In Despite of Heav'n

Theomachy in John Milton's Paradise Lost

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John Milton's *Paradise Lost* (1667, 1674) provides a chronicle of the time from Alpha to Omega, from the very beginnings of the universe to the apocalypse.[1] In this, the poem fulfils the 'encyclopedic quality' that Northrop Frye identifies as fundamental to the Renaissance epic (Frye 37). The encyclopedic poem was prestigious, Frye argues, because Christian philosophy, theology and scripture were encyclopedic in shape:

> The Bible, considered in its literary aspect, is a definitive encyclopedic poem starting with the beginning of time at the creation, ending with the end of time at the Last Judgment, and surveying the entire history of man, under the symbolic names of Adam and Israel, in between. (Frye 41)

What Frye calls the 'total action' of *Paradise Lost*, comprising the 'foreground action' of Books I–IV and IX–X and the 'context' narrated by the angels in Books V–VIII and XI–XII, is the action of the Bible, the history of time from Genesis to Revelation.

Ubiquitous in and emphatically central to the encyclopedic action of *Paradise Lost* is the theme of "theomachy", defined by Pramit Chaudhuri as 'war with god', a 'fight [...] whether literal or figurative' against the celestial powers (Chaudhuri 4, 6). Such altercations form the majority of the crucial events in the poem's plot: Satan's rebellion, the War in Heaven, the Fall itself and many of the future occurrences prophesied by Michael. It is by recounting such theomachic conflicts that *Paradise Lost* depicts past, present and future, understanding the structure of historical time through the framework of repeated struggles with God.

The argument of this paper is primarily indebted to the "non-good-God" school of Milton criticism—best known in William Empson's *Milton's God* (1961) and more recently found in the work of Michael Bryson—in that no attempt will be made to justify Milton's God as good. This is not to say that Empson's characterization of Milton's God as 'wicked' or Bryson's as tyrannical will be working assumptions (Empson 11); rather that here the Father and the Son will be examined as literary figures, emphatically not as theological ones. As Bryson argues, 'What Milton presents [...] is not God, but an *image* of God, a poetic character drawn from the human imagination' and 'Milton's poetic character is not an absolute representation of God. Neither is it to be taken as simply identifiable with the God in which Milton believed' (Bryson 17–18, 24).

I will not, therefore, attempt to reconcile the 'authoritarian character' Empson observes in the God of *Paradise Lost* with the God of the Christian tradition, nor characterize Satan as a hero

[1] All quotations from *Paradise Lost* are taken from the twelve-book 1674 version (See Milton 207–469) and abbreviated '*PL*', followed by Book and line references.

against such authoritarianism: the moral rectitude, or lack thereof, of these figures is beyond the scope of this paper (Empson 103). Rather, we will address the dynamics through which the narrative operates in a poem influenced by Christian and other religious narratives instead of viewing the text as a theological exposition of the Christian God as Milton personally understood him.

I. Theomachy

In his discussion of classical theomachy, Chaudhuri argues that theomachic narratives concern 'ideas of warring against the gods, ascent to the heavens, and overcoming the obstacles of nature' (Chaudhuri 4). It is important to re-emphasize that the 'war with God' may be 'literal or figurative', since, like the Classical literature that Chaudhuri discusses, the Miltonic material with which we are concerned only partially involves literal fighting.

The fulcrum of the narrative, the Fall of Man, constitutes a figurative theomachy. It is orchestrated by Satan 'all to spite | The great Creator' and, according to Raphael, 'As a despite done against the most High' (*PL* II. 384–85, VI. 906). There is no violence, let alone warfare, against God, but Eve's fall and to a lesser extent Adam's are motivated by a desire to rise to the status of deity. In Book III the Father foretells that 'Man disobeying [...] sins | Against the high Supremacy of Heaven, | Affecting God-head' (*PL* III. 203–6). Eve is persuaded by the serpent's promise that she and Adam 'shall be as Gods [...] putting off | Human, to put on Gods' and eats the fruit with 'expectation high | Of knowledge, nor was God-head from her thought' (*PL* IX. 708–14, 789–90). When she relates what she has done to Adam, she describes herself as 'growing up to Godhead' and claims to have achieved the status of 'Deity' (*PL* IX. 877, 885).

Adam appears in general more skeptical, taking the fruit more because he wishes to share Eve's fate, for good or ill, than out of a desire to rise to Godhead. However, at one point he does seem to persuade himself that by eating the fruit they will 'likely' achieve an 'ascent, which cannot be | But to be Gods, or Angels Demi-gods,' and once both are fallen, they 'fancy that they feel | Divinity within them breeding wings | Wherewith to scorn the Earth' (*PL* IX. 935–7, 1009–11). The aspiration to Godhead—Chaudhuri's 'ascent to the heavens' motif—is, as we shall see, central to the theomachy of other figures in the poem, particularly Satan and Nimrod.

Chaudhuri stresses the capacity of theomachy to act as 'an apt image for [...] cultural and power struggles,' on account of 'the classical Greek sense that opposition to the gods signified a wide range of challenges to intellectual and social norms' and the 'assumption that fighting the gods entails also a violent attack against the standing order, represented and embodied by the gods themselves' (Chaudhuri 7, 8). Thus, the theomachic narrative becomes a means to examine and address the power structures of the place and time in which the author lives:

> Through the rise and fall of the theomach [warrior against God], authority (divine or human) impresses on the audience both its own validity and recognition of the hierarchies of power. A closer examination of theomachy thus enables a closer scrutiny of authority: as the theomach probes potential weaknesses in authority and instabilities in the hierarchies of power, so with that knowledge comes the opportunity for authority to evolve or change altogether. (Chaudhuri 328)

These observations are apt, and could apply to *Paradise Lost*, if read as a commentary on the Commonwealth and Restoration of Seventeenth-Century Britain, as in Bryson's *The Tyranny of Heaven*

(2004), for example.

What Chaudhuri misses, however, is the etiological function of the theomachic narrative. Theomachy is a prominent feature of the Classical and Judeo-Christian stories of the primordial and is fundamental to their etiological enterprise. These narratives explain how the blissful world of the Golden Age or prelapsarian Eden transformed into a world in which suffering is ubiquitous. The answer in both cases is that one or more individuals (Prometheus, or Satan, Eve and Adam) committed a crime against the original standing order (the classical pantheon or Heaven) in response to which the celestial powers reasserted their dominance and punished the theomach(s) and the people(s) for which they stood as champion or progenitor. Discussing 'the motif of theomachy as a sin', Levon Abrahamian identifies 'the primordial sin of man's forefathers—disobedience to the will of God (cf. rivalry with god/father)' (Abrahamian 89, 92). This is equally the sin of Prometheus, the early champion and/or progenitor of mankind, and of Adam and Eve, the first humans.

Milton, like many Renaissance thinkers, frequently wove together the Classical and Judeo-Christian versions of this etiology. In Book IV of *Paradise Lost*, he esteems Eve above Pandora, who 'ensnar'd | Mankind with her fair looks, to be aveng'd | On him who had stole *Jove's* authentic fire', namely Prometheus (*PL* IV. 717–19). In *The Doctrine and Discipline of Divorce* (1643, 1644), Milton calls Eve a 'Pandora' and Adam 'our true Epimetheus', referring to the brother of Prometheus, victim of the Pandora revenge plot in the Hesiodic story (Milton 714). In Book XI, Milton compares Adam and Eve to '*Deucalion* and chaste *Pyrrha*', son of Prometheus and daughter of Epimetheus respectively (*PL* XI. 12).[2] Milton also alludes to various theomachic figures, both classical and Biblical, in describing Satan, including the '*Titanian* [...] that warr'd on *Jove*', the race of gods that included Prometheus and Epimetheus (*PL* I. 198).

Chaudhuri argues that 'If classical theomachy teaches us one thing, it is to shift attention from the result of the battle to the fight itself, for it is in the moment of collision, and in the welter of beliefs that come together, that we learn how the world is defined' (Chaudhuri 328). He refers here to the definition of the world in which a theomachic narrative is written. However, in the case of a creation narrative such as *Paradise Lost*, theomachic conflicts also teach us how the world was originally defined, how it was first redefined in response to the original theomachic act, and how those definitions brought us to the present.

II. Retrospection and Anticipation

Theomachic sin may form a fundamental part of a creation mythology, an etiology of humanity, but through that etiology, more than our origins may be elucidated. Abrahamian highlights the pairing of 'Prometheus ("foresight", literally "one who foresees, forebodes")' and his brother 'Epimetheus ("wise behindhand")' (Abrahamian, 97). Embodied in these two theomachic figures is the pairing of retrospection and anticipation, perception of the past and the future. The brothers are also intrinsically connected to the origins of humanity, invariably appearing in Classical myth as champions, creators or progenitors of mankind. It is in their capacity as progenitors that Milton alludes to them in *Paradise Lost* by comparing Adam and Eve to Deucalion and Pyrrha, children of the brothers, from whom the entire subsequent human race is descended.

In Plato's version of the story, within *Protagoras*, Epimetheus' error—'squander[ing] his stock of properties on the brutes [...] le[aving] unequipped the race of men'—necessitates Prometheus'

[2]Further examples: 'On the Morning of Christ's Nativity', stanza xiv; Prolusion II (See Milton 46–7, 604).

theomachy:

> Then Prometheus, in his perplexity as to what preservation he could devise for man, stole from Hephaestus and Athena wisdom in the arts together with fire [...] but Prometheus, through Epimetheus' fault, later on (the story goes) stood his trial for theft. (Quoted in Dorfman 61)

Eran Dorfman argues that this tale demonstrates the mutual dependence of anticipation and retrospection, for 'it is only at the *meeting point* of the two brothers that they both realize the qualities implied in their names; it is only when they encounter each other that Epimetheus can look backward to understand his forgetfulness and Prometheus can look forward to find a solution to the problem' (Dorfman, 63). The pairing is highly significant in theomachic creation narratives: to explain the fallen world, we look back to our origins and original sins against Heaven; this in turn allows us to perceive the trajectory from original sin to apocalypse. Thus, through retrospection we are able to anticipate the end of humanity—etiology enables eschatology, as Milton's Adam highlights in exclaiming, 'How soon hath thy prediction, Seer blest, | Measur'd this transient World, the Race of time, | Till time stand fixt' (*PL* XII. 553–5).

On top of the allusions to Prometheus and Epimetheus (and their children) discussed above, Milton also provides his own figuration of the pairing in his archangel narrators: Raphael is sent to forewarn (anticipation) Adam of the danger that Satan presents by telling him about the war that occurred in Heaven (retrospection); Michael, the 'Seer blest', is dispatched to reprimand (retrospection) Adam for the Fall and relate the consequent trajectory of future time up until the apocalypse itself (anticipation).[3] Retrospection and anticipation are not only mutually dependent, as Dorfman argues, but also mutually complementary: narratives of the past become cautionary tales for the future, while prophecies of future events become retrospective critiques of the acts that eventually cause those future events. The archangels are not theomachs themselves, as Prometheus and less directly Epimetheus are,[4] but their reason for speaking to Adam is the Fall, a figurative theomachy, and their narratives prominently feature the theomachic exploits of rebel angels and fallen human beings.

Michael is sent to 'reveal | To *Adam* what shall come in future days' and under his influence Adam 'to foresight wak'st' (*PL* XI. 113–4, 368). Adam's first vision enables him to 'behold | Th' effects which [his] original crime hath wrought' (*PL* XI. 423–4). This is an exercise in anticipation—seeing the future—which facilitates retrospection on the Fall. Through Michael's Promethean foresight, Adam sees the future mankind undertaking Promethean activities: a man 'at the Forge | Laboring' to produce 'Iron and Brass', with which he makes 'First his own Tools; then, what might else be wrought | Fusile or grav'n in metal' (*PL* XI. 564–73). Man learns metalworking and other crafts ($\tau\acute{\epsilon}\chi\nu\eta$) through the discovery of fire, Prometheus' principal gift to humanity. Like Olympus, Milton's heaven looks on such activities with ill favor:

> [S]tudious they appear
> Of Arts that polish Life, Inventors rare,
> Unmindful of thir Maker, though his Spirit
> Taught them, but they his gifts acknowledg'd none. (*PL* XI. 609–12)

[3] The identification of Michael with foreseeing Prometheus is not unprecedented: the archangel Michael is 'Prometheus's counterpart' in the Talmudic version of the Creation (See Graves 35).

[4] While he never rebelled against Zeus, as Prometheus did, Epimetheus did join Prometheus to war against Cronus in Aeschylus' version of the story (See Graves 144).

Man strives for independence from God: inventing tools and other means of survival, he believes himself to be self-sufficient. This is a theomachic hubris, an attempt, like Satan's, to set oneself up as independent of the God to whom everything is owed.

We see much the same hubris in the next generation of men, who prove themselves through 'Might' and are 'styl'd great Conquerers, | Patrons of Mankind, Gods, and Sons of Gods, | Destroyers rightlier call'd' (*PL* XI. 689–97). These are the 'Giants', archetypally theomachic figures, undertaking 'gigantic deeds' for which they are heralded as divine (*PL* XI. 642, 688, 659). Just as their fathers strove for independence from God through craft, so these Giants seek to replace God in glory.

Michael's prophecies of future human theomachy reach a climax with his foretelling of the Tower of Babel, 'whose top may reach to Heav'n', built by the theomach Nimrod 'in despite of Heav'n, | Or from Heav'n claiming second Sovranty' (*PL* XII. 44, 34–5): Michael here explicitly characterizes Nimrod's actions as an affront to Heaven; an attempt to challenge Heaven by reaching its heights or to masquerade as a divinely appointed sovereign. Milton alludes here to the Divine Right of Kings, the Stuart justification for monarchical rule until 1649, against which Milton was a prominent polemical voice. As Richard F. Hardin notes, Milton had already drawn a parallel between Nimrod and European monarchs in *Eikonoklastes* (1649), emphasizing that they 'receive thir power, not from God, but from the beast' (Hardin, 42). In *Paradise Lost*, the claim to Divine Right is likewise presented as Nimrod 'to himself assuming | Authority usurpt, from God not giv'n' (*PL* XII. 65–6). Nimrod 'from Rebellion shall derive his name, | Though of Rebellion others he accuse' (*PL* XII. 36–7). Like Charles I, who claimed that his trial and execution were rebellions against his divine authority, Nimrod will name those who do not bow to his will rebels, yet by his usurpation of divine authority he himself is a rebel against God.

That Nimrod's name derives from his rebellion recalls the poem's central theomach, '*Satan* (for I glory in the name, | Antagonist of Heav'n's Almighty King)' (*PL* X. 386–7). Just as Satan takes his name from *ha-satan* (the Obstructer, the Adversary), so Nimrod takes his from *marad* (rebel).[5] The similarities between the two do not end here: the Tower threatens to '[o]bstruct' those of Heaven—an etymologically *Satan*ic enterprise—and Adam remarks that 'to God his Tower intends | Siege and defiance', much like Satan's rebellion, which manifests in military defiance during the War in Heaven, his armies 'besieging' the throne of God (*PL* XII. 52, 73–4, V. 869). Hardin notes several textual parallels between the Tower of Babel and Pandæmonium, which connect Nimrod's theomachic enterprise to Satan's (Hardin, 42). He also cites Philo's description of Nimrod as 'the soul which [...] makes war on heaven' and Isidore's as 'a type of Satan who tried to rise to the heights of heaven' (Hardin, 39). Through these parallels Michael's anticipation of Nimrod's theomachy invites retrospection on that of Satan, which led to Eve's Fall and subsequently Adam's.

Adam's responses to the visions and narrations offered by Michael serve to illustrate the emotional impact of these anticipations and retrospections. At the nadirs of future time, such as the Flood, Adam despairs of Michael's purpose:

> Let no man seek
> Henceforth to be foretold what shall befall
> Him or his Children, evil he may be sure,
> Which neither his foreknowing can prevent,
> And hee the future evil shall no less

[5] According to Hardin, this etymology for Nimrod's name is erroneous, but 'still flourished in the late seventeenth century' (See Hardin 38–39). Hughes accepts the etymology as legitimate and, in any case, Milton's text seems to assume its rectitude (See Milton 454).

> In Apprehension than in substance feel
> Grievous to bear. (*PL* XI. 770–76)

Though he laments having to experience it, Adam here demonstrates the didactic power of Michael's instruction: through foresight, Adam is able to see the terrible destruction his actions have caused, enabling him to repent of it.

Adam is eventually persuaded of the merit of Michael's tutelage by the consolation it brings him, 'reviv[ing] [...] assur'd that Man shall live' (*PL* XI. 871–2). His later pronouncements about what he has seen and heard demonstrate an understanding, conscious or unconscious, of the workings of anticipation and retrospection we have discussed. He celebrates:

> That all this good of evil shall produce,
> And evil turn to good; more wonderful
> Than that which by creation first brought forth
> Light out of darkness! (*PL* XII. 470–73)

In other words, Adam finds consolation in comparing the eschatological good (redemption) he learns from Michael with the etiological good (creation) he had learnt from Raphael. He is at Dorfman's '*meeting point*' of the Promethean and Epimethean, where retrospection and anticipation operate in conjunction. Adam is consoled by the combination of foresight and hindsight.

Adam is taught by the 'example' of Jesus, whom he 'Acknowledge[s] [his] Redeemer' millennia before the incarnation (*PL* XII. 572–3). Michael's anticipatory prophecies enable the retrospective act of learning by example long before the example itself is set, and they allow Adam, the progenitor of all humanity, to achieve justification *sola fide*. Thus, it is implied, redemption is offered to all humanity from the very beginning. Indeed, Adam and Eve leave Eden 'Both in one Faith unanimous though sad, | With cause for evils past, yet much more cheer'd | With meditation on the happy end' (*PL* XII. 603–5). Guided by faith, they are mindful both retrospectively (of 'evils past') and in anticipation (of 'happy end').

Arthur O. Lovejoy describes Adam's realization that 'evil [shall] turn to good' and his subsequent uncertainty 'Whether I should repent me now of sin [...] or rejoice | Much more, that much more good thereof shall spring' as 'Milton's expression of what may be called the Paradox of the Fortunate Fall' (Lovejoy 162). The Fall, Lovejoy argues, must seem a 'deplorable thing' when it takes place, yet appear a *felix culpa* or 'Fortunate Fall' by the end of the poem:

> The only solution was to keep the two themes separate. In the part of the narrative dealing primarily with the Fall, the thought that it was after all a *felix culpa* must not be permitted explicitly to intrude; that was to be reserved for the conclusion, where it could heighten the happy final consummation by making the earlier and unhappy episodes in the story appear as instrumental to that consummation. (Lovejoy 179)

The separation of themes that Lovejoy describes is achieved through the poetics of retrospection and anticipation. In Book IX the Fall appears a tragedy, but in Book XII, by looking ahead to the Redemption and subsequently back on the Fall, Adam discovers that his *culpa* is *felix*.

The text is as explicit about the retrospective and anticipatory function of Raphael's narrative as it is about that of Michael's. The Father instructs the affable angel to inform Adam of what has already taken place 'Lest willfully transgressing he pretend | Surprisal, unadmonisht, unforewarn'd' (*PL* V. 244–5). Richard Strier argues that the Father must 'anticipate objections' to his justice in the aftermath of the Fall, since it is 'in response to an anticipated (or foreseen) accusation that Milton's God [...] makes his point about human responsibility' (Strier 182). Here Strier refers

specifically to the Father's first speech in Book III, when he asserts that mankind cannot 'justly accuse | Thir maker' of causing the Fall, for 'they themselves decreed | Thir own revolt' and 'they themselves ordain'd thir fall' (*PL* III. 116–17, 128). The same motivation is at work in Book V, however, for the Father sends Raphael to preempt an objection he anticipates Adam making, namely that he was not forewarned about Satan's arrival in Eden.

The means of preempting these anticipated objections is a retrospective narrative. Raphael will recount the past in anticipation of what may come, 'that [Adam may] beware | By what is past' (*PL* VI. 894–5). By hearing the history of Satan's rebellion, Adam will be forewarned, and cannot pretend otherwise. This temporal manipulation is mirrored on the level of narrative structure: the poem having begun *in medias res*, we are almost as ignorant as Adam about the events that Raphael recounts. Just as Adam must be informed so that he may not claim to have fallen out of ignorance, so we must learn what has taken place in order to understand the narrative of the poem and connect Satan's theomachy to the human Fall.

Raphael makes this connection clear, explaining in no uncertain terms that his tale concerns 'those too high aspiring, who rebell'd' and repeatedly highlighting disobedience as the cause of the sufferings experienced by the rebel angels (*PL* VI. 899). The 'happy state' of angels holds 'while [their] obedience holds': the rebels learn fear and pain once 'to such evil brought | By sin of disobedience', while the faithful angels receive 'high advantages [...] above thir foes, not to have sinn'd, | Not to have disobey'd' (*PL* V. 536–7, VI. 395–6, 401–3). Raphael concludes on the hope that it may 'profit [Adam] to have heard | By terrible Example the reward | Of disobedience' (*PL* VI. 909–11). Through this retrospective 'Example', Adam has been forewarned that the consequences of his disobedience will be dire. The warning is especially clear to the reader, given the emphasis placed on disobedience in the very first line of the poem. Milton also offers us a particularly poignant demonstration of how Raphael's retrospective account can enable accurate anticipation of the future in a brief digression on the ordnance invented by the rebel angels:

> In future days, if Malice should abound,
> Some one intent on mischief, or inspir'd
> With dev'lish machination might devise
> Like instrument to plague the Sons of men
> For sin, on war and mutual slaughter bent. (*PL* VI. 502–06)

Milton had lived through a catastrophic war in the 1640s, and the reality of the innumerable deaths by cannon-fire in the wars of Early Modern Europe was inescapable. Putting the conjecture of this possible future into Raphael's mouth, Milton gives his warnings an alarming pertinence.

III. Warring Spirits

In Raphael's account of the War in Heaven, we see the dynamics of retrospection and anticipation in action in the sole instance of literal theomachy—actual war against God—in the poem. The retrospective account of the War functions not only as a warning to Adam but as a quasi-prophecy: Raphael recounts occurrences that foreshadow or prefigure future events. As we have seen, theomachic figures in Michael's prophecy, such as Nimrod, recall previous theomachic figures, such as Satan. In Raphael's narrative, theomachic rebellions anticipate similar events in the future. As we shall see, not only do literal theomachic acts in Book VI in themselves have potential cosmic impli-

cations, but the literal theomachy of the War in Heaven also prefigures the figurative theomachy of Man.

To qualify, it is questionable exactly how literal the War in Heaven is. Raphael ponders 'how [he shall] relate | To human sense th' invisible exploits | Of warring Spirits' and resolves to do so 'By lik'ning spiritual to corporal forms, | As may express [such things] best' (*PL* V. 564–66, 573–74). However, Raphael counters these same epistemological doubts by pondering whether 'Earth | Be but the shadow of Heav'n, and things therein | Each to other like more than on Earth is thought' (*PL* V. 574–76). With this latter suggestion in mind, and given the fact that they are still 'warring Spirits', even if their 'exploits' may be unintelligible to human minds, it does not seem unreasonable to consider this a literal war. Raphael describes it as such, whatever qualifications he gives, and his narrative includes allusions to scenes of literal theomachic warfare in classical poetry.

Merritt Y. Hughes compares the 'fiery Cope' (*PL* VI. 215) under which the angels war to the sky 'darkened by missiles in the struggle of the giants with the gods' in Hesiod's *Theogony*, and connects the 'Hills amid the Air encounter[ing] Hills | Hurl'd to and fro with jaculation dire' (*PL* VI. 664–65) to 'the volleys of mountains thrown by the contending giants and titans in Hesiod's story' (Milton 328, 339). Hughes also cites Todd's argument, that Milton is asserting his story as the 'real event' that inspired the 'clouded tradition' of the classical theomachy (Milton 361). In other words, not only is the War in Heaven a literal theomachy, it is the very theomachy of which Hesiod's story is but an imperfect rendering.

Arnold Stein argues that the War in Heaven serves to ridicule a 'materialistic concept of *might*' (Stein 25). The rebel angels believe that they can challenge God through sheer force. However, 'Might, elevated to an absolute, proves an impostor in the divine comedy once it comes face to face with the direct expression of God's will. The rebels must be taught in terms of the value they hold' (Stein 27). According to this reading, the rebels are ridiculous because they make a futile attempt to conquer God by the physical means of warfare, and God condescends to fight with them on their own terms only to demonstrate their foolishness. It is true that, in Stein's terms, the rebellion is an ill-founded attempt to challenge a spiritual hierarchy by material means. What Stein describes as ludicrous, however, I would characterize as poignant.

The rebel enterprise is fundamentally flawed because they have severely underestimated their foe. They do not, as Abdiel points out, 'think how vain | Against th' Omnipotent to rise in Arms' when God 'at one blow | Unaided could have finisht' them (*PL* VI. 135–36, 140–41). The Father, we later discover, 'suspend[s]' the 'doom' of the battle, maintaining the stalemate until the Son enters the fray. Stein implies that the rebels' ignorance of this, their failure to recognize that they cannot win, is ridiculous. On the contrary, I contend that this suspension of doom derives from the *Iliad*, in which Zeus controls the war from on high, bringing the Achaians almost to defeat so that Achilleus' entrance brings him more glory. This does not make the feats of Diomedes or Ajax ludicrous, nor does the suspension of doom exercised by the Father render the War in Heaven laughable.

Rather, I would argue that the futility of the rebels' struggle adds significantly to its poignancy. The rebel angels do not know of their predetermined fate any more than the Achaians do. Satan asserts that the rebels 'while they feel | Vigor Divine within them, can allow | Omnipotence to none' (*PL* VI. 157–59). I interpret 'allow' here as 'accept as true or valid' (OED): the rebels, feeling their own divinity, cannot believe that they are ruled over by an omnipotent superior. Satan later describes God as merely 'nam'd' almighty and, the rebels having survived the first day of fighting, Satan determines that God is 'fallible [...] though till now | Omniscient thought' (*PL* VI. 294, 428–30). In the rebels' minds, this is a struggle in earnest. This is a fight in which 'Angel [...] with Angel war[s]' in a contest of 'Host and Host', arrayed 'Front to Front' (*PL* VI. 92, 104, 105).

This repeated construction, opposing noun against identical noun, reflects the appearance of two equally matched armies, an illusion the rebels have little reason to disbelieve at this point in the poem's internal chronology.

The altercations of the War are described in distinctly physical terms, such as 'Arms on Armor clashing', emphasizing the literal war taking place (*PL* VI. 209). However, these physical actions potentially have consequences on the cosmic scale: 'each on himself reli'd, | As only in his arm the moment lay | Of victory' (*PL* VI. 238–40). This is clearest in the confrontation between Satan and Michael, who seem 'Fit to decide the Empire of great Heav'n' (*PL* VI. 303). The lexis used to describe Michael's sword-stroke is highly physical. It 'cut sheer' Satan's sword and 'shear'd' his body (*PL* VI. 325–26). The stroke is 'griding' (slashing or piercing) and causes a 'gash' (*PL* VI. 329–31). The coarse consonance of these words, particularly in the homophonic 'sheer' and 'shear'd', reflects the harsh physicality of the sword's impact. Satan's reaction is thoroughly bodily: he 'writh'd him to and fro' and a 'stream of Nectarous humor issuing flow'd | Sanguine, such as Celestial Spirits may bleed' (*PL* VI. 328–33). Raphael does not refer to this humor as blood, distinguishing it from the bleeding of the human body, but the words 'Sanguine' and 'bleed' redouble its bodily character.

Despite the immediacy of this bodily altercation, its implications are far broader. Michael engages Satan in combat 'hoping here to end | Intestine War in Heav'n, the Arch-foe subdu'd | Or Captive dragg'd in Chains' (*PL* VI. 358–60). Like his fellows, Michael believes it possible that 'only in his arm the moment lay | Of victory.' The image of Satan in chains recalls the punishment of Prometheus and the 'chained hero' archetype that Abrahamian identifies, in which a theomach is condemned to chains for their crimes (Abrahamian 91–92). Abdiel previously threatened Satan with 'Chains in Hell', the Son will soon pledge to condemn the rebels 'To chains of darkness' and Satan will indeed, as we know from Book I, end up 'In Adamantine Chains' when the battle is done (*PL* VI. 186, 739, I. 48).

In fact, Michael is mistaken in hoping that his tussle with Satan will end the battle, for the Father states that he has suspended the conflict and 'none but [the Son] | Can end it' (*PL* VI. 702–3). Nevertheless, events that take place on the individual level during the War prove to be transformative. Michael and Satan aim sword-strokes 'That might determine, and not need repeat' (*PL* VI. 318). Michael's blow to Satan does not determine the course of the battle, as he hopes, but it is at this moment that '*Satan* first knew pain' (*PL* VI. 327). The force of this phrasing is extreme, yet ambiguous. It is clear that this is the first time Satan has ever experienced the sensation of pain, and Raphael goes on to elaborate that the rebel angels were 'first with fear surpris'd and sense of pain' in this battle, for pain was 'Till now not known' (*PL* VI. 394, 432). The truly horrifying poignancy of this moment for Satan, however, is the possible implication that he is the first being ever to experience pain. In this case, Michael's sword-stroke marks a paradigmatic shift, the genesis of a new evil, which Nisroch, chief Principality of the rebel army, not unreasonably describes as 'the worst | Of evils' (*PL* VI. 462–3). There is nothing ridiculous and everything poignant about this.

Raphael explains that the rebel angels were 'to such evil brought | By sin of disobedience, till that hour | Not liable to fear or flight or pain' while the 'innocence' of the faithful angels, 'Not to have disobey'd' makes them 'unobnoxious to be pain'd' (*PL* VI. 395–97, 401–04). This paradigmatic shift, caused by disobedience, prefigures another, that 'Of Man's First Disobedience, and the Fruit | Of that Forbidden Tree, whose mortal taste | Brought Death into the World' (*PL* I. 1–3). The genesis of pain, punishment for Satan's disobedience, anticipates the genesis of death, punishment for Man's disobedience. Various details in the verse reinforce this prefiguration: Alastair Fowler argues that the comparison of Michael and Satan to 'Two Planets rushing from aspect malign' ironically anticipates the postlapsarian cosmology of the Miltonic universe in Book X (*PL* VI.

313; Fowler paraphrased in Milton, The Complete Poetry and Essential Prose of John Milton 455); William Kerrigan et al. suggest that 'Satan's reaction to the pain [convolving] prefigures his metamorphosis into a serpent', also in Book X (Kerrigan, Rumrich, and Fallon 456); the angels' 'fiery swords' and the 'Cherubic waving fires' later guarding the camps of the faithful overnight anticipate the use of a 'flaming sword' to bar the fallen Adam and Eve from Eden at the poem's end (*PL* VI. 304, 414, XII. 592); Satan's armor 'stained' with humor foreshadows the 'tainted' postlapsarian Man 'Eject[ed]' from Eden as a 'distemper', a word signifying the imbalance of the humors, according to Kerrigan et al. (*PL* VI. 332–4, XI. 52–3; Milton, The Complete Poetry and Essential Prose of John Milton 587).

Pain is not the only phenomenon to have its 'first' instance in the War in Heaven, thereby prefiguring man's 'first' disobedience and the genesis of mortality. According to Michael, Satan is the 'Author of evil, unknown till [his] revolt' and 'into Nature brought | Misery, uncreated till the crime | Of [his] Rebellion' (*PL* VI. 262, 267–9). The beginning of these phenomena prefigures the 'woe' that man's first disobedience brings into the world (*PL* I. 3).

Satan's originality, his first-ness, is intimately connected to the motivations of his theomachic enterprise, as we can see from his rebuke of Abdiel in Book V: the conflict centers on priority; it is to the 'new Laws' imposing the Son's rule that Satan objects (*PL* V. 679). He scorns Abdiel's insistence that the angels 'were form'd' by the 'secondary hands' of the Son, instead asserting that they 'Know none before' them and were 'self-begot, self-rais'd' (*PL* V. 853–4, 60).

The righteousness of Satan's rebellion depends on the idea that he was first, not 'secondary', and owes no deference to the authority of God—Father or Son—because God is not his author. His 'puissance is [his] own', which he means to prove by 'besieging' the throne of God (*PL* V. 864, 869). In denying that he was created by another, in claiming that there was 'no time when [the angels] were not as now' (*PL* V. 859)—in short, in claiming to have been "there first", Satan strikingly resembles another figure in *Paradise Lost*, whose theomachy is the most mysterious of all.

IV. Temporal Priority Among Primordial Deities

The scenes featuring Chaos and his fellow quasi-allegorical deities constitute theomachic rebellion of a peculiarly ambiguous variety. These figures resemble the primordial deities of the classical Greek pantheon—such as Ouranos, Gaia and of course Chaos—older than the Titans and Olympians who succeed them in divine rule. Milton's '*Night*' in particular is 'eldest of things' and 'unoriginal' (*PL* II. 962, X. 477). Hughes explains that '*Night* [...] is *unoriginal* because nothing existed before it to originate it' (Milton 417). Chaos endorses Satan's rebellion, since his territory has been 'Encroacht on' by 'first Hell' and 'Now lately Heaven and Earth' (*PL* II. 1001–4). As Stephen Scully notes, 'Only in Milton are [Night and Chaos] a pair, the "Ancestors of Nature" who in a most unchristian sense are at the beginning and end of life, the "Womb of nature and perhaps her Grave"' (Scully, 181). The extraordinary implication of the grievances that these figures express is that the Father is the Olympian rebel against the older primordial deities. This is awfully reminiscent of Nimrod, the rebel 'Though of Rebellion others he accuse', and would confirm Empson's argument that the Father's 'authoritarian character' is 'just what one would expect from a usurping angel' (Empson 103).

A further complication arises in the juxtaposition of this encounter between Satan and Chaos with the invocation to holy Light at the beginning of the next Book, which (in thoroughly am-

biguous syntax) seems to describe God as 'bright essence increate' (*PL* III. 6). If God is 'increate' and Night 'eldest of things', it is unclear who existed first, particularly as the word 'increate' denotes a highly similar concept to the 'unoriginal' Night. Neither God nor Night, it seems, was created or originated. Milton describes this phenomenon in both cases using the negative prefix: emphatically nothing preceded either deity.

Neil Forsyth observes a comparable temporal confusion in Hesiod's treatment of the Greek theomachy:

> Zeus, then, is the rebel [...] The Titans, after all, are the older gods, their leader is Zeus' father, Kronos, who had himself usurped power from his predecessor [...] Hesiod [...] make[s] the Titan battle seem like a rebellion against Zeus [...] [he] blurs the issue of who rebels against whom. (Forsyth, 86)

This blurring is similar to that which occurs in Satan's case: he regards the Son as an upstart, for 'Who can in reason then or right assume | Monarchy over such as live by right | His equals?' (*PL* V. 794–6). Satan, as we have seen, scorns the 'new' and the 'secondary', affirming himself as unoriginal as Night. His argument rests on the conceit that, by order of priority, it is the newly arrived Son who has offended him—just as the Olympians overthrew the Titans—not he who rebels against the already reigning Son. Abdiel, he suggests, has distorted the chronology just as Hesiod does to make the older deity or angel seem the rebel.

Considering this crucial significance of priority of existence, it is peculiar that the narrator of *Paradise Lost* describes Chaos 'retir[ing]' from Nature's 'outmost works' as a 'brok'n foe' (*PL* II. 1038–9). Night and Chaos are 'Ancestors of Nature', but are overcome by this younger usurper (*PL* II. 895). The process of creation itself is cast as a territorial encroachment on Chaos' domain. Milton consistently employs the language of territory and physical domain to describe such encroachments. The cosmic restructuring that occurs after the Fall has the consequence that 'now in little space | The confines met of Empyrean Heav'n | And of this World, and on the left hand Hell' (*PL* X. 320–22). By constructing a causeway through Chaos, Sin and Death 'made one Realm | Hell and this World, one Realm, one Continent' (*PL* X. 391–2). In response, 'Disparted *Chaos* over-built exclaim'd, | And with rebounding surge the bars assail'd, | That scorn'd his indignation' (*PL* X. 416–8).

The irony is that Chaos brings this on himself. His realm is 'Illimitable Ocean without bound' where 'time and place are lost', yet, believing that Satan's actions may restore his territory, Chaos shows him the way through (*PL* II. 892–4). Satan is rightly 'half lost' in Chaos' placeless domain, yet Chaos sees fit to 'direct' him to the 'readiest path' because Satan emphasizes the 'Region' Chaos has 'lost' and presents himself as the solution to it (*PL* II. 975–82). Chaos' realm is 'without bound', yet Satan stresses the 'bounds | Confin[ing]' with heaven. Hughes glosses 'Confine with' as 'border upon'; the juxtaposition of 'bounds' and 'Confine' across the line break—which mimetically recreates the effect of a border—emphasizes the limits placed on this illimitable void (Milton 255). In response to Satan's petition, Chaos subverts his own nature in showing Satan the 'readiest path' and is punished with Sin and Death's causeway, constructed along that very same path (*PL* X. 314–8).

As we have seen, however, Satan and his children are not the first to encroach upon Chaos' territory. By Chaos' own account, the creation itself was such an encroachment. A quasi-Hesiodic temporal ambiguity emerges as to "who encroaches upon whom", to paraphrase Forsyth. The possibility that it is the Father who encroaches upon Night and Chaos is indeed, as Scully phrases it, 'most unchristian'. Yet this is what the text seems to imply, just as Hesiod's full genealogy of the gods cannot fail to show that the Titans preceded the Olympians. We cannot solve this

problem by writing off Chaos and his court as purely allegorical, as John Rumrich, for example, encourages us to do. He argues that 'The allegorical character of Chaos speaks for the part of the deity, arguably feminine, over which the eternal father does not exercise control, from which, in other words, the father is absent as an active, governing agent' (Rumrich 1043). Rumrich exhorts us not to fall into the same trap as William Empson, who 'ignores the principle that "allegorical agents reveal by their actions not internal psychologies but the abstractions [...] that lie behind them"' (Rumrich 1041). Chaos, in Rumrich's understanding, 'speaks for' the 'realm or state of being' of chaos, which '*would* profit from the uncreation—not the perversion—of the world, since his anarchy would be augmented.'

Such an interpretation does not, however, account for the immediacy of Satan's encounter with Chaos. As Regina Schwartz observes, '[Milton's] creation stories are always mediated—by accounts and accounts of accounts', as in Raphael's narration of pre-Edenic times, for example (Schwartz 1). However, this is not the case for the conclusion of Book II, which is narrated directly. Indeed, the poem's most allegorical sections (in Books II and X), when one would assume that mediation is most needed, are passages of direct narration. At precisely the moments when Raphael's disclaimer about the necessity of 'lik'ning spiritual to corporal forms' (*PL* V. 573) would dispel the ambiguity, the poem unabashedly recounts the direct interactions between physical and ostensibly allegorical figures. We cannot, therefore, avoid the implications of Chaos' role as an active, autonomous and "uncreated" agent by relegating this entity to pure allegory.

This is not, however, a question of Milton's personal theology. As Rumrich highlights, 'Milton in *Christian Doctrine* describes the confused, disordered first matter as good in itself and the necessary basis of a good creation', but '*Paradise Lost* is not always consistent within itself, much less with *Christian Doctrine*' (Rumrich 1037–38). My question is not what Chaos' theomachy tells us about Milton's religion, but what its significance in the narrative is. This is twofold. First, that the 'womb of Nature and perhaps her grave' should be at war with God signifies the temporal ubiquity of theomachy. It was there at the very beginning and will be there until the very end. Second, Chaos' grievance—that creation has encroached upon his territory—ties the origins of this ubiquitous theomachy to creation itself, connecting the hostile opposition of theomachy to the act of opposition, or division, which constitutes creation in the Miltonic universe.

V. All in All

Until the moment when 'God shall be All in All', the Miltonic cosmology is defined by oppositions, its trajectory by what Regina Schwartz describes as 'the *continual* struggle between oppositions' (*PL* III. 341; Schwartz 7). But, as Schwartz emphasizes, the 'opposites constitute one another' (Schwartz 6). We can see this in the dichotomy of Chaos and creation. Chaos resents that creation is encroaching on his territory, yet creation is composed of the matter of Chaos itself. In the Miltonic cosmos, creation is an act not of generation *ex nihilo* but of separation and opposition. God does not produce matter from nothing, but reforms the disordered matter of Chaos into the ordered matter of creation, thus imposing an opposition between the two. The warrant for this conception is Biblical: God 'divided the light from the darkness', 'divided the waters which *were* under the firmament from the waters which *were* above' and created lights in the heavens 'to divide the day from the night' (Carroll and Prickett: Genesis 1. 4, 7, 14,). This use of the word 'divide' is reproduced in the creation narrative of Book VII (*PL* VII. 251, 262, 269).

With this process of reformation or metamorphosis of matter in mind, Satan's invention of ord-

nance during the War in Heaven takes on an alarming new resonance. The rebel angels produce 'blackest grain', a primordial gunpowder, by 'mingl[ing], and with subtle art, | Concoct[ing] and adjust[ing]' the 'originals of nature in their crude | Conception' (*PL* VI. 511–15). These phrases are strongly reminiscent of God imposing order on the matter of Chaos—disordered, indistinct 'dark materials'—to 'create [...] Worlds' (*PL* II. 916). The 'originals of nature in their crude | Conception' could refer equally well to Chaotic matter, 'crude' in the sense of 'In the natural or raw state [...] not manufactured, refined, tempered' (OED). The innovation of ordnance also recalls Milton's poem 'On the Inventor of Gunpowder' (1626?):

> The ancients in their blindness paid honor to the son of Iapetus, who brought down the celestial fire from the chariot of the sun; but in my eyes he will be a greater man who is credited with having stolen his flaming weapons and three-forked thunderbolt from Jove. (Milton 14)

The son of Iapetus is the archetypal theomach Prometheus, whose achievement Satan exceeds, according to the contrast this poem draws. Satan describes his invention in highly similar terms to the early poem, claiming that his foes 'shall fear we have disarm'd | The Thunderer of his only dreaded bolt' (*PL* VI. 490–91). In producing the gunpowder, Satan appears to perform feats highly similar to those of God, reforming matter and creating his own thunder. We might even conceive of Satan and the Father as a pair of Schwartz' mutually constituting opposites: Satan after all defines himself by his role as God's 'Antagonist' (*PL* X. 387).

The forces of good and evil more broadly are such a pair. As Schwartz highlights, Milton tells us in *Areopagitica* that 'the matter of them both is the same', and indeed *Paradise Lost* repeatedly emphasizes the kinship of substance between the faithful and rebellious angels (see, for example, *PL* I. 591–93, 692–97, II. 553, VI. 690). As we have seen, retrospection and anticipation are mutually complementary and intertwined opposites in the poem. The missing element in Schwartz' analysis is the opposition of theomachy. From Chaos to Satan, to Adam and Eve, to Nimrod and the Giants, the phenomenon of theomachy is ubiquitous. It is the fundamental dynamic of the opposition between Creator and created. As the accounts of Chaos and Raphael demonstrate, theomachy is as old as time and as Michael's narrative of future days suggests, it will recur throughout time. However, like all oppositions, theomachy between Creator and created will end with the apocalypse, when 'God shall be All in All'. Then there can be no Adversary or Obstructer, nor will Chaos and creation oppose one another. As Rumrich observes:

> Apocalyptic love—when "God shall be All in All" (3.341)—unmistakably reflects the wild energy of chaos [...] The chronology of the end time explicitly draws on descriptions of chaos: "beyond is all abyss,/Eternitie, whose end no eye can reach". (Rumrich 1039)

Though Rumrich's conclusion, that Chaos constitutes a feminine aspect of God, is questionable, the observation that the pre- and post-creation states resemble one another is highly apt. Just as creation was not generation *ex nihilo* but transformation, so this apocalypse is not destruction *in nihilem*, but transformation: 'The World shall burn, and from her ashes spring | New Heav'n and Earth' (*PL* III. 334–5). The resemblance to creation does not end here; the era of this 'New Heav'n and Earth' will be 'golden days', a phrase recalling the classical concept of the golden age, often seen in Milton's day as equivalent to the prelapsarian era.[6] Here again we see the poetics of retrospection and anticipation embodied by Raphael and Michael: to look forward to

[6]For example, in 'On the Morning of Christ's Nativity', stanza xiv (See Milton 46).

the apocalypse is to look backward to the very beginning, and *vice versa*. Both Chaos and All in All constitute a lack of opposition, but in the state of All in All, even the opposition between Chaos and creation seems void, for the Chaotic state that Rumrich identifies in the apocalypse also involves a new creation of Heaven and Earth.

The effacement of all oppositions is prefigured in particular celestial phenomena. First, the opposition of genders is nullified by the hermaphroditic quality of divine beings. The Spirit invoked at the beginning of the poem sat 'brooding on the vast abyss | And mad[e] it pregnant'—a description implying both female (brooding) and male (impregnation) aspects of procreation—while angels can 'either sex assume, or both' (*PL* I. 21–2, 424). Second and most crucial is the opposition effaced by the Father in the following, addressed to the Son:

> Therefore thy Humiliation shall exalt
> With thee thy Manhood also to this Throne;
> Here shalt thou sit incarnate, here shalt Reign
> Both God and Man, Son both of God and Man. (*PL* III. 313–16)

The Son, having acceded to the throne of God, quite literally embodies the effacement of the opposition between Man and God. Reigning incarnate on the throne of God as judge at the end of time, the Son unites flesh with divinity, manifesting the end of the opposition between Creator and created.

Bryson argues that the state of All in All constitutes the 'uniting of all as one individual Soul', which necessitates the 'erasure of hierarchical distinction', including the hierarchy of angels and the conception of God as 'Father *or* Son' (Bryson 27, 34). My argument concerning the effacement of oppositions is similar. However, I contend that not only the divine hierarchy, but all oppositions are being erased. Only thus will the repeated phenomenon of theomachy end, when Creator and created are no longer opposed in any sense.

The *telos* of the Miltonic universe, then, is from Chaos to All in All, from one state of non-opposition to another. The act of creation imposes boundaries, limits and oppositions on the formlessness of Chaos. At the end of time, these oppositions will be broken down again. The fundamental opposition between Creator and created manifests in the hostile opposition of theomachy: from beginning to end, that which is divided from God is at war with him. Father and Son seem actively to encourage these oppositions. They undertake the creation, opposing Chaos against them. The Father anoints the Son as Messiah and threatens to damn anyone who objects, inciting the anger of Satan and his rebel fellows. As Bryson argues, 'What the decree must be intended to do is drive dissent out into the open, to create dissent in the first place, or both' (Bryson 93). Satan is allowed to escape Hell and is freed from the captivity of the Archangels in Book IV, allowing him to breach Eden (twice) and tempt Eve. On this point, Empson's argument is thoroughly convincing. 'God always intended to let Satan out', he contends. 'The chains of Hell, Sin, Death, Chaos and an army of good angels hold Satan back, but all this stage machinery is arranged by God to collapse as soon as he advances upon it' (Empson 118).

During the War in Heaven, both Father and Son will the rebels to hate and oppose them with relish:

> [L]et them learn, as likes them, to despise
> God and *Messiah* his anointed King. (The Father, *PL* VI. 717–18)

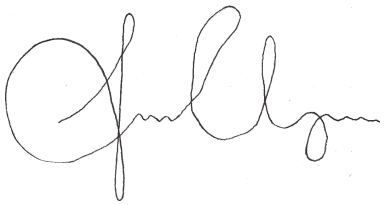
> [T]o mee thir doom he hath assign'd;
> That they may have thir wish, to try with mee
> In Battle which the stronger proves. (The Son, *PL* VI. 817–19)

Father and Son are only too keen for the rebel angels to despise them, yet, on account of their powers of foresight (as seen in Book III), they must know that this will inspire Satan to seek a theomachic revenge, which will in turn cause the theomachic rebellion of Adam and Eve, followed by their descendants. Raphael demonstrates an intriguing awareness of this theomachic psychology when he describes the rebel angels' reaction to the Son riding into battle:

> Grieving to see his Glory, at the sight
> Took envy, and aspiring to his highth,
> Stood reimbattl'd fierce, by force or fraud
> Weening to prosper, and at length prevail
> Against God and *Messiah*, or to fall
> In universal ruin last, and now
> To final Battle drew. (*PL* VI. 792–8)

Such 'envy' will continue to motivate God's creatures to 'aspir[e] to his highth', an act of theomachic hubris. The phrases 'universal ruin' and 'final Battle' seem to anticipate the apocalypse when all these theomachic rebellions will come to an end.

At this apocalyptic end, opposites and opposition are no more. Creator and created are united, for God is All in All. Ruler and ruled are united, for the Son 'shalt lay by' his unneeded 'regal Sceptre' (*PL* III. 339). Chaos and creation are united, for All in All involves new Heaven and Earth. Hell is 'for ever shut', meaning that the 'stage machinery' Empson describes no longer lets out God's enemies to continue their theomachic opposition (*PL* III. 333). Here we return to Frye, who argues that 'the total action begins and ends, not at precisely the same point, but at the same point renewed and transformed by the heroic action itself' (Frye 44). By initiating and ending these oppositions, most particularly the theomachic opposition between Creator and created, God brings the universe from Chaos to the renewed and transformed All in All.



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