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Postmodernism & Paradise Lost: Reconsidering Knowledge, Politics and Literature

I. Introduction: Postmodernism and Paradise Lost

Creative work, specifically that of John Milton, may appear to find its origin in history, however, it has been my task to interpret Paradise Lost in an anti-historical mode. My study considers contemporary thought as the basis for a political interpretation of Paradise Lost. Linda Hutcheon describes the postmodern novel: "It begins by creating and centering a world...and then contesting it"(180). While her description stands as a trademark for the postmodern novel, it also stands as a description of John Milton's epic poem, Paradise Lost. This observation, however, demands clarification and justification. From what mountain do we stand in order to see Milton's epic as postmodern? And if we are to stand there, from this mountain, with a postmodern viewfinder, what will we see? How will the literary landscape change? In order to address these questions, this paper will take note of postmodern themes to find ideological points of intersection between historical and literary theory and Jean-Francois Lyotard's philosophy. Lyotard's method in, The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge (1984), is to analyze knowledge structures, for example economics, history, and science, in terms of legitimation and delegitimation. Analyzing these knowledge structures, specific to Western civilization,

poses philosophical problems with respect to the social bond, or social knowledge. Paying special attention to the political as one sphere of social knowledge I would like to show how the method for analyzing this body of knowledge is different than other empirical bodies. What is of particular interest to me is what a postmodern theory of knowledge is and how it contributes to a reading of Paradise Lost. From a postmodern point of view, how does Milton's text contribute to the study of knowledge? What does the knowledge we gain from reading this text according to a discourse initiated 300 years later, tell us about knowledge as a subject of history? Keeping Lyotard in mind throughout this paper, it will be my objective to answer these questions and stir up more questions about literature and its relationship to knowledge.

Christopher Hill has argued that Milton's political views fall in line with politically radical groups. These groups, which include Grindletonians and Familists, share with Milton ideas about the relationship between a government and its people. I would like to draw a connection between these radical groups and Milton. Paradise Lost presents both political and religious views held among the radicals. By drawing a connection between certain radical views as found by Hill and their presentation in Paradise Lost, it is clear that a substantial part of Milton's work is devoted to the presentation of radical ideas. Therefore, I will claim that Paradise Lost is primarily a political text, more specifically a radical text.

With this designation, I look to J.C. Davis for a definition of radicalism. Davis attempts to redefine radicalism, not with regard to specific ideas, but rather to the mode in which radicalism operated in 17th-century England. Davis argues that radicalism is a theoretical entity. He continues to suggest that as a theoretical entity radicalism should be

evaluated differently. Consistent with radicalism's metaphysical being, Davis argues that radicalism should be evaluated theoretically. In practice I have identified Paul de Man's literary theory of Romantic texts as sound and beneficial to an investigation of radicalism as a theoretical entity. De Man's conception of the poetic image and allegory as it relates to Romantic texts can be applied to Paradise Lost. It has been my task to explicate de Man's theory, using Milton as exemplary of his claims. In so doing I have discovered the importance of Milton's text to an understanding of radicalism as a theoretical entity. It will be the goal of this paper to show not only that Davis's definition of radicalism is justifiable, but also that it provides a unique reading of Paradise Lost.

Milton's text thinks about the relationship between literature and knowledge as productive. As a politically radical text Milton's poem had to be productive. As literature Paradise Lost produces in its readers knowledge of radicalism in 17th- century England. Milton's poem was not concerned with producing truth, nor did it aim to impart knowledge about right and wrong from a radically political standpoint. Paradise Lost is concerned with producing knowledge about a discourse that could not express itself according to explicit modes. Traditional society, that is the society understood to have existed in 17th-century England, employed a traditional system of government. The monarchy was not only traditional insofar as it depended on blood ties to decide who would rule but it had been England's form of government for seven centuries. The English monarchy was the system to rule all systems, including language. Therefore radical ideas not only conflicted with a traditional system of government but they also conflicted with a system of language used by traditional governmental parties. Republicans and royalists debated heavily about the system of government that should

rule England; their views were expressed within a traditional system of language. The explicit demands of these two political groups could be found written in pamphlets and in speeches. Radically political groups in 17th-century England could not write down their views in pamphlets and share their ideas in public speeches. Radical ideas existed in a different form. Therefore, radicalism, in conflict with traditional modes of rule, and consequently with traditional modes of communication, found its expression elsewhere. Paradise Lost is a metadiscourse. The self-conscious assumption that this paper makes with respect to language is explicitly postmodern. Postmodernism does not provide a reading of Paradise Lost as representative of 17th-century politics at large, nor does it provide a reading of Paradise Lost as representative of one political viewpoint. Postmodernism provides a way of reading Paradise Lost *as* a political document itself.

Part II. Interpreting Radicalism Through Literature: Symbolism, Satire and Angels

In Milton and the English Revolution (1979), Christopher Hill argues that John Milton's political and religious views fell in line with ideas that proliferated among a radical underground. English radicalism has hibernated as a culture. Unlike the republicans and the royalists, whose views were recorded, distributed, and historicized; radical ideas existed within discourse: "This third culture [radical underground] is difficult to identify, because its records are normally unwritten: our evidence comes from hostile accounts of church courts prosecuting heretics, of orthodox spokesmen denouncing them. What I say about it in this chapter is necessarily tentative" (Hill, 69). Although he argues that his remarks on the ideas of radicalism are derived from an empirical investigation, evidence of a different kind is found in Paradise Lost. This text

reveals that these ideas characterize radicalism— that radical ideas exist in a form of representation that goes beyond traditional structures.

Hill outlines four radical ideas that surfaced in the 1640s; first, anticlericalism, second, the denunciation of sacred imagery, third, anti-Trinitarianism and fourth, mortalism. These ideas were heretical to the political and religious state of England in the mid-seventeenth-century. These ideas form a concept of radicalism as not merely oppositional to but fundamentally distinct from the current political and religious situation. While reanimating the characters from the book of Genesis, Paradise Lost also brings to the forefront these radical ideas.

The first radical view that Hill outlines is anticlericalism, the idea that members of the clergy held no sovereignty over the common man. Anticlericalism, was an avenue toward tolerance and equality,

> Anticlericalism was the view that a layman is as good as a parson. It may extend to seeing the whole ecclesiastical hierarchy as antichristian, to rejection of tithes and a state church, to hostility towards universities as training centres for the clergy, to advocacy of 'mechanic preachers' who enjoy the spirit of God, so much more important than academic education (71).

The radical view of anticlericalism opposed an academic-based production of preachers, because they did not see Christianity as a literal and objective system. Specifically, the Familists and the Grindletonians found the practice of Christianity to be closer to a philosophy, or a way of thinking, than to an instructional code: "Familists were said to believe that Christ and Antichrist were not real people, heaven and hell not real places: all were states of mind. The Grindletonians, like Thomas Munzer before them and Gerrard

Winstanley after them, emphasized the spirit as against the letter of the Bible, a doctrine not unknown to Milton" (75).

Book IV of Milton's poem serves as evidence of his familiarity with the radical idea of anticlericalism. In Book IV, Milton presents a dual context—a narrative that references two metanarratives, the polytheistic, of gods and the monotheistic, of God. The polytheistic and the monotheistic are referred to here as metanarratives because they are consistent with their respective historical narratives. The concept of the metanarrative is one that Lyotard employs to describe myths or narratives that are read for the purpose of instruction, that is as a vehicle for knowledge. The radical intolerance for the "letter of the Bible" or the word as truth, is consistent with a postmodern intolerance for the metanarrative. The bond between the radical intolerance for the Bible as objective truth and postmodernism's intolerance for the metanarrative is summed up when Lyotard states: "Simplifying to the extreme, I define postmodern as incredulity toward metanarratives" (Lyotard, xxiv). Milton's positioning of two metanarratives in his epic is testament to the radical idea of anticlericalism, because it does not allow one metanarrative to take precedence over the other. In fact Milton sees these two metanarratives as necessary to one another, as necessary to the creation of a state of mind rather than an objective mode of being.

Milton alludes to a polytheistic metanarrative when he articulates a description of the Tree of Life. What constitutes a polytheistic metanarrative is a text that references the polytheistic narrative— the narrative of the gods and of immortality. The text describes the Tree of Life with three descriptors. These three descriptors provide a reference consistent within a polytheistic metanarrative, that is, a classical literary tradition. Amidst

a description of the landscape that constitutes the garden of Eden, the Tree of Life is described:

> Out of the fertile ground He caus'd the grow
>
> All trees of noblest kind for sight, smell, taste
>
> And all amid them stood the Tree of Life
>
> High eminent blooming ambrosial fruit
>
> Of vegetable gold. (IV: 216-220)

This passage articulates three significant descriptors: "High," "eminent," and "blooming ambrosial fruit" allude to a polytheistic metanarrative. "High" characterizes the tree's stature, directing our gaze above earth, into the heavens, into the realm of the gods. "Eminent" characterizes the Tree of Life, as the grandest of its kind, god-like. The Tree of Life is, moreover, "blooming ambrosial fruit"; this final descriptor points readily to the nature of the Tree of Life as vital, providing food for the immortal— fruit for the gods. That the Tree of Life bears immortal fruit fit for the gods, so too the Tree of Life is itself immortal. This description of the Tree of Life explicitly references the polytheistic metanarrative to describe the tree as immortal, characterizing the tree's` metaphysical being. Thus, the mythology of immortality establishes itself as a figure present in the garden of Eden.

Just as the Tree of Life provides fruit for the gods, the text ambiguously suggests the Tree of Life to be the parent of the Tree of Knowledge in a passage spoken by Adam:

> He who requires
>
> From us no other service than to keep
>
> This one, this easy charge, of all the trees

In Paradise that bear delicious fruit

So various, not to taste that only Tree

Of Knowledge planted by the Tree of Life. (IV: 419-424)

I dare to interpret "planted by" in the last line of this passage as an act performed by the Tree of Life in order to suggest the immortality of both of these trees. Given this relationship, how then does the Tree of Knowledge cross over from the polytheistic to a monotheistic metanarrative, from a structure that considers immortality to a structure founded on the grounds of man's mortality?

Previously, I posited that the immortality of the fruit grown by the Tree of Life is an indication of the immortality of the tree itself; logically speaking then if I am to suggest, as I just have, that the Tree of Knowledge was planted by the Tree of Life, then it is also immortal. Can we also assume that the fruit of this immortal tree, the Tree of Knowledge is ambrosial, is "Of vegetable gold?" With respect to the Tree of Knowledge Milton tells us by the end of the epic that it is Adam and Eve who eat from this tree. It is the effect of the Tree of Knowledge that causes Adam and Eve to become mortal. The text, subsequent to the description of the Tree of Life, describes the Tree of Knowledge in terms of its effect on Adam and Eve: "And next to Life / Our death, the Tree of Knowledge, grew fast by; / Knowledge of good bought dear by knowing ill"(IV: 220-222). The Tree of Knowledge is characterized as "Our death," as mortality directed by God who commands that Adam and Eve should not eat from the tree. Similarly Adam says of the Tree of Knowledge, "So near grows death to life, whate'er death is, / Some dreadful thing no doubt, for well thou know'st / God hath pronounced it death to taste that Tree"(IV:425-427). God's command over Adam and Eve references a monotheistic

metanarrative. However the fruit provided for the gods is of the same nature as that provided for Adam and Eve by the Tree of Knowledge. The fruit is variable; that is, it legitimates, or nourishes an immortal *and* a mortal figure. "Vegetable gold" serves as a symbol for knowledge insofar as one more educated Christian can be no more Christian than the uneducated Christian. That this food be provided to both the gods and our first parents illustrates tolerance for a variable practice and view of Christianity, the ultimate goal of anticlericalism.

As a symbol, vegetable gold stands for a radical idea of anticlericalism, serving the idea that gods, or the clergy, are no more privileged in their belief of God than the common man, Adam and Eve. The symbol serves to level the sovereignty between priests and laymen, to advocate belief in God as a state of mind, not a set of commands.

Another radical idea that Hill outlines is the denunciation of sacred imagery; radicals saw the imagery and glorification of the church as extreme blasphemy. Radicalism promoted the worship of God anywhere, anyhow. As Hill articulates, the denunciation of sacred imagery was replaced by worship of personal design:

> Secondly comes strong emphasis on study of the Bible, and use of its texts— as interpreted by the individual conscience— to criticize the ceremonies and sacraments of the church. Worship of images, for instance, was denounced as idolatry. Sacredness was denied to church buildings: worship and prayer could take place anywhere (71).

This viewpoint is one that has previously pinned Milton as an iconoclast due to his insistence on intellectual and religious freedom that could be expressed by shattering

those images and idols that served as a reminder of God's command over man (Hill, 262).

In Book I, the explicit denunciation of biblical idols is presented when Milton calls upon his muse to figure images of the fallen angels: "Say, Muse, their names then known, who first, who last" (I: 376). Following this summoning, his muse proceeds to name the fallen angels: "First Moloch, horrid king, besmeared with blood" (I: 392), "Next Chemos, th' obscene dread of Moab's sons" (I: 406), "Him followed Rimmon whose delightful seat/ Was fair Damascus on the fertile banks/ Of Abbana and Pharphar, lucid streams./ He also 'gainst the house of God was bold" (I: 467) and the most demonishly figured,

> Came Astoreth whom the Phoenicians called
> Astarte, Queen of Heav'n, with crescent horns,
> To whose bright image nightly by the moon
> Sidonian virgins paid their vows and songs,
> In Sion also not unsung where stood
> Her temple on th' offensive mountain, built
> By that uxorious king whose heart, though large,
> Begiled by fair idolatresses, fell
> To idols foul. (I: 438-446)

This last description of Astoreth, makes Milton's critical position, with respect to the Catholic church's practice of idolatry, explicit. Astoreth is the idol for whom all Catholics are rendered ultimately submissive to God's command. They are "uxorious king[s]" and supremely ignorant of deception "begiled by fair idolatresses." As a satire,

Milton's figuring of the fallen angels after heretical characters, ridicules the hypocrisy of religious practices, specifically Catholicism that glorifies Christian imagery.

Hill's third outline of a radical idea is that of anti-Trinitarianism. The denial of Christ's divinity and the Holy Ghost was a heretical view that had proved dangerous in the previous century, and no doubt remained underground for that reason. The rapid spread of anit-Trinitarianism both in the liberal reign of Edward VI and in prisons under Mary gave rise to great alarm among the orthodox. In 1555 the divinity of Christ was the subject of discussions in an underground meeting in a Colchester tavern. Between 1548 and 1612 at least eight persons were burnt in England for heresies concerning the Trinity, including Marlowe's friend Francis Kett, grandson of the leader of the Norfold rebels of 1549 (73).

A rebel claim and a resurfacing radical claim, anti-Trinitariansim appears consistent with the first view Hill brings up about the equality of the laymen with the clergy. If the radicals contended that knowledge of God lay in an individual mode of belief rather than a knowledge or truth oriented curriculum, it is consistent that they would reject the sovereignty of Christ's presence on earth, and favor his humanity. Hill defines anti-Trinitarianism as: "Another recurrent doctrine is anti-Trinitarianism, heretical emphasis on the humanity of Christ"(72).

Milton addresses this view, highlighting the humanness of Jesus in Book III. In Book III God tells of Satan's entrance into the garden and his aim to deceive Adam and Eve, to bring them to the fall:

And now

Through all restraint broke loose he wings his way

Not far off Heav'n in the precincts of light

Directly towards the new created world

And Man there placed, with purpose to assay

If him by force he can destroy or worse

By some false guile pervert. And shall pervert,

For Man will hearken to his glozing lies

And easily transgress the sole command,

Sole pledge of his obedience. So will fall

He and his faithless progeny. (III: 86-96)

God's foresight is limitless. God sees Satan enter into Eden, and he foretells the fall of Adam and Eve. However, his command is bound by Adam and Eve's free will: "I made him just and right, / Sufficient to have stood though free to fall" (III: 98-99). God continues, helpless to the force and power of their freewill: "They themselves decreed / Their own revolt, not I. If I foreknew / Foreknowledge had no influence on their fault / Which had no less proved certain unforeknown"(III: 116-119). As God's son listens to his father's foretelling of the fall of man, Christ's humanity is described:

Thus while God spake ambrosial fragrance filled

All Heav'n and in the blessed spirits elect

Sense of new joy ineffable diffused.

Beyond compare the Son of God was seen

Most glorious. In Him all His Father shone

Substantially expressed and in His face

Divine compassion visibly appeared:

Love without end and without measure grace, (III: 135-142).

These lines illustrate Christ's human qualities. His face is showing "divine compassion." Christ's compassion is "divine" not because he is the Son of God, but because the magnitude of his compassion is comparable to the might of God. Christ inquires as to the prospect of Adam and Eve ever finding grace. In response God proposes to deliver grace to Adam and Eve in exchange for one of his heavenly being's immortality: "Say, Heavn'ly Pow'rs, where shall we find such love? / Which of ye will be mortal to redeem / Man's mortal crime and, just, th' unjust to save? / Dwells in all Heaven charity so dear?" (III; 213-216). God proposes immortal life in heaven in exchange for mortal life on earth to save man; "He asked, but all the Heavn'ly choir stood mute/ And silence was in Heav'n"(III; 217-218). The silence of the angels in response to God's proposition amplifies the importance of compassion as a uniquely human quality. Christ's humanity allows him to show compassion for our first parents.

The Bible tells us, "For God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in Him should not perish, but have everlasting life" (John 3; 16). In the Bible God chose his Son to save our first parents. God gave his Son, commanded his Son to be sent to earth to save man. Milton's text does not give God this power, as God is powerless in the face of free will with respect to Adam and Eve. He is also powerless to choose a heavenly being, to take away an angel's immortal presence in heaven for the sake of man. However, it is Christ who volunteers, Christ whose humanity calls him to ask God to send him to save man:

Behold Me then, Me for him, life for life

I offer. On Me let thine anger fall.

Account Me Man. I for his sake will leave

Thy bosom and this glory next to Thee

Freely put off and for him lastly die

Well pleased. On Me let Death wreck all his rage! (III:236-241)

Milton's portrayal of Christ's humanity, through his compassion and his volunteer effort to save man, illustrates the concept of anti-Trinitarianism that was a radical idea in the 1640s. Up to now, it is apparent that Milton's political and religious views were legitimately radical. Paradise Lost articulates the radical ideas of anticlericalism, iconoclasim, and anti-Trinitariansim by presenting two metanarratives, figuring the fallen angels and illustrating Christ's humanity.

Finally, Hill presents the doctrine of mortalism. Hill claims with respect to this doctrine, "If at death the body returns into its elements, as a drop of water taken out of the ocean returns to it again, mortalism can also lead to skepticism about the physical existence of heaven and hell" (75). It is important here to remember that Hill does not categorize Milton into any specific group of radicals; the groups varied from one extreme of radicalism to another. The spectrum reaches from a view that maintained a political charge only by objecting to the current political state of England, while other groups went so far as to oppose the political and religious doctrines that governed England. I maintain that it is Milton's objective to present these views not as his own, but as existent in the time and place he was writing. Therefore, with respect to this doctrine, I resist reaching into Milton's poem for evidence to support Hill's claim with respect to mortalism. While it may be argued that Milton's poem can be theorized to support this view of radicalism, I do not think that the denial of the physical existence of heaven and hell was at the

forefront of Milton's goals for Paradise Lost. This view deals in a realm that does not seem relevant to the imaginative aspect of Milton's work. Hill points out, "Mortalism could be accompanied by, or lead to, a species of materialism"(Hill, 74). I believe it is Milton's priority to explore imaginatively the radical viewpoints that hovered in the air of mid-seventeenth-century England, and an analysis of a viewpoint that leads to a form of materialism feels to me to be irrelevant.

III. Radicalism: Bringing Politics into Existence

It has been shown that Paradise Lost is illustrative of 17th-century radical ideas. Is it enough to define radicalism in terms of the ideas that fall under the category of 'radical'? This definition of radicalism is not sound. Radicalism itself remains a subject of inquiry. After all, if radicalism is to be defined in terms of the ideas associated with it, there still remains a force of radicalism itself, a force that brings these views into existence. In his paper, J.C. Davis redefines 17th-century English radicalism in different terms. It is Davis's prerogative to provide a view of radicalism that may allow a more thoughtful evaluation of its status in history and in politics. Davis shows that radicalism is a theoretical entity that is contingent on its own specific historical moment and mode of expression. The attention to specific moments in history and modes of expression is how radicalism distinguishes itself from itself throughout history. Davis calls for a reading of culture as a means of giving 17th-century English radicalism a voice of its own rather than a voice that echoes a non-theoretical analysis of English political history: "The paradox, in this instance, is that radicals who rejects the status quo constituent of reality are brought to book in terms of it" (Davis)

J.C. Davis resists an established view of radicalism that judges the status of the theoretical according to the criteria of the literal, or the real. This view situates radicalism as a static moment in a historical narrative. As part of a historical narrative radicalism is susceptible to being categorized in ways that provide limited, if any, epistemological value. He suggests a postmodern analysis of radicalism insofar as it identifies the historical narrative as over-determined, reductive and incommensurable. We acknowledge the implications of encapsulating radicalism inside the historical narrative by understanding Lyotard's assertions about the character of the metanarrative. A definition then, of radicalism, involves refining a perspective of the theoretical, setting aside rationalism for the prospect of possibility.

If radicalism continues to be associated within a historical narrative, it is subjected to a reductive authority, repressing its theoretically-unique quality. More importantly, historians will continue to conclude that mid-seventeenth-century English radicalism failed. What are the implications of convicting the theoretical of failure? What knowledge do we gain by categorizing radicalism in mid-seventeenth-century England as a failed event in the history of English politics and society? The implications are many and the knowledge is meager. Therefore a historical narrative is an insufficient ground for an analysis of radicalism. In fact, Lyotard would agree that placing radicalism inside the narrative perspective is both irresponsible and slighting of a particular social bond. Radicalism as a theory is a particular social bond, and the demands put on it by the historical narrative puts its legitimacy, not its success or failure, into question. Lytoard poses the question: "Where, after the metanarratives, can legitimacy reside?" (Lyotard, xxv). It is my contention that we learn nothing about radicalism by looking at its

associations with historical events. Instead we attach names and documents to this failed event, thus categorizing those as failed figures. Looking at radicalism in this way articulates the status of radicalism, not radicalism itself. To discover where legitimacy resides Davis aims to deconstruct all of the theoretical elements of radicalism and evaluate them in terms of legitimacy. The theory of radicalism in mid-seventeenth-century England is specific to the traditional society that it aimed to uproot. Davis points out key figures of seventeenth-century radicalism that are slighted by their associations with the events of the age. Furthermore, their assumed participation in a historical narrative serves only for a reading of their status that is their success or failure. The historical narrative does not allow for an investigation of the theory itself. Davis provides specific examples of seventeenth-century figures that have been defaced by a reading of radicalism in terms of success and failure:

> We can— and do— enhance the status of these 'thinkers ahead of their time' in two ways. In the one they become 'philosophers of a revolution that failed and Samuel Hartlib, William Sprigge, Gerrard Winstanley and James Harrington, amongst others, have all been auditioned for that role. Secondly, we can hook them on to some long-term 'success' story. We depict them as visionaries, dreamers, utopians and talk about their undefined- often unexamined- contribution to a radical, liberal, socialist, (if your lucky) feminist tradition. (Davis 194)

In order to avoid a reading of radicalism as an event in an arbitrary historical narrative, Davis suggests reading radicalism as theoretical. By doing so Davis applies a "process" that analyzes radicalism with respect to its ideological, theoretical, and imaginative

elements. The “process” inherent in a theoretical reading of radicalism according to Davis entails delegitimation, legitimation, and the involvement of a transfer mechanism. This "process" is the means by which the theoretical comes into existence. Delegitimation, legitimation and the involvement of a transfer mechanism are the primary functions of radicalism, and an evaluation of radicalism requires an assessment of these functions and their ability to resolve the problems posed to radicals.

To begin with, Davis loosely defines radicalism in contrast to reform. Where reform aims to augment an existing situation, radicalism aims to completely destroy the existing situation (203). With that in mind I would like to highlight what Davis identifies as the primary functions of radicalism, and to show how the problems they pose grant seventeenth-century-English radicalism epistemological value.

The first function is delegitimation, which requires that an existing system is wrong and necessitates replacement. Davis argues that delegitimation aims to uproot existing systems, he states: “Radicalism in its insistence upon root and branch change must show the whole to be unsoundly based upon false principles” (204). Radicalism views change from the ground up. It requires that a system built on unsturdy ground be re-tilled, that the soil be reinvigorated, the earth revitalized so that a new system can be implemented. The second function is the legitimation of a new system to replace the destroyed system. Delegitimation and legitimation are consequences of one another; they are mutually dependent. Legitimation requires an idea, a vision for something other than what exists. Legitimation requires the innovative strength of imagination. The third function of radicalism is the employment of a transfer mechanism. The transfer

mechanism serves as the evidence that an old system has been destroyed and a new one has been implemented.

The major problem posed by Davis's process, delegitimation, legitimation and the involvement of a transfer mechanism, is that it essentially requires an agent for destroying and for creating. That is, the transfer mechanism must both legitimate, or create a representation, and delegitimate, or destroy the authority of an existing representation. This way of evaluating radicalism poses questions about authority and who or what should hold it. By suggesting reading radicalism according to its primary functions we gain knowledge specific to mid-seventeenth-century radicals, and instead of attaching figures to radicalism we are poised to ask questions about forms of rule, ways of governing, and the inherent problems that arise when we speak of processes that concern destruction and creation. Can one system really be destroyed? If it is, can the imagination's view of what should replace it ever become a reality? What is the transfer mechanism that transposes vision into reality?

Evaluating the performance of radicalism's three primary functions similarly allows us to digest the material of the mid-seventeenth-century differently and perhaps place documents and figures that had not before been looked at in the role of performers of these functions. The claim that radicalism is crucially theoretical and that the radical "process" should be evaluated leads Davis to his final remarks about the radicals in mid-seventeenth-century England.

Charles I, the emblem of centuries of monarchial rule, was a political and religious target for the radicals. His severe rule was a testament to the traditional society that dominated the English. Davis concludes that the traditional situation presented a

distinct task for radicals, that a society based on an intolerance for change renders the radical theory of mid-seventeenth-century England unique, he concludes: "Thus radicalism of mid-seventeenth-century England appears unique in its own period. We should evaluate it in terms consistent with that uniqueness" (213). A reading of radicalism in this period, according to its primary functions, may allow us to gain insight from sources previously overlooked or categorized in opposition to the established view of radicalism as a historical event.

IV: Discovering a Theoretical Entity: Paul de Man's and the Critique of Language, the Poetic Image and the Value of Allegory

With Davis in mind, I will investigate a theoretical reading of Romantic texts by Paul de Man. I will attempt to further these readings by finding support for de Man's claims in Paradise Lost. Using de Man's theory of the poetic image and his conception of allegory, I will show that Paradise Lost not only presents radical ideas but also uproots traditional texts, most notably the Bible. I would like to argue that the poetic image and allegory are literary devices capable of the process that Davis requires of an analysis of a theoretical entity, specifically radicalism.

In his essay, *The Structure of Romantic Nature Imagery* (1970), William K. Wimsatt Jr. identifies the Romantic landscape as a literal, material landscape. Our ideas of the natural world enter us through our senses. The poet expresses these ideas of the natural world through language. Wimsatt argues that Romantic poetry is essential in its capacity to present an experience of nature through language in such a way that is not dissimilar from an experience of nature outside of language. "[We may see] romantic poetry as a step toward the directness of sensory presentation" (88). In Wimsatt's view

the "imitative powers of language" (87) enable the poet to recreate nature. Language is rendered a mimetic force. As such, Wimsatt continues to premise his argument on the claim that the imagination is a faculty capable of merging or "fusing" the material or the sensory and thought. This merger, according to Wimsatt, recreates a landscape, similar to a photograph.

A photograph in its 5x7 frame serves Wimsatt's idea of the merger between thought and sensory perception. Photography captures an image that serves as a testament to an experience. The figure in the image is not the figure of experience. The image is a representation of the figure of experience. However, since the difference lies merely in the form of representation, it can be said that a fountain in a photograph is still the fountain in the park where the picture was taken— it still *is*. For Wimsatt the gap between the figure and its representation can be bridged. The presentation of the photograph can serve the viewer as actually having had an experience of sitting in the park, looking at the fountain. Similarly, the poetic image in its shift from experience to language, is fixed— that is, the poetic images crosses over from nature to language unaltered. This inconspicuous shift, as Wimsatt sees it, is conceivable because of language's system of signs: "But romantic nature poetry tends to achieve iconicity by a more direct sensory imitation of something headlong and impassioned, less ordered, nearer perhaps to the subrational" (87). Wimsatt's argument finds nature unordered, perhaps reckless, in need of universal presentation; which he contends can be found in language. Similar to Wimsatt's view of language and with respect to the photograph, imagine the process of the photographer. The photographer photographs the fountain in the foreground where children are swimming. Their figures are blurred because they are

moving and splashing around. An ice cream cart sits in the middle ground whilst rolling hills line the background. The photographer composes this image, positioning the elements, the fountain, the children, the ice cream cart, the rolling hills, intentionally so as to convey to the viewer an experience of human life in the midst of quiet nature. The photographer uses techniques, the rule of thirds, and slow shutter speed to compose the image so that it is readable. Wimsatt sees the poetic image being composed as intentionally and technically as the photographic image. Wimsatt's poetic image then becomes bound within the system of language. The poetic image is framed by Wimsatt's conception of language. Thus, the reader is limited to an experience of nature that lies inside a frame, an experience of nature that has been had before. Since Wimsatt's poetic image depends on the view of language as a system, the view of nature is limited not only to the system of language but also to the human eye. However, it is no surprise that some experiences in nature transcend the senses, stirring other faculties, consciousness, the imagination for example; faculties for which there is no system. Is it possible to think that language is unable to construct a poetic image of this, what I could call a varied experience? With de Man in mind, I resist Wimsatt's assertions about the system of language, and content that language is variable.

Similarly, Milton's poem does not stand to construct a landscape according to Wimsatt's theory. In the opening lines of Book I of *Paradise Lost*, Milton proposes a reading of the Fall as variable. That is, instead of the poetic image as a photograph, Milton creates a poetic image more akin to a collage. He calls on his muse to write a landscape that considers views from various heights.

Sing Heav'nly Muse, that on the secret top

Of Oreb or of Sinai didst inspire

That shepherd who first taught the chosen seed,

In the beginning, how the heav'ns and earth

Rose out of chaos (I; 6-10)

On the peak of Oreb is where Moses met God and God appeared as a burning bush. From this peak, from this view Milton isolates a piece of the landscape to construct his poetic image. In the same line Milton isolates a piece of the landscape as viewed from the peak of Sinai, a peak higher than Oreb and covered in darkness. Sinai, while part of the same mountain range as Oreb no doubt presents a view vastly different from the peak of Oreb. Milton requires both of these views to imagine and to represent the rise of heaven out of chaos. It is crucial that two views be positioned side by side, in order to testify to the variability of an experience and figuring of nature.

Unlike Wimsatt, Milton uses language not as a universal system but as a mode of creating a landscape thick with tension. The two mountain peaks contrast light, the burning bush, and dark, tall and taller. Similar to Wimsatt though, the natural world seen from the two peaks is one of disorder, of chaos. Instead of using language as a universal system of signs to order the chaos, Milton uses language to create an original landscape, a landscape in which he may "justify the ways of God to men" (I; 10).

De Man's theory of the poetic image allows the imagination to enter the text and replace a traditional mode of representation. The imagination's view is a constructed view— one created similar to an existing view.

In the same way that Milton uses language to originate a landscape, Paul de Man theorizes language as essentially capable of origination in *Intentional Structure of the*

Romantic Image (1970). For this reason language is incapable of direct sensory presentation. Origination, says de Man, is the ontological distinction between language, the word, and nature, the natural object. De Man states, "For it is in the essence of language to be capable of origination, but of never achieving the absolute identity with itself that exists in the natural object"(69). If words are capable of origination, then two conclusions may follow: one, a word's beginning or origin is determinable and two, this beginning constitutes its existence. Rather than the imagination fusing language with sensory perceptions, for de Man the imagination, in its dealings with language, will always create a poetic image essentially distinct from nature.

Similar to Wimsatt, de Man finds nature to be disordered, chaotic insofar as its origin cannot be realized: "But the natural object, safe in its immediate being, seems to have no beginning and no end. Its permanence is carried by the stability of its being, whereas a beginning implies a negation of permanence…"(68). The natural object seems to have no beginning and no end because it is conceivable to think of that which came before it and that which will spring from it, forever. On the other hand, the word, whose origin is determinable, whose beginning constitutes its existence, is impermanent. That is, the word, its beginning, what it means, what it stands for, is fleeting, is momentary. Milton identifies language as capable of origination. Thus his intent in creating a landscape is not to make it 'readable' but to make it conceivable. By drawing views from multiple heights, he constructs a landscape that is a collage of multiple perspectives.

The opening lines of *Paradise Lost* continues, for perhaps the view of Sion hill will help to appropriate the landscape Milton is creating in order to justify the ways of God to men. Of Sion hill:

Or if Sion hill

Delight thee more and Siloa's brook that flowed

Fast by the oracle of God, I thence

Invoke thy aid to my advent'rous song

That with no middle flight intends to soar

Above th' Aonian mount while it pursues

Things unattmepted yet in prose or rhyme (I; 12-16).

The necessity to create a landscape in order to say what has not ever been said is, for Milton, an adventure. Through poetry, Milton embarks upon an adventure— an exploration— via language of the social state of seventeenth-century England. Using a conception of language as capable of origination Milton traverses the landscape of the imagination. Milton employs the innovative faculty of the imagination in search of justice in the name of God.

Similar to de Man's critique of Wimsatt, de Man critiques a view of romanticism that prioritizes symbolic diction over allegorical diction. With respect to the relationship between language and the subject of language de Man states, "For this dialectic originates, it must be remembered, in the assumed predominance of the symbol as the outstanding characteristic of romantic diction, and this predominance must, in its turn, be put into question" (198). Putting the symbol into question will lead to an alternative interpretation of the romantic image, one that is consistent with de Man's idea of the poetic image. With respect to the poetic image, de Man argues that the originating nature of the poetic image is characteristic of romantic poetry. This position requires that the relationship between experience and representation be examined according to the

differences between an experience of nature and a representation of nature. Similarly, de Man discusses the relationship between subject and object with respect to its differences. This methodology allows him to remain consistent with a view of language as capable of origination. The subject's disparity from language is similar to that of the experience from its representation. Through this disparity de Man finds a contradiction in the notion of the priority of nature or object (experience) over self or subject (representation). De Man states, "They are obliged, on the one hand, to assert the priority of object over subject that is implicit in an organic conception of language" (197). The contradiction arises because it is not a conception of language as capable of origination that renders this hierarchy. Rather a conception of language as containing symbols capable of fusing the subject and the object gives weight to the symbol. The object is prioritized over the subject, the representation over the experience. However, that is inconsistent with an idea of the symbol as a unit of language. De Man's critique is that this prioritizing of the object over the subject in turn prioritizes the symbol over allegory, a hierarchy that is arbitrary and inconsistent with its theoretical lineage.

Thinking about the photograph as a metaphor for Wimsatt's view of the function of language, de Man's observation of the symbol as a unit of language continues to critique a view of language as a unifying system:

> There is the same stress on the analogical unity of nature and consciousness, the same priority given to the symbol as the unit of language in which the subject-object synthesis can take place, the same tendency to transfer in nature attributes of consciousness and to unify it organically with respect to a center that acts, for natural objects, as the identity of the self functions for a consciousness (200).

Thus, de Man's critique of language viewed according to Wimsatt as well as other critics of romanticism leads de Man to investigate the role allegory plays, specifically in Rousseau's novel *La Nouvelle Heloise*. After careful analysis de Man shows the way in which Rousseau's text actually prioritizes allegorical diction over symbolic diction. His argument finds evidence in the fact that the text admits to its ontological status as art and not nature: "From the beginning we are told that the natural aspect of the site is in fact the result of extreme artifice, that in this bower of bliss, contrary to the tradition of the topos, we are entirely in the realm of art and not that of nature"(202). Similarly, in the passage above, Milton tells us that the site of his poem is not akin to nature but to imagination by calling on his muse. Milton employs an ancient tradition, calling on the muse to tell what Milton cannot himself say. Above, I concluded that the poetic image is a product of the imagination; similarly it is logical to conclude that the poetic image is also in the realm of art. This conclusion is not only consistent with a view of language as capable of origination, but it supports the contradiction de Man finds as a result of the prioritization of the symbol over allegory.

The view of language that de Man criticizes is consistent with Lyotard's critique of metalanguage. Lyotard's critique in *Just Gaming* (1985) is concerned with a distinction between statements of opinion and statements of fact with respect to the political. Lyotard clarifies a conception of the political: "Therefore, there is no science of the political. I would put it otherwise: There is no metalanguage, and by metalanguage, I mean the famous theoretical discourse that is supposed to ground political and ethical decisions that will be taken as the basis of its statements" (Lyotard, 28). This critique is analogous to de Man's concern for the distinction between subject and object, nature and

the experience of nature. By arguing the prioritization of allegory over symbol, de Man concludes that the language of allegory must be capable of origination, intended not to represent but to construct a way to "justify the ways of God to men". De Man states, "The language is purely figural, not based on perception, less still on an experienced dialectic between nature and consciousness" (203). Therefore, my hypothesis is that if allegory does in fact use "purely figural" language then the effect will be a conflict between the work that allegorizes (*Paradise Lost*) and the work that is allegorized (the Bible).

Paradise Lost explicitly allegorizes the Bible. What constitutes this work as an allegory is not that the intent of Milton's text is similar to the intent of the Bible but that it differs. In the final lines of Milton's text when Adam and Eve are sent out of Eden for disobeying God. The Bible intends to justify the ways of God to men by showing Adam and Eve's shame as the punishment for disobeying God. Milton's text justifies the ways of God to men by showing that Adam and Eve's failure to comply with God's requests sends them to another landscape wherefore to seek out other possible ways of loving God. In the final lines of *Paradise Lost*, Adam and Eve look upon the horizon outside of Eden as a plane of possibilities:

> Some natural tears they dropped but wiped them soon.
> The world was all before them, where to choose
> Their place of rest, and Providence their guide.
> They hand in hand with wand'ring steps and slow
> Through Eden took their solitary way (XII; 645-650).

According to de Man the allegory stands because there is a conflict between the mode the Bible uses to justify the ways of God to men and the mode Milton uses. The relationship between God and Man is not based on persistent repentance. Milton views the relationship between God and man as a practice of discovering God and a tolerance for the various means of knowing God that these discoveries produce.

The Bible uses nakedness as a symbol for shame; before Adam and Eve ate from the Tree of Knowledge they were unashamed. The Bible states, “And they were both naked, the man and his wife, and were not ashamed” (Genesis 2; 25). After their fall their nakedness causes them shame: “And the eyes of them both were opened, and they knew that they were naked; and they sewed fig leaves together, and made themselves aprons. And they heard the voice of the LORD God walking in the garden in the cool of the day: and Adam and his wife hid themselves from the presence of the LORD God amongst the trees of the garden” (3; 7-8). The Bible employs nakedness as a symbol of the difference between a prelapsarian mankind and postlapsarian mankind. This difference is indicated by the shame postlapsarian man feels as indicated by his need to cover his nakedness from his fellow man and from God. Contrary to the Bible, Milton’s text presents quite a different experience of our first parents after eating from the Tree of Knowledge. Nakedness is not employed as a symbol in *Paradise Lost*. Instead it marks the difference between the Bible and *Paradise Lost*. Nakedness as a symbol does not carry over from the Bible to *Paradise Lost*. The effect of this difference is the undermining of the authority of the Bible as "truth," and on a less grand scale, the authority of the symbol as evidence of language as stable. Milton tells of our Parents’ first experience after eating form the Tree of Knowledge:

Bad fruit of knowledge if this be to know

Which leaves us naked thus, of honor void,

Of innocence, of faith, of purity,

Our wonted ornaments now soiled and stained

And in our faces evident the signs

Of foul concupiscence, whence evil store,

Ev'n shame the last of evils—of the first

Be sure then! (IX; 1073-1080)

Nakedness is a descriptor. Nakedness describes Adam and Eve's original state in nature prior to experience. Likewise, nakedness is employed as a descriptor of experience. It is self-aware of itself as void of "honor," "of innocence," "of faith," and "of purity" of nature. Thus, nature and experience (as represented through language) are distinct from one another. An experience of nature—that is a representation of nature through language— can never be nature itself. By interpreting nakedness as a description of experience, *Paradise Lost* is inconsistent with the Bible. The difference is between Adam and Eve's first experience according to the Bible and according to *Paradise Lost*. Instead of rushing to cover themselves, *Paradise Lost* recounts quite differently Adam and Eve's first experience:

Nor Eve to iterate

Her former trespass feared, the more to soothe

Him with her loved society that now

As with new wine intoxicated both

They swim in mirth and fancy that they feel

Divinity within them breeding wings

Wherewith to scorn the earth. But that false fruit

Far other operation first displayed,

Carnal desire inflaming (IX; 1005-1013)

Milton tells that although their sin will "scorn the earth," their first experience is the discovery of each other as worthy of one another: "They swim in mirth and fancy that they feel." Instead of immediate acknowledgment of their disobedience, "Far other operation first displayed." Adam and Eve consummate their partnership as their first human experience:

Her hand he seized and to a shady bank

Thick overhead with verdant roof embow'red

He led her nothing loath. Flow'rs were the couch,

Pansies and violet and asphodel

And hyacinth, Earth's freshest softest lap.

There they their fill of love and love's disport

Took largely, of their mutual guilt the seal,

The solace of their sin (IX; 1037-1044)

Lovemaking for Adam and Eve is "the solace of their sin." They lay together on "Earth's freshest softest lap" in the midst of flowers, a scene Milton creates. Subsequent to this scene Milton uses "nakedness" to describe a more general postlapsarian conception of human experience. These two passages draw attention to the variability of language, criticizing what Lyotard calls metalanguage, and what de Man calls the prioritization of the symbol. Both Lyotard and de Man criticize this view of language because it

necessarily limits an interpretation of allegorical work by prioritizing the symbol. De Man states, "For, if the dialectic between subject and object does not designate the main romantic experience, but only one passing moment in a dialectic, and a negative moment at that, since it represents a temptation that has to be overcome, then the entire historical and philosophical pattern changes a great deal" (*The Rhetoric of Temporality*, 205).

De Man states that it is a temptation to take language as a stable system and to give the Bible authority. However, the defacement of the symbol leads to the authority of the allegory. The symbol of nakedness does not carry over into Milton's text. Therefore, we must now look to the allegory to analyze the authority of the Bible with respect to Paradise Lost. In Paradise Lost the Fall serves to delegitimate the existing system by obstructing the authority of the symbol of nakedness.

The critical approach that de Man provides through a reading of romantic literature is consistent with a reading of Milton's *Paradise Lost*. It is evident in his essays, *The Nature of Romantic Nature Imagery*, and *The Rhetoric of Temporality* that a conception of language as capable of origination and the priority of allegorical diction over symbolic diction is a shared view of Milton's poetry and Romantic poetry. De Man's essays ask us to reconsider the relationship between experience and nature, between subject and object, but most importantly he provides a way of reading ` Lost that is radical and theoretically sound.

V: Conclusion: The Presentation of a Theoretical Entity

Davis's article distinguishes radicalism as theoretical. Through the example of de Man's analysis of Romantic poetry I have shown that Milton employs a theoretically sound conception of language and its possibilities. Allegory according to de Man is a

form of delegitimation. Identifying differences between Paradise Lost and the Bible serves to uproot the illusionary authority of a traditional text. The possibility of a theoretical entity existing within a text is a way of reading Paradise Lost. Milton's text illustrates views that characterize 17th-century English radicalism but also expresses radicalism as a theoretical entity. As a theoretical entity radicalism emerges in the poetic image created by Milton in Paradise Lost. It is evidence that radicalism be defined as a theoretical entity, because it requires expression through a language that is variable. The use of allegory in Paradise Lost shows that radicalism defines itself as a theoretical entity distinct from a material entity that depends on the use of metalanguage in the context of a metanarrative. That is, radicalism does not draw on a system of language that aims to express itself within another governing system. A conception of language as capable of origination is why the symbol of nakedness in the Bible does not carry over into Paradise Lost. With respect to 17th-century England, radicalism's only concern for the traditional system was to extinguish it, and to implement original modes of government. To both extinguish the current system of government and simultaneously implement a new original system, radicalism took to expressing itself through different forms of representation. Issues of censorship in the 17th-century limited the explicitness of expression, including the expression of radical ideas. Literature, however, capable of employing devices that could make implicit what was not allowed to be explicit, provides still a valuable means for a presentation of radicalism. Literature as a means of presenting radical ideas also serves for the expression of creation. De Man states that the poetic image is in the realm of art —this statement allows us to conclude that art, more specifically literature, is a sound political outlet. That the transmission of political ideas

does not only dwell in the content of historical documents but also in the realm of art is how we should analyze a theoretical entity. More important to radicalism, literature serves as the primary means of expression.

The process of legitimation and delegitimation that Davis identifies as inherent in a conception of radicalism finds a landscape in literature. Literature provides for radicalism the space to both uproot and implant new views. Paradise Lost is an example of a literary landscape in which radical views are created and presented. In the expression of radical ideas, Milton's text creates radicalism as a theoretical entity. As a theoretical entity, radicalism is capable of proliferating as a significant political element not only during 17th-century England but also throughout political discourse. Therefore, in order to see Milton's epic as postmodern we must stand at the peak of a theoretical mountain, where we will view language as capable of origination. From this height the literary landscape will become broader, and the lines that separate one territory from another will dissolve. The landscape will be a collage of forms from varying historical and political groundings. No longer is the landscape strictly instructive. It is expressive. From this viewpoint Paradise Lost views expression as indicative of knowledge, that where there is expression there is knowing. Unique to Paradise Lost is the expression of its radical political charge. Paradise Lost serves as a testament that politics as a body of knowledge is transferable primarily through expression. Consistent with Lyotard's view of politics, Milton's literature presents knowledge of radical politics not by means of a metalanguage but through a metadiscourse. In conclusion I would like to propose that Paradise Lost is a metadiscourse. As a metadiscourse it is concerned with the discourse of politics. This conclusion is a proposition for further study of Milton with respect to postmodern

philosophy. As a means of representing radical politics, Paradise Lost contributes to a political discourse whose aim was and still is, according to postmodernism, primarily concerned with presentation.

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