's different worlds do not fit together neatly, the ethical field they comprise cannot be reduced to political dogma. Providential predictability is replaced by a calculus of probable short-term outcomes, disintegrating the grand-narrative model of historical time by decoupling it from any overarching sense of eschaton or telos.[209]

[209] For a detailed explanation of such secularization, see esp. chapter 1 of Koselleck.

Coda

Measure for Measure's world-remaking differs from Michel Foucault's providential scheme of the state apparatus, with which he announces the terror of modernity. Famously, in Foucault's conceptualization of Jeremy Bentham's Panopticon, an anonymous guard observes inmates without them knowing whether they are being watched at any given moment, creating a sense of constant surveillance.[210] However, Shakespeare's interest in games features a different anonymity, which is not entirely encephalic. The play has no game master other than the convocation of worlds seeking to communicate. Because of the aggregate of silences, no single character owns the game. Isabella's notorious self-muting at the play's end functions as just one species of this trait. Although Foucault inverts the grand narrative of the supposed historical movement from mythos to logos, he is still thinking teleologically in his depiction of surveillance as a myth of centralized authority. Thus the Foucauldian reading neglects the operation of the game.

In contrast, world-remaking solicits a posture of critical inquiry into the question of agency through a posthumanist lens. This is so because agency is caught in a transitional space within the play, informed by a range of silences and an invisible webbing decentered from any humanist tenets of self-understanding or discipline. The bracketing of the still-pervasive framework established by Foucault makes space for recognizing how the subterranean investments of *Measure for Measure* are informed by a distinctively Lucretian ethos. After all, the play's world-remaking gambits open questions on the purchase of the very idea of inevitability, as its array of games has no telos on a meta-level. Further, the text creates ad hoc

[210] Foucault, *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison*, trans. Alan Sheridan (New York: Vintage Books, 1995): 195-230.

circumstances that adumbrate how game theory works through failures—while celebrating an immanent paradise, rather than an imagined transcendent afterlife. In turn, *Measure for Measure*'s Lucretian sensibility introduces another legible link to posthumanist thought, in the materialist intuitions that emerge strikingly in two of Lucretius's most influential modern readers, Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari. In effect, the Lucretian tenor of the play takes a modern turn, anticipating Deleuze's and Guattari's materialist critiques of traditional structures of reality.[211] Every situation or case is just another game, with just another outcome, whose sense or value is contingent, rather than fixed. The play's "measure" endlessly awaits the next move.

[211] Deleuze and Guattari, *Anti-Oedipus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, trans. Robert Hurley, Mark Seem, and Helen R. Lane (Minneapolis: U of Minnesota P, 1983); *A Thousand Plateaus*; *Kafka: Toward a Minor Literature*, trans. Dana Polan (Minneapolis: U of Minnesota P, 1986); and *What Is Philosophy?*, trans. Hugh Tomlinson and Graham Burchell (New York: Columbia UP, 1994).

Chapter 5. The Productive Failure of World-Remaking in Milton's Paradise Lost

Paradise Lost takes up questions that have been present throughout the earlier texts examined in this study: the instability of human agency, the tension between theological authority and imaginative invention, and the problem of how failure can become constitutive of new forms of meaning. Donne's *Metempsychosis* probed these questions through a satirical lens that turned transmigration into an experiment in parasitic logic. Marvell's "Upon Appleton House" refracted them through anamorphic distortions of history, theology, and genre. Cavendish's *The Blazing World* staged them through narrative reflexivity, embedding the very act of world-remaking into the fabric of fiction. Shakespeare's *Measure for Measure* dramatized them as a series of casuistical games, where silence and strategy determined the conditions of ethical choice.

Milton adds new nuance to these shared concerns. His epic reimagines the origins of human history itself, bringing into view the paradoxes of freedom and obedience, knowledge and blindness, divine sovereignty and human limitation. Here, the problem of world-remaking is staged on a cosmic scale. The failures of angelic rebellion and human disobedience simultaneously undermine and generate new possibilities for imagining justice, history, and redemption. Milton's experiment does not simply rehearse the questions posed by his predecessors, but reframes them within the epic's capacious theological and cosmological design. Unlike the other texts of my study, *Paradise Lost*'s enormous narrative canvas enables the epic to suggest a meta-level of speculation about the nature of failure—in perspectives that straddle humanist and posthumanist orientations or positionalities.

Before turning to the world-remaking capacity of failure in Milton's epic, I treat Giorgio Agamben's meditations on potentiality and impotentiality as important foundational loci for

understanding the concept of failure in general. Agamben conceptualizes failure not merely as a negation of success, but as an integral element of being: a state of potentiality that refuses to be actualized. For Agamben, potentiality is most fully itself when it includes the capacity *not* to act—that is, when it preserves its relation to what he calls impotentiality. "To be potential means: to be one's own lack, to be capable of one's own impotentiality."[212] This conception of potentiality as the capacity to *not be* undergirds Agamben's claim that failure is not a deviation from being, but intrinsic to its modal structure. Agamben differentiates potentiality from the assumption that life forms possess a fixed telos or predetermined end correlated with their essential nature. Instead, being is marked by the open possibility of both actualization and non-actualization; failure belongs to the very mode of existence rather than to a deficiency measured against an essential end.

This idea is crucial when analyzing Milton's theological and cosmological structures, wherein failure is both inevitable and generative. In *Paradise Lost*, this framework allows for a nuanced understanding of how Milton presents failure not as a terminal point but as a condition laden with modal significance—an oscillation between being and non-being, action and inaction. At the same time, the poem engages with the Lucretian legacy, which I explored in previous chapters. From a Lucretian perspective, Milton's theodicy—his putative effort to "justifie the wayes of God to men" (1.26)—cannot retain its a priori status, since material contingency and the random swerve of atoms destabilize the premise of divine necessity.[213] This tension may account for the poem's ambivalent meanings. The theological narrative insists on providential order, yet its imaginative texture continually betrays an openness to chance, failure, and

[212] Agamben, *Potentialities* 179.

[213] In-text citations are from Milton, *Paradise Lost*, *Riverside Milton*, 296-710.

ungoverned potentiality. This tension between providential order and Lucretian contingency opens the way for a more refined account of failure as a modal condition, one that can be further clarified through Agamben's framework.

I build on Agamben's position by emphasizing the *modal* aspects of failure—how failure is shaped and perceived through the lens of generic conventions and tropes: the very features that shape individual and collective understandings of what counts as a life and a meaningful life-story. I explore how Milton deploys such conventions to construct shared assumptions between his first-person narrator and his imagined readership—his "fit audience […] though few" (7.31). In *Paradise Lost*, for example, Satan's repeated failures to recreate Heaven, Hell, and Paradise are integral to Milton's broader cosmopoetic framework. These failures are not isolated events; they are tied to modal conditions that question what could have been, what remains unrealized, and how these unrealized potentials shape theological and historical narratives. By situating failure within these modal frameworks, my analysis reveals how generic expectations in epic literature, shaped by both classical and Christian traditions, determine the contours of what counts as failure and what remains within the realm of potentiality.

Given Milton's sharp focus on biblical texts and his crucial, though often understated, engagement with Christological ideas of messianic and redemptive history, I contextualize *Paradise Lost* within early church debates concerning the "scandal" of the Cross. Central to these debates was the paradox of a suffering and dying god—an apparent ideological failure when contrasted with the prevailing conception of an omnipotent deity. The crucifixion posed a fundamental theological challenge: How could omnipotence coexist with vulnerability, humiliation, and death? The Cross thus became a site of modal tension, where divine potentiality appeared suspended in the moment of failure.

This paradox led to significant doctrinal heresies, notably Docetism, which proposed that Christ's broken physical body on the Cross was merely a simulacrum.[214] This "saving of appearances" attempted to resolve the scandal by denying the reality of Christ's suffering, thereby preserving divine omnipotence. However, this interpretation also diminished the redemptive power of the crucifixion by undermining its embodied and human reality. The Docetic position highlights the modal dimensions of failure—how perceived failures (in this case, divine suffering and death) are negotiated through theological frameworks that oscillate between reality and appearance, potentiality and actuality.

A fascinating classical parallel to this theological debate is the legend of the "Egyptian Helen," which narrates that the true Helen never went to Troy but remained in Egypt, while a simulacrum took her place in the Trojan War.[215] This narrative complicates traditional notions of fidelity, identity, and failure by introducing the idea of a double—an unrealized potential that exists alongside the realized narrative. The simulacrum of Helen serves as a modal figure: It represents what could have been (the adulterous Helen who went to Troy) while simultaneously embodying a covert failure on the plane of reality (the absence of the true Helen). The wrinkle here is that the depicted plane of reality is precisely the *unthought* of literary history and cultural memory, largely eclipsed by the affordance of the simulacrum, as celebrated and rehearsed in the literary canon. The migration of this legend into Christian mythography (and its subsequent demotion to heretical status) underscores how modal notions of failure are embedded in both classical and Christian traditions.

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[214] Bart D. Ehrman, *Lost Christianities: The Battles for Scripture and the Faiths We Never Knew* (Oxford: Oxford UP, 2003).

[215] Euripides, *Helen*, trans. E.P. Coleridge, *Euripides: The Complete Greek Tragedies*, ed. David Grene and Richmond Lattimore (Chicago: U of Chicago P, 1955).

By incorporating these theological and mythographic contexts into an analysis of *Paradise Lost*, we can better understand how Milton's representation of failure operates within a broader modal framework. Satan's failures, for instance, resonate with the Docetic impulse to deny or reframe failure by creating simulacra of divine creation. His attempts to replicate Paradise are marked by a refusal to accept the limits of potentiality, resulting in spaces that mimic but ultimately fail to embody the divine order. Similarly, Adam's and Eve's fall introduces a modal rupture in salvation history—an interruption that necessitates the redemptive promise of Christ's future incarnation and crucifixion, casting these events as at once deeply contingent, yet also necessary. Thus, the modal aspects of failure in *Paradise Lost* are inextricably linked to the theological and generic conventions that shape readers' perceptions of what counts as failure.

By drawing on Agamben's framework and situating Milton's epic within these broader discursive contexts—in which the idea of potentiality swerves from its logically dependent relation to actuality—my analysis reveals how failure functions not as a narrative endpoint, but as a generative condition that shapes theological, cosmological, and historical possibilities. More generally, the modal dynamism of *Paradise Lost* intuits an emergent perception of the posthuman consequences or implications of Lucretian materialism: a vision of the cosmos not as a teleologically ordered whole, but as a field of contingent motion, void, and atomic divergence.[216] This phenomenon is openly declared in Book 2, when Satan traverses chaos. Additionally, and more importantly, it is also made evident as a kind of spectral element in the

[216] For a contemporary account of how Lucretian materialism informs posthuman understandings of motion and indeterminacy, see Thomas Nail, *Lucretius II: An Ethics of Motion* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh UP, 2020), esp. chs. 1 and 3. Nail articulates how Lucretius's physics anticipates a posthumanist ethics grounded in flux, relationality, and the rejection of fixed ontological hierarchies.

rhetorical permutations of the text. The impact of the Lucretian sensibility on Milton's modal perspective of failure takes shape in the epic's discursive design, even as it complicates the theodicean project of justifying "the wayes of God to men" (1.26). While Lucretian materialism satisfies many of the dramatic and aesthetic interests at work in the poem, it simultaneously destabilizes the theological assurance on which Milton's meta-argument depends.

The Breakdown of Spenserian Allegory

Near the end of book 2, Satan leaps into chaos, leaving behind the figures of Sin and Death at the gates of Hell. Similarly, Milton himself seems to leap away from the previously privileged but now outdated literary mode for cosmopoetic imagining—allegory—into a space informed by 17th-century technology and New Science (emergent modes of knowledge production, which make even ancient sources like Lucretius, Epicurus, and Democritus seem modern). Yet, surprisingly, allegory seems to harbor a strange persistence. Having ostensibly dispatched the allegorical mode, the narrative nevertheless confronts Satan with more allegorical figures in the pavilion of Chaos personified. Milton's recidivist turn to allegory demonstrates his epic's historical limit, as if the narrative must autocorrect by reverting to an old-fashioned literary device to ensure narrative coherence and momentum. In this moment, the text comes close to disclosing its otherwise covert positionality, on the cusp of an emergent category: the newfound interest in Lucretian materialism (which, in this context, signals the onset of secular modernity).

Milton tactically accounts for atomic contingency and "ill chance" in his theodicy (2.935). His tactics occur on at least two registers—enough to suggest the poem's interest in testing the solvency of theodicy itself as the poem's a prori condition. First, while allegory

nominally depends on the rooted assumption of an unchanging cosmological hierarchy, Milton's aesthetic ambition in depicting the cosmos instead creates parallel worlds, rather than hierarchically stacked worlds: a de facto embrace of exuberant diversity over dogma. Second, because Milton, characteristically, reappropriates the classical past—even those elements intractable to the theodicy project—to bolster his own authority as a world-remaker, his currents of thought drift into a secular framework beyond the reflexive need for the ideological ballast of allegory. However, the pull of the allegorical mode is never entirely lost, and Milton can only think his way into the Lucretian sensibility just so far. In short, a full-throated embrace of Lucretian materialism would call into question the narrative and ideological need for the metafigural category of the Father. In this regard, although Milton's Lucretian depiction of atomic contingency produces an emergent secular space, it inevitably also recalls the philosophical tension over the problem of contingency in a notable literary precursor.

I refer to the tension between Platonic forms and Ovidian transformations in *The Faerie Queene* (1590, 1596), the very text Milton's epic nominally aspires to subsume and supersede. Edmund Spenser uses an Ovidian repertoire (indebted, not coincidentally, to Lucretius) to express psychological defects and to stage cultural preoccupations and crises, but he relies on Platonic idealism to undergird the swirling proliferation of shapes that propel the narrative. Ideologically, Spenser needs the Platonic element, but aesthetically, he is fascinated by the ways in which appearances can change and cut against the grain of what the edifying purpose of the allegory requires. Because of Spenser's commitment to the systematic philosophy of Plato, however, he cannot imagine Platonic forms as empty of allegorical meaning (that is, as merely structural affordances). At the same time, the Ovidian element is elastic enough to flag the misuse of rituals as dangerous, without resorting to propositional fiats about the bankruptcy of

the Platonic system and its correlate in political theology—a nexus of thought handled with ingenuity, as we have seen, in *Measure for Measure*. In essence, Spenser attempts to temper the satiric edge of Ovidian shapeshifting with the stability of Platonic idealism—and, conversely, to render the legacy of Platonic idealism more responsive to the complex tissue of lived reality.[217]

Building on Spenser's use of Ovidian metamorphosis and Platonic forms, Milton engages with Ovid and Lucretius in a more radical reconfiguration of classical sources. In *Paradise Lost*, Milton channels Ovid's concept of metamorphosis, but infuses the epic with a deeper investment in the materialist philosophy of Lucretius that also informed Ovid's cosmopoetic project. Tellingly, the revival of Lucretius in Renaissance philosophical cultures and the concomitant voices of the New Science also complicates Milton's vision, as Lucretius's materialism offers a counterpoint to Platonic forms, allowing Milton to explore the contingency of creation itself.

Milton probes not just physical transformations, but also the deeper psychological and theological implications of memory and trauma. Ovid's portrayals of metamorphosis are particularly significant for Milton's depiction of Adam and Eve, where memory becomes objectified, externalized in the form of the landscape around them, deeply encrypted with signs of both catastrophe and serenity. This Ovidian elasticity of form and memory intersects with Milton's Christianizing project, where Adam's creation is informed by both classical and theological traditions. The effect is not a seamless harmony, but a productive tension. Ovid's mutability strains against the Christian claim of fixity in divine creation. As a result, Adam's body and memory appear at once as mutable—shaped by echoes of classical metamorphosis—and as divinely ordered, bearing the imprint of providential design. The intersection is thus

[217] For a study of how Renaissance authors adapted Ovid's *Metamorphoses* to express political and psychological concerns, see Heather James, *Ovid and the Liberty of Speech in Shakespeare's England* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2021).

fraught rather than conciliatory, revealing how Milton's synthesis both appropriates and unsettles the classical legacy.

The diversely staged philosophical engagement with poetic form is another feature Milton's project holds in common with Lucretius's, Ovid's and Spenser's. This investment also reflects a queering of genre. Milton troubles the boundaries between the categories (genres) of thought and perception, which denote the properties of the human and the world—suggesting a fluidity that challenges fixed cosmological and moral orders. Tellingly, the Ovidian (and Lucretian) element in Spenser and Milton expresses different ways of imagining a queer poetics. Spenser's allegorical procedure entertains queer elements, but in ways distinct from Milton's narrative, in part because the allegorical mode itself occupies a "meta-" status in Spenser. It founds and grounds Spenser's fictive world, whereas it is no more than an occasional trope in Milton's. Where Spenser tempers the chaos of transformation and its queering potential with Platonic stability, Milton's poetic imagination fuses these elements, drawing on Ovid's elasticity to grapple with questions of memory, queerness, and the troubling of fixed human identities within the broader cosmological framework.

Milton's debt to Lucretius is different from Spenser's—and closer to Ovid's. The Lucretian element is the key to clearing the path for Milton to express the ideological limits of the overtly stated ambitions of *Paradise Lost*: the theodicy project. The epic's theodicean goal and its cosmopoetic investment move in different directions. This very divergence exemplifies the modal dynamic I have been tracing throughout: the coexistence of competing possibilities within the same textual space. In this case, the theological drive to defend divine justice is unsettled by the poem's simultaneous world-remaking energies, which open onto alternative perspectives not fully contained within the theodicean frame. The theodicy looks "backward," so

to speak, toward premodern theological and cosmological schemes, while the *cosmopoiesis* looks "forward," to the afterlives of Lucretius that turn up in Milton's historical moment (the ethos of the New Science) and later (Darwin and, eventually, late modern thinkers like Bruno Latour, Gilles Deleuze, et al.).

Spenser's depiction of unstable, transformative figures—like Acrasia in *The Faerie Queene*—positions humankind as malleable, liminal beings who challenge the boundaries of human and animal, rational and bestial. This instability in Spenser, tied to Aristotelian notions of humoral composition and the slippages between reason and passion, finds a new and more radical iteration in Milton's *Paradise Lost*. Here, Eve inherits Spenser's fantasy of "wanton" human agency, but with a distinct shift (4.306). Unlike Acrasia, for example, whose danger in the landscape of Spenser's Faeryland remains local (Acrasia's represented defects, and the margin of intemperance they express, will never be more or less than what they signify allegorically), Milton's Eve becomes a site of philosophical and theological inquiry into the bounds of the human, where the human is not merely defined by male rationality and the corresponding privilege of mind over body, a legacy carried over from premodern systematic philosophy and given new accents in the long history of Christian Platonism.

Against this backdrop—and drawing on Pico's esoteric idea that humanity has no fixed essence—Milton uses metamorphosis to launch a freshly critical interrogation of the nature of identity. As Pico declares in the *Oration on the Dignity of Man*, God placed humanity "at the center of the world" with no determined form, so that humans may "fashion [themselves] in whatever shape [they] shall prefer."[218] This radical openness of human potentiality, which is

[218] Giovanni Pico della Mirandola, *Oration on the Dignity of Man*, trans. Francesco Borghesi, Michael Papio, and Massimo Riva (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2012), 5.

neither fixed, nor preordained, echoes through Milton's treatment of metamorphosis, which dramatizes identity as mutable and precarious, rather than essentially stable.

The receptivity to transformation is key to Milton's treatment of Eve, whose creation and fall are deeply embedded in a fluid ontology, where memory, agency, and identity are subject to change, not as the consequence of metaphysical intervention but as the very condition of the historical embeddedness of life. For instance, Eve's moment of self-recognition at the pool, where she first mistakes her reflection for another being, dramatizes a consciousness formed in relation to mutable appearances and shifting frames of reference—an identity born not from divine fiat but from the phenomenology of perception (4.460-89). In short, the link between Spenser and Milton—precisely because of, not despite, its complicated nature—reflects the broader Renaissance preoccupation with the porous boundaries of human nature, as both poets navigate the tension between stability and transformation in their respective cosmopoetics.

All the more reason, then, to reconsider the impact of Milton's seemingly odd recursion to allegorical thinking in his depictions of Satan's shapeshifting, especially in book 10 of *Paradise Lost*, when the fallen angels transform into serpents—a nod to the mode of Spenserian transformation that signals radical evil. Recall Spenser's allegorical depiction of Errour as a hybrid figure, half-serpent and half-woman.[219] Apparently, for Milton's theodicy to work, he must enlist the allegorical gesture: specifically, the mode's fluency in registering mutability and contingency as signs of deficit or evil. The pragmatic mandate is voiced in book 5, when Raphael informs Adam that, by recounting the war in Heaven to a human, the angel must rely on accommodationist logic, conceding the rhetorical utility of allegory (rendering metaphysical

[219] "Halfe like a serpent horribly displaide, / But th'other halfe did woman's shape retaine" [Edmund Spenser, *The Faerie Queene*, ed. A. C. Hamilton, 2nd ed., Longman Annotated English Poets (London: Routledge, 2001), 1.1.124-5.]

realities palpable). Yet the residual presence of the allegorical temper is no longer Spenserian. Allegory has migrated from (Spenserian) ground to (Miltonic) figure.

That said, the diegetic frame of *The Faerie Queene* stages its fictive character and figural design in the opening letter to Ralegh and in occasional moments in the unfolding narrative. For example, when in Book 3 Malbecco, having reached the limit of emotional stridency, turns into the allegory of jealousy, rather comically if painfully, the rueful joke trades on the assumption that the character, Malbecco, is "real" in the first place and not viewed as an allegorical figure.[220] In short, Spenser, throughout the poem, relies on a subtle and supple double vision, through which readers are recurrently invited to enter imaginatively into the represented world (and to treat the narrative events as real—in what Ricoeur would call the "world of the text") and yet also invited to read the adventures and characters as allegories of one thing or another (this is the tensile relation between allegory and allegoresis, whereby the figural moorings of allegory intermittently dissolve from view).

Milton's frame does not seem overtly fictive in *Paradise Lost* because the fabula itself—the biblical narrative of providential history—enjoys an inherited historicity that anchors its figural properties to "real" events in history and also grounds the biblical text's amenability to "fictive" elaborations (as in the fourfold method of textuality that enjoyed such prestige in late antique and medieval biblical and literary cultures). Milton's Eve is just as "fictive" as Spenser's Redcrosse Knight, but she is also "real" (or historically anchored) in a way that Redcrosse is not, and her historical anchorage is directly related not to the existence of a putative "first woman" called Eve (not some type of anthropological datum), but rather to the rich, historical embeddedness of her status as a historical being in a received origin story.

[220] Ibid. 3.10.58-60.

Both Spenser and Milton must necessarily deal with the question of where to mark the *a priori* placement of the site, where fictiveness appears as a contrivance and where it disappears into what Rodolphe Gasché calls "the tain of the mirror"—the unseen enabling conditions for perception and thought.[221] However, Spenser's and Milton's choice of subject matter, poetic idiom and form account for how they mark these liminal sites differently. Raphael's foregrounding of the figural, allegorical mode to make "real" the information he wants to convey is a distant cousin of the position of Spenser's narrator in setting up the allegorical matrix in which the dramas of the various virtues unfold in *The Faerie Queene.*[222] In brief, the "meta-" positionality of allegory is generalized for Spenser and localized for Milton. Between Spenser's and Milton's respective epics, the sense of "world," together with the cosmopoetic assumptions grounding that sense, have changed radically, observing what I have been calling an essentially modal discursivity. The mutating calibration of allegory in the poems is a telling sign of that change.

Milton historicizes events and complicates his characters so much that his epic appears to move into the territory of the novel.[223] Thus, it may be that Milton takes a cue on this point from Spenser. The novel characteristically reflects a cultural moment deeply caught up in secularizing processes (economic, social, ideological, etc.). Recently, Sandra Macpherson has described the novel as a form that emphasizes modernity's newfound interest in the so-called law of

[221] Rodolphe Gasché, *The Tain of the Mirror: Derrida and the Philosophy of Reflection* (Cambridge: Harvard UP, 1986).

[222] Spenser, "A Letter of the Author's," in *The Faerie Queene*, 4-5.

[223] According to Gallagher, Spenser's allegorical mode announces a prescient articulation of novelistic discourse, in the Bakhtinian sense of the term. See Gallagher, *Medusa's Gaze: Casuistry and Conscience in the Renaissance* (Stanford: Stanford UP, 1991).

unintended consequences.[224] The manifestation of unintended consequences, shorn of allegorical tethers, is more fully cognizant of the lack of a providential motive, or causal logic, driving the relation between event and result (and, in this sense, is in tune with a certain modern reception of Lucretian thought).

In *Paradise Lost*, Milton pointedly frames Satan's encounter with the created world as contingent on the "ill chance / […] of som tumultuous cloud" (2.935-6), which interrupts his otherwise endless fall through Chaos. The episode foregrounds the role of accident in shaping the poem's narrative trajectory. Satan's prospective designs for Eden, and even the unfolding of Milton's theodicy, are made possible only through this happenstance. From the perspective of novelistic discourse, such a moment functions less like a providential design than like a plot device, introducing a Lucretian element of chance—akin to the *clinamen*, the unpredictable swerve of atoms—into the chain of causation. This insertion of contingency unsettles the coherence of the theological frame, exposing how the epic's claim to justify divine providence depends, paradoxically, on a narrative accident that resists theological necessity.

Further, this novelistic quality aligns with the ancient and early modern consensus that the novel privileges character over plot—but in a manner distinct from the psychological realism of later fiction. In late antique Greek and Latin prose narratives, and in the sprawling baroque romances they inspired, "character" emerges less through interiority or mimetic development than through allegorical roles, rhetorical self-presentation, and situational metamorphoses. This tradition of the "novel before the novel," as discussed by critics such as Margaret Anne Doody

[224] See Macpherson.

and John Richetti, emphasizes formal experimentation and moral or philosophical typology over modern psychological depth.[225]

Milton's departure from Spenser's narrative technique is instructive here. Let's consider Spenser's Guyon, the allegorical knight of temperance, as a case in point. The question of how to square Guyon's inconsistencies, as a coherent and fleshed-out character, never appears in the unfolding narrative of *The Faerie Queene.* After the catastrophic destruction of the Bower of Bliss at Guyon's hands, at the close of Book 2, Guyon simply disappears from the narrative. He returns later to the field of action—ironically enough, in Book 5, the book of justice—with no narrative recognition of the problem his past exploits have introduced into the allegorical correspondence of his behavior. The narrative *forgets* the problem. By contrast, the problem posed by Milton's Satan in *Paradise Lost*, famously characterized as a split subject, has bedeviled critics for centuries. Indeed, the problem is arguably an intrinsic element in the poem's architecture. While Spenser allegorizes psychological information, Milton converts allegorical gestures into the inner scaffolding of his character's psychomachias.

This explains how the representations of God the Father and the Son in Milton's epic, though they are notably hieratic, do not reflexively signal allegorical personifications. They reside in a strangely liminal space between the theological "real" and an emergent sense of the fictive "real" (i.e., the novel). The inclusion of recognizably allegorical characters in the poem, like Sin and Death, helps point up the contrasting, inchoate discursive space of the Father and

[225] See Margaret Anne Doody, *The True Story of the Novel* (New Brunswick: Rutgers UP, 1996), especially chapters 2 and 4, where she argues that ancient prose fiction and its baroque successors foreground digression, episodic form, and the staging of ethical or philosophical dilemmas, rather than mimetic character psychology. See also John Richetti, *The English Novel in History, 1700–1780* (London: Routledge, 1999), which traces how these early experiments inform—but differ from—the rise of inward psychological realism in the eighteenth-century English novel.

Son. The metaphysical status of Milton's God, while theologically legible, is narratively enigmatic. In a word, the place occupied by Father and Son in the poem is a premodern holdover, whereas Satan, with his tortured ambition and boundary-breaking animus, is already modern.

Milton's world-remaking tactics enfold the Spenserian legacy of allegory and its Platonic substrate in the narrative design of *Paradise Lost*, not simply by consigning it to the status of a defunct or inauthentic tropic gesture, but more importantly by showing how it is supplanted by a different species of figuration, signaling Milton's departure from the Spenserian mode. Rather than reverting to the allegorical thinking of political theology and subject formation as a buffer to recognize, without frontally addressing, historically grounded problems, *Paradise Lost* ends in a quasi-celebratory embrace of the beginning of (secular) human history. This history differs from the human history figured and assumed in Spenser. For Milton, history itself is now untethered, at least in part, from metaphysical and providential guarantees, a textual indication in *Paradise Lost* that Milton understands how Christianity, in essence, marks the beginning of secularity.[226] This is so, according to how secularity would come to be understood after Darwin and Marx—whose work, by no coincidence, partakes in the poem's Lucretian legacy. Secularity here does not denote the time given to creaturely existence by a providential deity, so much as the time in which humans invent their gods.

Thus far, I have emphasized the premodern ideological uses of allegory (which Spenser relies on and also challenges, but in localized ways that become more robust in Milton). However, an alternative function of allegory has moorings in Augustine's rapturous allegorical treatment of the Book of Genesis. The allegory of the *Confessions* signifies the generativity of

[226] See Jean-Luc Nancy, *Dis-Enclosure*; and *Adoration: The Deconstruction of Christianity II*, trans. John McKeane (New York: Fordham UP, 2012).

figural action, where we can see Milton's deft "modernizing" of the Augustinian legacy. The conclusion of *Paradise Lost* parallels Augustine's *Confessions* by embracing the start of human history. Allegory, often associated with negative events or moral failings, allows Augustine to return to the beginning, but in a different register—where the end signals a chance for redemption and renewal, in line with providential design.

The garden scene of the *Confessions* serves as a distant echo of Platonic thinking, especially in how Augustine articulates the nature of evil through privation theory, which states that evil is not a substance but the absence of good. This recapitulates Platonic ideas about the ontological hierarchy, where evil is viewed as an imitative, inferior force. In *Paradise Lost*, this Augustinian insight is evident in Satan, whose rebellion and willful rivalry with omniscience reflect this mimetic reflex. Satan imitates God, but as a fabrication that is ontologically lesser—showing that evil can be both ontologically nil (an instance of non-being) and yet characterologically and dramatically potent because of its imitative nature. In this sense, evil is another example of a modal trait.

Tellingly, the question of chance and providence arises in Augustine's later reflections. For Augustine, providence and chance are not opposites; rather, providence harnesses chance, directing what appears random toward a divine purpose. By the end of the *Confessions*, Augustine moves from personal memory to a broader, speculative memory, where his reflections on his past become part of a larger, providential narrative. In *Paradise Lost*, Milton similarly ends on a note that, while tragic, celebrates a new beginning.

The relationship of providence to chance in the *Confessions* is a foundational trope of the "modal" orientation, as it turns on the question of differential scales of perception (divine vs. human) regarding the meaning or purpose of events in history. For Augustine, speculation

(informed by both human labor and divine inspiration) can glimpse the "big picture" in a way that only God fully comprehends. In a minor key, this dynamic plays out in the narrative shape of the *Confessions* by the tensile coupling of the narrator (depicted in the dilating "now" of the time of writing) and the autobiographical character "Augustine" (depicted in the time of living: the *Lebenswelt*). In turn, this doubled perspective is subsumed under the final, speculative reading of Genesis.

While *Paradise Lost* lacks the direct narrator-as-confessor posture of the *Confessions*, it nonetheless stages a structurally analogous tension between human experience and divine providence—though it does so through the choreography of transcendent voices, rather than a unified retrospective voice. Where Augustine uses the dilation of narrative time and the speculative rereading of Genesis to disclose providential meaning, Milton relies on a dramatic configuration of angelic discourse, visionary scenes, and embedded prophetic perspectives to reframe loss as the precondition for a greater good.

This providence/chance dynamic comes into sharp focus in the final books of *Paradise Lost*, particularly via the archangel Michael's visionary exposition to Adam. Through this angelic mediation, the poem invites the reader to ascend into a meta-temporal perspective: one that affirms a providential logic, without effacing the tragedy of immediate experience. The sorrow of exile is not nullified, but relocated within a redemptive arc that exceeds human temporality. In this sense, Michael's apocalyptic teaching performs a narratological function similar to Augustine's speculative turn in Book XII of *Confessions*. Both recast painful contingency as part of a divinely legible history.

Moreover, Milton formalizes this theological claim by layering perspectives—Adam's grief, Eve's dream, Michael's prophecy, and the narrator's epic voice—such that the poem's

closing gesture toward "A paradise within thee, happier farr" is not an erasure of tragedy, but a transposition of hope across modal thresholds (12.587). Just as Augustine retroactively aligns the random-seeming events of his life with divine intention, *Paradise Lost* presents exile not as an endpoint, but as the theological condition of futurity, requiring the tragic to make room for the eventual. Ultimately, what Augustine achieves through introspective recursion and exegetical framing, Milton renders through a dramatic theology: a layered chorus of voices whose interplay constitutes the poem's speculative structure. In both cases, providence absorbs chance without annihilating it, and meaning arises not despite, but because of historical suffering.

"The World was all before them"

Romantic reinterpretations of *Paradise Lost*'s conclusion complicate Milton's quasi-celebratory tone, exposing cracks in the authoritative appearance of divine power in Milton's epic. In what follows, I explore 19th-century visual representations of the ending of *Paradise Lost*, focusing on the downcast, averted, or covered gaze of Adam and Eve in artworks by William Blake, John Martin, and Gustave Doré. Blake's watercolors, Martin's mezzotints and paintings, and Doré's drawings for his engravers raise the same crucial question: What do Adam and Eve see at the beginning of human history—and what do they *not* see? While the epic concludes with the promise that "The World was all before them," these later visual depictions highlight the ambiguity and obscured nature of the world perceived by the first humans (12.646). By analyzing how Blake, Matin, and Doré depict this pivotal moment, I examine the gap between Milton's vision of salvation history and the blind spots within his theodicy.

Allegory might frame Milton's ending as purely comic—marking the movement from sin to redemption—but Milton's soteriological investment in the *felix culpa* doctrine complicates

that arc. His conclusion evokes the shape of comedy, while retaining the emotional and structural weight of tragedy. This dual affective register is accomplished not through resolution or return, but through forward-looking messianic expectation. The ending insists on the eschatological horizon embedded within Christian allegory: specifically, the promise of the Second Coming, per the tradition enunciated in the Book of Revelation. Michael's final words to Adam, for instance, shift the affective scale of the poem from loss to prophetic futurity. Michael foretells that the Son will

> dissolve
> *Satan* with his perverted World, then raise
> From the conflagrant mass, purg'd and refin'd,
> New Heav'ns, new Earth, Ages of endless date
> Founded in righteousness and peace and love
> To bring forth fruits Joy and eternal Bliss.
> 12.546-51

Here, the poem's allegorical mode opens toward cosmic renewal, placing present suffering in a typological sequence that leads ultimately to apocalyptic restoration. Rather than resolving the Fall within the plot of *Paradise Lost*, Milton's narrative gestures toward its eschatological consummation, thereby fusing tragic loss with redemptive promise.

The metaphysical moorings of allegory in Christian tradition—up to and including Milton's historical moment—typically promise a providential end, the *Ur*-narrative of salvation history. Yet in *Paradise Lost*, the recognition of tragedy is no longer fully contained within the teleological assurance of the *felix culpa* scheme. While the poem affirms the eventual redemption of humankind, its final movement refrains from dramatizing resolution; instead, it concludes with Adam and Eve walking "hand in hand with wandring steps and slow"—a description that evokes exile, uncertainty, and suspension, more than triumphant return (12.648). This temporal and emotional indeterminacy at the poem's close marks a shift. Allegory's providential arc

remains structurally in place, but the poem's tone and imagery defer its fulfillment. It is this discursive deferral that later Romantic visual artists seize upon—emphasizing not doctrinal closure, but the tragic, wandering aftermath of the Fall, thereby exposing the gap between the theological promise and the poem's affective register.

Blake's, Martin's, and Doré's artworks share *Paradise Lost*'s fantasy of a generically illegible world: pure futurity. The specific ways that Blake, Martin, and Doré shape Milton's conclusion, however, yield a surprising, emergent sense of the profound ambiguity of the status of the human at the scene of its postlapsarian origins. This interpretive ambiguity has not gone unnoticed by scholars, though their emphases differ depending on the artist and the distribution of critical focus has been uneven. Blake's Milton designs have received sustained attention, with studies emphasizing symbolic and mythic dimensions.[227] Martin's mezzotints are often read in the context of Romantic and Victorian spectacle.[228] Doré's engravings, though enormously influential, have been treated more sporadically, with critics noting their popular impact, rather than probing their compositional subtleties.[229] My analysis builds on this body of work, but shifts focus toward the micro-level details—gesture, gaze, and iconographic variation—that destabilize the conventional expulsion motif and mirror Milton's own ambivalences toward allegory.

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[227] See Stephen C. Behrendt, *The Moment of Explosion: Blake and the Illustration of Milton* (Lincoln: U of Nebraska P, 1983); Pamela Dunbar, *William Blake's Illustrations to the Poetry of Milton* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1980); and W. J. T. Mitchell, *Blake's Composite Art: A Study of the Illuminated Poetry* (Princeton: Princeton UP, 1978).

[228] See Morton D. Paley, *Apocalypse and Millennium in English Romantic Poetry* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1999); and Richard D. Altick, *The Shows of London* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard UP, 1978).

[229] See David Bindman, *The Shadow of the Guillotine: Britain and the French Revolution* (London: British Museum Publications, 1989), and Michael J. Sullivan, *The Etchings of Gustave Doré* (San Francisco: Alan Wofsy Fine Arts, 1977).



Figure 1. William Blake, "The Expulsion"[230]

Blake's interpretations of *Paradise Lost*—notably in the "Thomas" set (1807), housed at The Huntington Library—reveal his multifarious engagement with Milton's work. In Illustration 12, he depicts the moment when,

> High in Front advanc't,
> The brandisht Sword of God before them blaz'd
> Fierce as a Comet; which with torrid heat,
> And vapour as the *Libyan* Air adust,
> Began to parch that temperate Clime; whereat
> In either hand the hastning Angel caught
> Our lingring Parents, and to th' Eastern Gate
> Led them direct, and down the Cliff as fast
> To the subjected Plaine; then disappeer'd.

[230] William Blake, "Illustration 12 to Milton's 'Paradise Lost': The Expulsion," (1807), The Huntington Library, Art Museum, and Botanical Gardens, San Marino, accessed 18 December 2024: https://emuseum.huntington.org/objects/62/illustration-12-to-miltons-paradise-lost-the-expulsion, accessed 26 March 2025.

12.632-40

"[L]ooking back" and up, they see a great coiling form, representing the "flaming Brand" that leads them out of Paradise and bars them from returning (12.641, 643). Its swirl of red and black captures Adam's and Eve's gaze. In its high degree of abstraction, the sword seems to be purposefully Miltonic—akin to the famous textual puzzle from *Lycidas*, which describes a divine weapon that guards the gate to the heavenly Paradise: "But that two-handed engine at the door / Stands ready to smite once, and smite no more."[231] Visually enigmatic, the sword also recalls a famous Renaissance depiction of God. Its red, coiling, clothlike form evokes the swirling red mantle from which God reaches out to Adam in Michelangelo's fresco "The Creation of Adam" (c.1508-12).



Figure 2. Blake, "The Expulsion" (detail)



Figure 3. Michelangelo, "The Creation of Adam" (detail)[232]

In addition to recollecting puzzles of Renaissance iconography, Blake invokes design elements associated with an earlier era. His drawing's lack of atmospheric and three-point

[231] Milton, *Lycidas*: 130-131.

[232] Michelangelo, "The Creation of Adam" (c.1512), Sistine Chapel, Vatican City, *World History Encyclopedia*, uploaded by Alonso de Mendoza, 17 Aug. 2020, https://www.worldhistory.org/image/12580/the-creation-of-adam-by-michelangelo/, accessed 26 March 2025.

perspective visually compresses the image's various planes, squeezing the foreground and background together and positioning subjects and objects on a pictorially "flat" surface. For Blake, such compression achieves a medievalizing gesture, harkening back to the procedures of allegory, which render immaterial items or abstract ideas in palpable form. This allegorical allusion yields intertextual connections within Blake's own body of work, since the same figures recur across his poems and prophetic books with shifting symbolic functions. A single allusion in *Paradise Lost* thus activates Blake's larger symbolic network, binding Milton's text to Blake's own mythopoetic system. For example, in Blake's illustrations of the Book of Job, the whirlwind, from which God speaks to Job, is a swirling shape, which resembles the Sword of God's coiling form in the "Thomas" set. As such, the "flaming Brand" allegorically depicts God as an amalgam of light and dark, in keeping with the way that *Paradise Lost* presents the cloud "Dark with excessive bright" wherein Milton's God enshrouds himself (12.643, 3.380).



Figure 4. Blake, "The Lord Answering Job out of the Whirlwind"[233]

[233] Blake, "The Lord Answering Job out of the Whirlwind" (c.1805-6 and c.1821-7), The Morgan Library & Museum, New York: *The William Blake Archive*, https://blakearchive.org/copy/but550.1?descId=but550.1.wc.13; ibid. (1821), Fogg Art Museum, Washington, D.C.: *The William Blake Archive*, https://blakearchive.org/copy/but551.1?descId=but551.1.wc.13; and ibid. (1823-6), Collection of Robert N. Essick: *The William Blake Archive*, https://blakearchive.org/copy/bb421.1?descId=bb421.1.spb.15, accessed 28 February 2025.

At the top of "The Expulsion" (Figure 1) are four of the guardian cherubim that Adam and Eve see:

> They looking back, all th' Eastern side beheld
> Of Paradise, so late thir happie seat,
> Wav'd over by that flaming Brand, the Gate
> With dreadful Faces throng'd and fierie Armes.
> 12.641-44

Milton makes no mention of their mounts, the addition of which in Blake's composition suggests the four horsemen of the Apocalypse. This allusion is appropriate because of Michael's earlier references to "this worlds dissolution" and last judgment (12.459).

Neither the "Lightning" nor the "Serpent" beneath Michael's feet are explicitly named in the passage illustrated from Book 12, yet the imagery visually recalls an earlier scene in *Paradise Lost*—specifically, the Son's judgement of the serpent in lieu of Satan (10.174-84). The Son curses the serpent and proclaims, "Upon thy Belly groveling thou shalt goe" (10.177). Afterward, "this Oracle" is "verifi'd" when Jesus "Saw *Satan* fall like Lightning down from Heav'n" (10.184). Thus, the "mysterious terms" whereby "God at last / To Satan first in sin his doom apply'd" are allegorical or typological (10.171-3). According to the poem's internal logic, the Son's punishment of the serpent is not really what it appears to be, but something else. It signifies or stands in for the punishment of Satan. Further, Milton tries to rationalize the serpent's punishment as recorded in the Genesis story. Though innocent, the serpent's body has been "vitiated in Nature" and so can never again be as it originally was created (10.169).

Similarly, the "Thorns also and Thistles" depicted in the foreground are not named in Book 12, but visually echo Christ's curse upon Adam in Book 10: "Thorns also and thistles it shall bring thee forth / Unbid, and thou shalt eat th' herb of the field" (10.203–4). These visual

elements draw from earlier textual moments to deepen the sense of loss at the poem's end, embedding in the landscape the consequences of judgment across narrative time.



Figure 5. Blake, "Michael Foretells the Crucifixion"[234]

To be sure, these images of fallen nature are not devoid of redemptive significance, for the thorns invariably remind us of Christ's crown in the previous design of the "Thomas" set. In Illustration 12 (Figure 1), Michael is dressed much as he is in Illustration 11 (Figure 5), but he now wears a plumed crown, less reminiscent of a centurion's helmet. This slight change, plus the absence of his spear, makes him seem less militant. The hopeful possibilities are also

[234] Ibid., "Illustration 11 to Milton's 'Paradise Lost': Michael Foretells the Crucifixion," (1807), The Huntington Library, Art Museum, and Botanical Gardens, San Marino, accessed 18 December 2024: https://emuseum.huntington.org/objects/60/illustration-11-to-miltons-paradise-lost-michael-foretel, accessed 26 March 2025.

underscored by the serious yet mild expressions on all faces. The absence of the iconographic allusions to the Crucifixion scene (centurion's spear and helmet) in Figure 1 mean that the suggestion of hopeful possibilities here dispenses with the specifically Christological narrative of the *felix culpa.* This absence suggests an emergent form of secular eschatology.

This medievalizing element shows how Blake, like Milton, adopts an ambivalent posture toward the allegorical matrix. Allegory at once sustains redemptive possibilities and underscores the opacity of divine presence. On the one hand, the reliance on visual allegory suggests a hopeful horizon for Adam and Eve, framing their expulsion within a typological scheme that gestures toward eventual redemption. On the other hand, the very same allegorical device marks their distance from God. They are cut off from the sword, flanked by Cherubim that foreshadow the four horsemen. Gazing mournfully at the pluming fire and smoke, Adam and Eve behold not a consoling divine presence, but *deus absconditus*—a hidden God of flame and shadow, absent until the world's end.



Figure 6. Blake, "The Expulsion of Adam and Eve from the Garden of Eden"[235]

In Blake's later version of this same image from the "Butts" set of 1808, housed in the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston, the composition includes several nuances that are deceptively innocuous. The Cherubim are more prominent (Figure 6). The ears of their horses touch at their tips to form ogee arches. Their hand gestures are generally the same as in the Huntington design, but Eve's open mouth signifies the beginning of some kind of vocalization—words, a sigh, or maybe surprise. Michael holds Eve by the wrist rather than the hand. His crown has become a

[235] Ibid., "The Expulsion of Adam and Eve from the Garden of Eden," (1808), Museum of Fine Arts, Boston: *The William Blake Archive*, https://www.blakearchive.org/copy/but536.1?descId=but536.1.wc.12, accessed 5 March 2025.

simple skullcap, surmounted by a great, flowing plume. There is only one thistle plant (in the left margin) and the thorns are placed differently. Instead of looking up at the Sword of God, Adam and Eve look down at the serpent.

These shifts have attracted critical attention, though often in terms that emphasize Blake's symbolic or mythic ambitions, rather than their micro-compositional effects. Pamela Dunbar, for example, emphasizes Blake's persistent dramatization of oppositions, such as light and dark, good and evil; however, her analysis treats them at the level of broad symbolic schemes, rather than focusing on how compositional details register these dualities.[236] Stephen Behrendt, similarly, underscores the mythic and apocalyptic force of Blake's designs, reading them as extensions of Blake's visionary cosmology.[237] My analysis builds on these readings but highlights the ways that apparently minor changes—an altered handhold, Eve's half-formed vocalization, or the couple's gaze away from the Sword—destabilize the expulsion motif itself, mirroring Milton's own ambivalence toward allegory.

The cumulative effect of these compositional nuances cuts against the grain of the familiar expulsion topos, which typically emphasizes submission to divine justice and the loss of paradise. Here, by contrast, the gestures and gazes suggest a different affective register. Eve's half-formed speech conveys the potential for agency, rather than silent resignation. Michael's grasp by the wrist implies restraint, instead of guidance. Adam and Eve's downward gaze shifts attention away from the flaming sword to the serpent, as if to dwell on their earthly adversary, rather than their heavenly judge. These subtle departures disrupt the expected moral closure of the scene and open it to more ambivalent, even resistant, meanings.

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[236] Dunbar, 47-52.

[237] Behrendt, 93-105.

Whether gazing down at the devil or up at the deity, Blake's answer to the question—what do humans see at the beginning of salvation history—remains the same: They don't see. Blake's depictions suggest how Adam's and Eve's uncomprehending gaze is, in effect, a kind of blindness. The "pure" future described above is, for Adam and Eve, vacant, just as the macro-solution afforded by recourse to faith in the providential attribute of divine foreknowledge is, for Blake, compositionally inoperative. In short, Blake's aesthetic design is more in tune with the secularizing drift (which is implied but not fleshed out in Milton's narrative) than Milton's narrator can afford to espouse.



Figure 7. John Martin, "Adam and Eve leave Paradise"[238]

In contrast to Blake's watercolors, John Martin's mezzotints for the 1827 illustrated edition of *Paradise Lost*, particularly the final image in the series, interpret Milton's ending as

[238] Milton, *The Paradise Lost of John Milton with Illustrations by John Martin* (London: Charles Whittingham, 1846), The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York: https://www.metmuseum.org/art/collection/search/334091, accessed 24 March 2025.

visually desolate, rather than ostensibly hopeful. Plate 24 (Figure 7) depicts the landscape bending and twisting around Adam and Eve, with windblown trees arching away from the Edenic light. These trees take on the appearance of migrating figures, mirroring Adam's and Eve's own displacement.

The trees stand in for a general idea about "nature" itself, under the dispensation that interests Martin. "Nature" participates in the "fall" that affects postlapsarian humankind. Martin's representational tactics for depicting the general condition of "errancy" or fallenness tap into the understanding of the natural world articulated by Lucretius's heirs—Darwin and Marx (i.e., change that is governed by adaptive transformations to circumstance, not by providential and teleological schemes).

Another crucial context for interpreting Martin's work is the cultural fascination with the sublime in his era. In fact, one link between Milton and Martin is precisely this legacy, which encompasses both Longinus and Kant. There is a subtextual history of secularization in the changing theories of the sublime, where the focus of attention shifts, from awe at the power of the divinely ordered cosmos, to the dynamism of the human mind in rising to grasp and apprehend the immensity of cosmic power—for which the idea of God has become, increasingly, a residual *figure* rather than preeminently a theological "real."[239]

Martin's works have drawn critical attention primarily for their spectacular scale and cultural context, rather than for their precise compositional choices. Morton Paley places Martin's *Paradise Lost* mezzotints firmly within the Romantic fascination with apocalypse, suggesting that they translate Milton's powerful imagery into visual spectacles of sublime

[239] See Thomas Matthew Vozar, *Milton, Longinus, and the Sublime in the Seventeenth Century* (Oxford: Oxford UP, 2023).

destruction.[240] Richard Altick, meanwhile, discusses Martin's mezzotints as part of the Victorian "shows of London," where they were exhibited to huge audiences as quasi-theatrical events, reinforcing their role as public spectacle, rather than intimate illustration.[241] These readings underscore the monumental and cultural force of Martin's Milton designs, but tend to leave aside the smaller-scale choices of perspective, framing, and architectural detail that I emphasize here. By attending to these compositional nuances—such as the ways Martin renders disproportionate scale between human figures and vast celestial or architectural structures—I argue that Martin's images destabilize the centrality of the human, foregrounding instead the overwhelming scale of the world itself.

Martin's scene is dominated by darkness and a disorienting use of light, so that the engraving technique itself evokes cosmic disruption. The sunlight, rather than illuminating, appears to damage the surface of reality, scratching away the lineaments of heaven and transfiguring the sky into a typological fulfillment of the rocky roof of Hell. This etching technique is especially fitting for *Paradise Lost*, wherein "Heav'n" and "Hell" overlap—and not just in the "place" of "The mind," as Milton's Satan claims (1.254-55).

[240] Paley, 242-58.

[241] Altick, 459-64.



Figure 8. Martin, "Adam and Eve leave Paradise" (detail)

The light of Eden has become too blinding for Eve, who raises her hand as if to shield herself from the vision she longs for. Perhaps she waves it goodbye. The sublimity of this gesture in Martin's image anticipates Kierkegaard's philosophy, for which the sublime also figures importantly.[242] Eve seems to foregleam a Kierkegaardian knight of faith—still trying to see the light, despite the loss—while Adam, cast in shadow, adumbrates a knight of infinite resignation, resting his face in his hand, brooding over what is no longer his to grasp.[243] Eve does not see "the world […] before them," but rather the world behind (12.646). Blended using chiaroscuro, Adam's dark eyes are not as sharply drawn as hers. He lacks her clarity. She sees more clearly,

[242] See John Milbank, "The Sublime in Kierkegaard," *The Heythrop Journal* 37.3 (July 1996): 298-321. Milbank argues that Kierkegaard reconceives the sublime not as a Romantic aesthetic category grounded in the infinite or the formless, but as an existential and theological experience—one that confronts the individual with the paradox of faith, the absurd, and the impossibility of mediation. The Kierkegaardian sublime, in this reading, is marked by the subject's inward confrontation with divine transcendence and ethical demand, rather than aesthetic transcendence alone.

[243] Søren Kierkegaard, *Fear and Trembling*, trans. Walter Lowrie (Princeton: Princeton UP, 1941).

but only what has been lost; he struggles to see what remains ahead. The only "place of rest" he finds is for his head in his hand (12.647).

This detail is rather startling, given the iconographic resonance of Adam's gesture. In *Saturn and Melancholy*, Raymond Klibansky, Erwin Panofsky, and Fritz Saxl trace the development in art of the cue for the condition of melancholia (in a reading of Dürer's engraving, "Melencholia I"). Drawing on Aristotle's writings, the authors make a case for the three stages of melancholy, which embodies a paralytic condition of stalling at each threshold of cognitive ascent or mastery. The first stage is sentient awareness of the outside world of images; the second: ratiocination, involving abstract thought; and the third: contemplation of metaphysical realities. Martin's Adam belongs in the history of the melancholic condition, especially given how Martin visually differentiates Adam from Eve. The scales of melancholia, in the tradition that Klibansky, Panofsky, and Saxl describe, fit generally into the larger thematic of modal perspectives.[244]

In Martin's composition, Adam's posture—head in hand, eyes averted—visually recalls the first stage of melancholia, the sentient awareness of external images. Yet his brooding stillness also intimates the second, ratiocinative stage, in which thought becomes abstracted and withdrawn. The engraving seems to hold him suspended between these modalities, caught neither in mere sensory engagement, nor in fully realized contemplative ascent. This suspension emphasizes the modal quality of melancholy itself. Adam's figure embodies a shifting, unstable position within the engraving's wider play of light and shadow, suggesting that postlapsarian existence is lived not in a single stage, but in a precarious oscillation across them.

[244] Raymond Klibansky, Erwin Panofsky, and Fritz Saxl, *Saturn and Melancholy: Studies in the History of Natural Philosophy, Religion, and Art* (Montreal: McGill-Queen's UP, 2019), esp. 60-2, on the three stages of melancholia (imaginative, rational, contemplative).

The plate also disorients the viewer's sense of space—and, accordingly, the viewer's understanding of the narrative sense of spatial composition. What kind of story is being told, or retold, here? The scene does not depict "Paradise," "that flaming Brand," or "the Gate / With dreadful Faces throng'd and fierie Armes" (12.642-44). Most importantly, we do not see "Thir place of rest, and Providence thir guide" (12.647). Adam and Eve are shown already in exile, moving leftward—or westward?—across the image, counterintuitively inverting Milton's indication of the biblical direction of their expulsion "Eastward" (12.145).

The mezzotint's staging of slippages in spatial orientation also prompts inquiry into the related question of how the work destabilizes the cognate concept of *horizon,* which here, in a visual composition, denotes the tactics by which the work's limits of visibility and comprehensibility are deployed. The term "horizon" carries a distinct resonance in phenomenology and philosophical hermeneutics, where it refers not to a literal visual boundary, but to the shifting limit of understanding—a structure of openness shaped by the interpreter's historical and experiential situation.[245] This usage builds on Edmund Husserl's conception of the "horizon of meaning" as the implicit background against which phenomena appear, and is further developed in thinkers like Paul Ricoeur, who treat horizons as the temporal and narrative limits that condition all interpretation.

For example, the image may be said to look "backward" from the Romantic era fascination with the sublime to the seventeenth-century aesthetic culture's fascination with the baroque (a known element of Milton's aesthetic repertoire, as well).[246] The baroque, notoriously,

[245] See Hans-Georg Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, trans. Joel Weinsheimer and Donald G. Marshall (London: Continuum, 2004), 301-305.

[246] Cf. Murray Roston, *Milton and the Baroque* (London: Faber and Faber, 1980).

with its perspectival experiments and fascination with the fluidity of forms, was associated with popish maneuvers in devotional art to dazzle and bewilder viewers into a state of subjugation before the incomprehensible cosmic power of God (a point Milton satirizes in his similes treating Satan), but there is also a Lucretian dynamism in the baroque that doesn't revert to theological dogma as its ground, and this dynamism, errant and allergic to teleological capture, arguably resurfaces in the Romantic sublime.

The coordinates of the world in Martin's image are seemingly destabilized not only vertically, as in the confused zone of imbrication of heaven and hell, but also on a horizontal scale, as the "East" for Milton becomes "Western" and vice versa (12.141). I refer here to the convention of reading paintings as though left depicts the west and right depicts the east (unless visual details provide different coordinates).[247] In such inversions, the artwork replicates Milton's own baroque disruption of sacred spatial order, suggesting that geographic inversion becomes a cosmopoetic figure for the disordering effects of the Fall. Multiple overlapping horizons appear, disrupting our sense of direction and reinforcing a vision of exile as both physical and metaphysical. The idea of a horizon is further confused by the similarity of the clouds to cavern walls. There is no clear point at which the clouds are separated or separable from the "Hell of Heav'n" (1.255).

The sense of direction is also confused by the depiction of the river in the background. Although the viewer faces south in Martin's composition, both we and the figures of Adam and Eve are already situated east of Paradise. This orientation confirms that the river in the

[247] This convention—where the east is positioned on the right and west on the left—commonly holds in early modern mapmaking, particularly in theological or cosmographic contexts influenced by biblical orientation (e.g., Eden in the east). However, this is not a universal standard in painting, where orientation depends more on the direction of light, narrative composition, and the artist's symbolic intent. In visual art, east-west axes may be reversed, ambiguous, or subordinated to dramatic or allegorical concerns.

background lies to the south of Eden—possibly even southeast—which aligns more closely with the Gihon, the river said in Genesis to encompass the land of Cush, or Ethiopia. Yet, as the most geopolitically and symbolically resonant of Eden's four rivers, the Euphrates also remains a plausible identification—especially if we read the river as a threshold between divine order and historical exile. It might also be a composite river, symbolizing the confluence of the four Edenic rivers—suggesting the loss of Eden as a loss of divine coherence and unity, now dissolved into the chaotic geography of the fallen world. While absolute identification remains speculative, this referential lapse may be the point. The river's ambiguous geographic and symbolic positioning suggests a descent into exilic space—emphasizing postlapsarian rupture. This space positions the idea of "rupture" outside the premodern cosmos, where "postlapsarian" remains a theological as much as historical category. Thus, the engraving's secularizing treatment of spatial details recalibrates understanding of the relation between the human, the cosmos, and the divine.



Figure 9. Martin, "Adam and Eve leave Paradise"[248]

Further, the printing process itself—specifically, the page-setting format—also plays with space and time (Figure 9). From the reader's initial perspective, the image is puzzling, for Adam and Eve are at the top of the image, moving downward. Presumably, the reader will then turn the entire manuscript clockwise to view the image—physically "turning the clock" forward, yet imaginatively returning to the now-legible start of human history. Presenting a complex phenomenology of reading, John Martin's composition and Septimus Prowett's printing, then, subtly align the fall of humanity with both a descent and a return, deterritorializing Eden into the world and detemporalizing the Fall into the present.

[248] Milton, *The Paradise lost of Milton; with illustrations, designed and engraved by John Martin* (London: Septimus Prowett, 1827), Charles E. Young Research Library, Los Angeles, accessed 13 December 2024. Photograph by the author.

Martin imagines the Fall is a new (secular) understanding, wherein Eden is nothing more than the (historical) "world," in the *mode* of a retrospective fantasy. The return is Martin's code for comprehending the "start of history" as always meaning "now." Similarly, Paul Ricoeur distinguishes between origin and beginning, with "origin" referring to the "now" (metatemporally) and "beginning" referring to the commonplace metric of historical chronology.[249] The Fall, for Martin, is inherently a double figure—a historical event and an aspect of human cognition of being in time—detemporalizing the ongoing awakening to the force of the "now," which cannot be reduced to historical markings of time.

Martin's interpretation strips away the quasi-celebratory tone of Milton's ending, allowing the epic's divine comedy to appear tragic. The image's Lucretian, materialist thought moves cosmopoetic gestures of tragedy toward a secularizing plane of perception. The appearance of tragedy itself—considered as a "horizon" of meaning-making—is shorn of the causal backdrop of fate and providence, yet keenly aware of the human propensity for attachments that can be broken. Martin's image resists the notion of providence as a consoling force, instead exposing a world where scapegoating is inevitable. Creatures take the fall for those above them in the hierarchy of Milton's God. The snake crawls on his belly, punished for what his body did when Satan possessed it. All animals are transformed into beasts as a consequence of the disobedience of humans. The human animal is faulted for the guile of Satan. The rebel angels are punished for what God could have prevented. God has transformed earth into a kind of Hell and made his creatures culpable for his world-remaking scheme, though he used them to unknowingly recreate earth.

[249] Paul Ricoeur, *Time and Narrative*, vol. 1, trans. Kathleen McLaughlin and David Pellauer (Chicago: U of Chicago P, 1984), 20–21.

Milton attempts to circumvent this problem, which turns on the question of human perspective, by having The Father determine what is good and evil. The theodicean, appearance-saving position insists that the apparent injustices of the Fall must be judged from the providential deity's elevated scale of vision—intellectually comprehensive, but dramatically and affectively unsatisfying for human agents within the poem. Thus, the modal character of the meta-concept of "horizon" frames *Paradise Lost*'s awkward fit between classical and Judeo-Christian ideas of licit and illicit action. In the Judeo-Christian tradition, the ultimate authority is God, not reason. God may command anyone to perform an action that teleologically suspends universal principles or rules of right action, which apply to everyone at every moment—such as when He commanded Abraham to sacrifice Isaac. In Platonic philosophy, since all moral people would respond in the same way to the same situation, all morally perfect people act the same way. A person who acts morally can justify his actions and can be understood by anyone equally rational. In Plato's *Euthyphro*, Socrates asks his eponymous interlocutor, "Do the gods approve of an action because it is pious, or is it pious because the gods approve of it?"[250] As a good Greek, Euthyphro claims the former, since the gods are rational and so are bound to agree with whatever reason shows to be good. However, the Judeo-Christian tradition is committed to the latter perspective. An action is good because God commands it, and what God commands can be different for each individual. Milton seeks to blend the Judeo-Christian tradition with Platonic philosophy, as Milton's God defines reason. Acting in a blessed compliance with the "Umpire *Conscience*" is to act reasonably, since "Conscience" is another name for "right reason" (3.195).[251] Adam's upright stature and "Sanctitie of Reason" define him as God's last and best

[250] Plato, *Euthyphro*, *The Socratic Dialogues*, trans. Benjamin Jowett (New York: Kaplan, 2009), 15.

[251] Milton, *On Christian Doctrine*, *The Riverside Milton*, 1156-1213: 1.2.

creation, closest to God, of all the earthly creatures, in the new divine hierarchy (7.508). Tellingly, Milton omits, from Michael's prophesy of sacred history, Abraham's near-sacrifice of Isaac—ignoring the problem of a divine decree that only applies to one person. In Milton's scheme, an action is ostensibly reasonable and good because Milton's God approves of it, without consideration of localities of circumstance. Because divine morality universally applies to everyone in every situation, Milton's God approves of an action because it is reasonable and good. Yet the narrative arc of *Paradise Lost* moves nonetheless toward a dogmatically insecure vision, most clearly in the final passages, where the opening onto history is genuinely undetermined.

Milton, then, is not diametrically opposed to Martin; rather, Martin picks up elements that are still emergent and unresolved in Milton. Where *Paradise Lost*'s ending oscillates ambiguously between providential assurance and the uncertainty of human perspective, Martin's composition pushes these ambiguities toward a more secularizing register, stripping away the consolatory tone of the theodicy and underscoring instead the disorientation and estrangement of exile.

Martin's God, occupying a Jovian role in the mezzotint's framework, wields power without necessarily embodying justice. Lightning cuts the sky, like that of the Homeric Zeus, without recourse to an ethical system beyond raw command. Here, Martin's illustration critiques Milton's vision, pushing biblical logic to its extreme: an action is right because God commands it, not because it adheres to any higher moral order. Martin's God is Homeric, rather than Platonic. The Homeric gods were also committed to a species of "Judeo-Christian" logic: An action is "right" because a god commands it, but those commands could contradict each other. Milton's God is also Homeric, though Milton wants to position him as Platonic. Tellingly,

Paradise Lost depicts Homeric polytheism as hellish in Book I, then monotheism as heavenly in Book III. Yet the only real difference between these depictions is the number of spirits holding power: many oligarchs in Hell, and one dictator in Heaven.

The question of *mode* (in the sense of *genre*) is relevant here. Martin's visual vocabulary lacks the literal grammar that Milton enjoys in writing an epic poem. Therefore, the mezzotint does not have the resources of temporal and verbal dilation—the space and time wherein to promote the theodicean argument and create effects of "plausible deniability" on behalf of the premodern, theological defense of God's actions. Because of this absence, Martin's visual vocabulary offers instead an arresting "shorthand" of the depicted action, which effectually exposes the (otherwise only intermittently legible) logic of raw command.

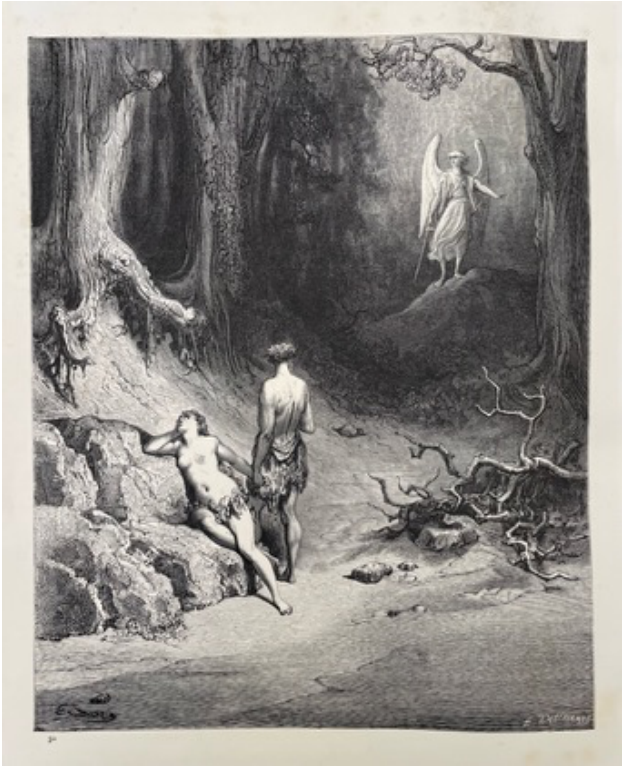


Figure 10. Gustave Doré, "Some natural tears they dropt, but wiped them soon"[252]

[252] Milton, *Milton's Paradise Lost, illustrated by Gustave Doré* (London and New York: Cassell, Petter, and Galpin, 1866), The British Museum, London, accessed 14 November 2024, photograph by the author.

In contrast, Gustave Doré's and Émile Deschamps's 1866 image of the expulsion draws on a different visual mode, which suspends meaning rather than declaring it, and invites reflection rather than submission. Doré and Deschamps center the reader's gaze on the inscrutability of (un)fallen perception, crafting a visual field where the conditions of sight are themselves ambiguous. The design's ambiguity brings out epistemological instability. In Plate 50 (Figure 10), Adam appears to be looking at Michael, but his back is turned on the viewer, so his eyes may be downcast. The figure's vision and the viewer's vision of him are both obstructed.

The ambiguity evident in Plate 50 has long shaped the way scholars interpret Doré's *Paradise Lost* engravings. Joanna Richardson emphasizes how Doré's Milton illustrations exemplify the monumental scale and spectacular quality of his style, which made him immensely popular but also suspect in elite critical circles.[253] Michael Steadman similarly observes that Doré's visualizations foreground atmospheric mood and dramatic contrasts of light and shadow, privileging spectacle over narrative subtlety.[254] More recent commentators, such as W.J.T. Mitchell, point out that Doré's engravings participate in a broader nineteenth-century discourse of reproducibility, where illustration becomes a form of cultural translation across media.[255] My reading builds on these insights, but attends to how Doré's compositional choices—especially his consistent use of overwhelming scale and plunging perspective—collapse the human into the immensity of natural and supernatural orders, thereby amplifying the tension between Milton's theological teleology and the Romantic inheritance of the sublime.

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[253] Joanna Richardson, *Gustave Doré* (London: Cassell, 1983), 102-8.

[254] Michael Steadman, *Gustave Doré* (New York: Praeger, 1973), 145-53.

[255] Mitchell, *Iconology: Image, Text, Ideology* (Chicago: U of Chicago P, 1986), esp. 104-10.



Figure 11. Doré, “Some natural tears they dropt, but wiped them soon” (detail)

Michael, with his severe, squinting gaze, looks down at Adam and Eve. Yet his posture makes it unclear whether he truly sees them, or something beyond. Because his chin is parallel with the frame of the illustration, the viewer cannot be certain if he looks at (or above) the humans—or whether his eyes are fully open. He guards the gate to the world of light, but he himself is framed in shadows.

Although he revealed the future to Adam, Doré’s Michael may misunderstand his own existential position of being responsible for the world-remaking failures of God. There are different scales of referred responsibility here, going back as far as Satan’s own freedom to choose rebellion. In terms of God’s overarching responsibility, Satan’s choice itself has been *allowed* by God, even though it is Satan who pays the price. In this regard, Michael may be even more responsible than Satan for perpetrating and perpetuating God’s cosmopoetic failures precisely because Michael does not view them as failures.



Figure 12. Doré, "Some natural tears they dropt, but wiped them soon" (detail)

As for Eve, her face is turned upward and away, yet the shading in the corner of her eye suggests that she might also be looking sideways, as if uncertain of her own trajectory. In the stages of melancholia described in *Saturn and Melancholy*, Eve's gesture here may also suggest the uncertainty through the iconographic allusion to melancholic stalling or paralysis.[256] Because of the shading in the foreground, Adam and Eve appear to be on the "shore" of Paradise, leading to an unknown "sea" beyond their sight. If we take the shadow in the corner of Eve's eye as her pupil, then she is the only one who dares to gaze beyond the "shore" into the yet unknown world. Of course, none of the depicted characters look at the viewer; i.e., none of them fully sees the modern, fallen world they have helped inaugurate, whether knowingly or not. Is their future the same as ours?

[256] Klibansky, Panofsky, and Saxl., esp. 60-2 and 268-75, on the stages and iconographic codes of melancholia.



Figure 13. Doré, "O Earth, how like to Heaven, if not preferred / More justly"[257]



Figure 14. Doré, "Back to the thicket slunk The guilty serpent"[258]

Toward the end of Doré's series, both Satan and Adam visually adopt a fallen perspective associated, again, with the iconographic history of melancholia. The only character in the manuscript who may be able to "see" us is Satan. In Plate 37 (Figure 13), the melancholia trope is unmistakable, with Satan's head resting on his clenched fist. Ostensibly lost in thought, Satan's eyes also appear to penetrate beyond the frame and behold the viewer's space—gazing into the modern, fallen world. Meanwhile, in the background shadows, Adam and Eve look at each other. They are in the dark, but (in keeping with his former name, Lucifer) he bears the light of knowledge. Yet this light makes his eyes appear dark and severe. In the background of Plate

[257] Milton, *Milton's Paradise Lost, illustrated by Gustave Doré*.

[258] Id.

40 (Figure 14), Adam himself takes on demonic attributes, his satanically contemplative pose resembling that of Milton's tragic archfiend. As previously mentioned, this pose is one of the classic iconographic codes for melancholia, as depicted in Dürer's "Melancholia I."[259]

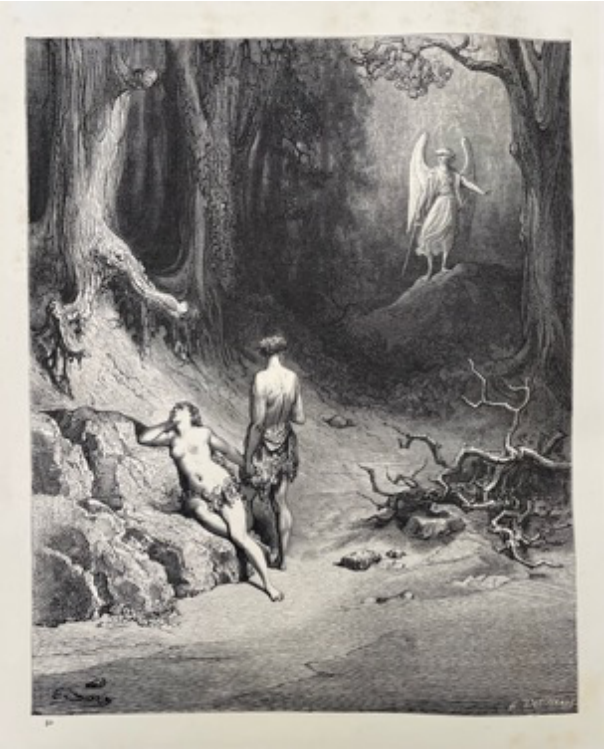


Figure 15. Doré, "Some natural tears they dropt, but wiped them soon"

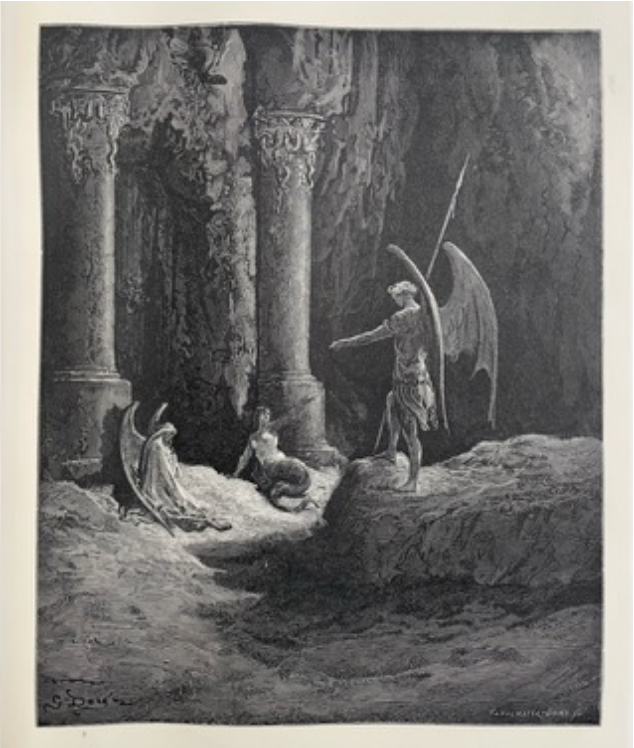


Figure 16. Doré, "Before the gates there sat On either side a formidable shape"[260]

Returning to Plate 50 (Figure 10), we should note that the composition recalls that of Plate 8 (Figure 16). While Plate 50 depicts the expulsion of Adam and Eve in book 12 of *Paradise Lost*, Plate 8 visualizes Satan's approach to the gates of Hell in book 2. Both plates illustrate a warlike angel, with his arm outstretched on a hill, looking down on two figures—male and female—near a gate. In Plate 8, the angel is Satan, the male and female figures are Death and Sin, and the gate is the portal of Hell. The key compositional feature, however, turns

[259] Klibansky, Panofsky, and Saxl.

[260] Id.

on the perspectival arrangement. Everything beyond the large boulder, on which Satan stands, is meticulously detailed. Satan's back is turned on us, approximating Satan's third-person limited perspective. In Plate 50, the angel is Michael, the male and female figures are Adam and Eve, and the gate is the eastern entrance of Eden. Here, with Adam, we look at the angel Michael, rather than seeing Adam and Eve from the angel's vantage point, as we do in Plate 8 with Satan, Death, and Sin. Because the perspectival arrangement invites us to inhabit the viewing positions of Satan and Adam, we therefore are induced to see ourselves, our condition as historical subjects, as inhabiting the myth's designation of historical life as "fallen." Crucially, we see the gate of Hell, but not of Paradise. Behind Michael, the trees and vegetation dissolve in rills of light, as if (instead of the cherubim and flaming sword) he guards the unseen gate.

The visual reinterpretations of this final moment sharpen awareness of *Paradise Lost*'s textual ambivalence, by reinforcing the idea of failure not just as a thematic element among others in the story of the Fall, but as an epistemological condition of postlapsarian existence. Blake, Martin, and Doré illuminate the ways Milton's vaunted theodicy—to "justifie the wayes of God to men" (1.26)—ultimately fails to negotiate between divine providence and human suffering, even as the virtuosic blending of generic modes (epic, philosophical argument, tragedy, fictive historiography) expose the transformative potential inherent in Milton's worldmaking failures. This is demonstrated in the tactical imbalance between Satan's bravura persona and his catastrophic ambition, in the theological gravitas but narrative impoverishment of the Father (no reader wishes for more information on the Father's design for the world), and in the poem's staged reticence on the consolations of the *felix culpa* as the long-range solution to the ontological condition of suffering and finitude. These artworks give visually arresting nuance to the fractures in Milton's theodicy, illustrating how failure—exposed as a structural feature of

shifting yet inescapable horizons of legibility and understanding—operates both as a mode of world-remaking and as a means of existential reckoning. In these interpretations, the contrast between textual and visual narrative also underscores the modal aspects of failure—how world-remaking, even in its most divine form, carries the weight of its own catastrophic consequences.

As Adam and Eve embark into the beginning of "fallen" history, their passage marks a dynamic and unresolved tension between humanist and posthumanist ideology (i.e., between *Paradise Lost*'s Protestant vision of re-imparadising readers and its real-world failure to do so). Thus the denouement of Milton's epic gestures toward an anti-modernist modernity, wherein original sin, coded as the ultimate world-remaking failure, produces a space of freedom "to choose" where to wander—an essential modernist aspiration—but in which Adam and Eve are held responsible for all with which they interact—a resilient premodern humanist sense of centrality in the cosmos (12.646). Milton's historical limit includes the poem's emergent sense of a core problem in posthumanist thought: how to wrest ethical agency and responsibility from its moorings in deontology and providential metaphysics (a problem with which Kant, Leibniz, and Levinas famously struggle). Here, at the denouement of the poem's action, at the imagined genesis of history, one witnesses a "metaphysical catastrophe" understood as a theological accomplishment.[261] It is a world characterized by tension between two obverse sides of catastrophe: The appearance of a serene arrival is shadowed by the figuration of expulsion. The traumatized creatures to be called "human" remain oblivious to their own existential position of being embedded in and held accountable for the world-remaking failures of Milton's God. The unanswered question for Milton, and perhaps also for his late modern readers, is whether the

[261] Nelson Maldonado-Torres, "Outline of Ten Theses on Coloniality and Decoloniality" (Paris: Fondation Frantz Fanon, 2016).

future of cosmopoetic schemes will find new ways to align accountability and failure with unexpected consequences. What would the genre, or mix of genres, be? Milton does not know the answer. But he sees the question.

Coda: Toward a Poetics of Modal Failure

I have argued that failure, far from marking an endpoint or collapse, operates as a generative force within the cosmopoetic imaginations of early modern literature. By tracing how authors from Donne to Milton engaged the modalities of being, knowing, and creating, under conditions of metaphysical uncertainty and historical rupture, I have proposed that failure becomes the ground from which new worlds are envisioned—even when such worlds remain incomplete, deferred, or fragmentary.

In Donne's parasitic errancy, Marvell's garden of recursive deferral, Cavendish's baroque doubling, Shakespeare's juridical silences, and Milton's tragic hope, we witness a literature not content to simply represent collapse, but to experiment with the forms and affects of speculative survival. These writers do not merely diagnose crisis. They imagine how language, form, and genre might metabolize it. Their works refuse both naïve teleology and nihilistic foreclosure. Instead, they stage failure as a modal field: a space in which multiple futures and ontologies are tested, some extinguished, others provisionally sustained.

Under pressure, the early modern texts examined here reconfigure allegory, genre, and theology, inviting the reader to dwell in incompletion. Through this lens, Milton's epic does not resolve so much as suspend, placing its eschatological logic under aesthetic and philosophical scrutiny. Likewise, the visual afterlives of *Paradise Lost* reveal the endurance of this modal openness, as artists reimagine Milton's cosmology in ways that foreground perception, disorientation, and the thresholds of meaning.

Ultimately, this study contributes to an understanding of early modern literature as a site of cosmopoetic labor, where the imagination contends with the brokenness of the world, without relinquishing the drive to remake it. In an era increasingly defined by planetary crisis, political

fragmentation, and epistemic disarray, the texts I have analyzed offer an alternative poetics—not of mastery or progress, but of dissonant creation: a world-remaking that begins, as it must, with the recognition of what has already failed.

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