

“So were I equalled with them in renown”: The Politics of Poetic Adaptation in
Dante’s and Milton’s Epics

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Abstract¹

In this thesis I examine the narrator's role in John Milton's *Paradise Lost*. To do so, I compare Milton's narrator to the narrator of Dante Alighieri's *Divine Comedy*. I found that both Dante's and Milton's narrators have a unique relationship to their respective Muses that differs from what can be found in classical epics: Dante replaces the Muse with Beatrice and Virgil — representing Church and State respectively — while Milton's poem presents an internalised Protestant Muse. I argue that, through this unprecedented relationship to the Muse figures in each poem, both poems re-negotiate how narrative authority is gained: Dante constructs a poem in which his narrator derives his authority from two external guides, whereas *Paradise Lost* presents a narrator whose authority resides within. I further argue that, while Milton's narrator partakes in journey that parallels the purification process in Dante's poem, the replacement of external guides with an internal source of authority encourages a critical reading of *Paradise Lost* and its narrator. By rejecting the certainty associated with the external sources of authority in previous epics, Milton's poem urges its readers to actively engage with the poem: like the narrator of *Paradise Lost*, who is unable to rely on any external figure of absolute authority, the reader is encouraged to use reason and make interpret choices without reference to a central figure of authority.

¹ Keywords: John Milton; Paradise Lost; Narrator; Authority; Muse

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Introduction

Dante's Poetic Influence

Despite John Milton's apparent departure from the political sphere after the restoration of the monarchy in 1660, readers of *Paradise Lost* have long acknowledged the political nature of Milton's poem. Nigel Smith states that none of Milton's contemporaries would have seen the poem as removed from the political events of his time (251-55). *Paradise Lost* then, is in part a political commentary and arguably a reaction against the Restoration as a political event. Given the monarchy's support for and association with the theatre, Milton's decision to move "*Adam Unparadised*" — the play script that would later become *Paradise Lost* — from the stage indicates Milton's increased resistance to a monarchy in England after the Restoration.² How Milton's poem registers his political reaction to the Restoration, however, has been, and continues to be, widely debated. Much of the current scholarship focuses on attempting to unravel the multivalent significances of Satan and God in the poem. Even those, such as Stevie Davies — who suggest any attempt to link the characters in *Paradise Lost* to contemporary political figures, such as Cromwell or Charles I, is both "reductive" and "ridiculous" (12) — are still inclined to read Milton's characters as poetic representations of certain types of political figures.³

² There are seven pages in the *Trinity Manuscript* which contain Milton's notes on his planned tragedy. Masson argues that these notes were written between 1639 and 1642. For a detailed explanation of the contents of these notes, see Parker ("Trinity Manuscript"). In his edition of *Paradise Lost*, Leonard states that Milton began composing the poem (as an epic instead of a tragedy) in 1658 (xii).

³ For a more explicit allegorical reading of *Paradise Lost*, see Bennett, who argues that Milton's Satan continues the fictional representation of Charles I that Milton started in his political tracts.

Following in the tradition of Northrop Frye, Sharon Achinstein argues that in writing allegory, an author exerts a degree of control over his reader. Achinstein states that the reader is forced to “share the particular vision of the author” (178). She goes on to state that “[a]llegory, consequently, serves political propaganda well. During the English Revolution, writers sought to effect political persuasion, to consolidate support from a select audience, and thus to limit the ‘freedom’ of their readers” (178). Readers were limited in that they were unable to arrive at any conclusion other than the one the writer desired. With this understanding of allegory and its propagandistic power in mind, Achinstein argues that in his prose, especially *Areopagitica* and the *History of Britain*, Milton seeks to educate his readers so that they might be better able to read allegory and resist propaganda in the future. What is most relevant for my own study of the narrator of *Paradise Lost* and his purpose in the poem is Achinstein’s argument that Milton, like many political thinkers, found the behaviour of the people of England to be contemptible: for Milton, the people’s ineptitude was responsible for the revolution’s failure (205-6). Where Milton differs from his Royalist counterparts is in his response to this perceived deficiency. For royalists, the solution was to re-instate the monarchy and reclaim absolute political authority by subjugating the people. In contrast, after the Restoration, Milton believed that “the common people must be prepared for freedom in the future better than they were in 1649” (Achinstein 206). In Achinstein’s view of Milton, this readiness comes from an ability to read allegory critically. She suggests that the purpose of *Paradise Lost* is to educate readers by presenting them with opportunities to practise reading allegory (207-10). While I do not deny that *Paradise Lost* offers its readers such opportunities, and that *part* of the purpose of the poem is to facilitate the readerly growth of its audience, I contend that the poem does more to educate its reader: by using

the narrator to provide an example of the personal development that Milton desired of the English people, *Paradise Lost* acts as an educational guide for its readers. Milton's narrator then, becomes an example of the ideal citizen through his personal growth as a poet in the poem: as the poem progresses, the narrator becomes an increasingly effective narrator as his ability to understand his own fallen nature and his role in the poem improves.

The role of the narrator as an example for the poem's readers becomes clearer when *Paradise Lost* is compared to Dante's *Divine Comedy*. Thus, the purpose of my paper is to examine the ways in which Milton borrows from and adapts the role of Dante's epic narrator. Milton was certainly familiar with Dante's poetic works and very likely had read and discussed Dante during his trip to Italy (Lewalski, *Life* 193). Milton's awareness of and respect for many of the most famous medieval and Renaissance Italian poets — specifically Dante, Petrarch, Boccaccio, and Ariosto — is beyond doubt. Milton alludes to these four poets throughout his works and refers directly to them in his *Commonplace Book*. Recently, however, scholars have begun to reconsider the influence these Italians had on Milton's development as a poet. The discovery of Milton's copy of Boccaccio's *Vita di Dante* — which William Poole in 2014 first argued was Milton's copy — seems to have prompted a re-examination of Milton's relationship to his Italian predecessors, as the marginal comments in the book shed light on Milton's reading practices.⁴ Poole contends that the *Vita di Dante* was pivotal in Milton's poetic development. He argues that Milton would have read the *Vita di Dante* in the 1630s, which was a formative period for Milton, and that Boccaccio's text had a greater influence on Milton than most other texts that

⁴ Despite Milton's large library, of the hundreds of titles identified by Boswell (*Milton's Library*) as once having been owned by Milton, only nine physical books have been recovered. See Campbell and Poole for discussions of these books and a complete list of titles.

he read during this stage of his life (139). In fact, Dante's influence on Milton can be seen in his earliest prose works (Lewalski, *Life* 153). In his early anti-prelatical tract *Of Reformation*, Milton refers directly to Dante, Petrarch, and Ariosto (*CPW* 1.558-60).⁵ Milton also makes explicit reference to *Inferno* 19 and *Paradiso* 20 in the tract.

While there is no question that Milton had read the poetry of Dante, Poole argues that Milton's close engagement with the *Vita di Dante* indicates that Milton was drawn to Dante on a more personal level due to Dante's political engagement and his exile. He further notes that Milton was also interested in how Dante's works had been censored and how Boccaccio's description of this censoring was, in turn, censored. Milton's note on the censoring of Boccaccio's text appears to be the first recorded English comment on the subject (Poole 146). In the first edition — the version Milton owned — a section documents Messer Bertrand's attempt to suppress public dissent by having Dante's *De Monarchia* publicly condemned and burned for containing heresies. Boccaccio goes on to note that Bertrand sought to have Dante's body exhumed so that the bones could be publicly burned. Beside this passage on censorship in his copy of the *Vita di Dante*, Milton notes that any mention of the burning of Dante's book is missing in later editions. While it is not surprising that Milton was drawn to this passage, given his own political dissent and interest in questions of censorship, this note regarding the event's disappearance in later versions demonstrates not only Milton's careful reading, but suggests he must have either spoken to people about the text during his travels in Italy or consulted more than one edition. In either case, Milton's interest in Dante's life is made evident by his engagement with Boccaccio's *Vita di Dante*.

⁵ In *An Apology against a Pamphlet* Milton celebrates Dante's and Petrarch's poetic achievements and states that he considers them two of his most important poetic inspirations (*CPW* 1.890).

One thing that would have made Milton hesitant fully to embrace Dante as a role model in his poetic development — his Catholicism — is negated by Milton's claiming Dante as a proto-Protestant. A.M Cinquemani notes that Milton's *Commonplace Book* references Dante when discussing Christian doctrine, which demonstrates Milton's "appropriation of Dante as proto-protestant" (118).⁶ Interestingly, Dante similarly reclaims Virgil for his purposes despite their spiritual differences. In *The Comedy*, Dante makes clear that Virgil was the most influential poet in his development by having Virgil act as his guide through *Inferno* and most of *Purgatory*. In *Purgatory* 21, Statius comments that it was through Virgil's works that he found both poetic inspiration and religion: that is, Statius, who had originally been a pagan, is motivated to convert to Christianity because of Virgil's works. Virgil, of course, was a pagan himself, so it seems somewhat strange that he would motivate anyone's conversion to Christianity; however, this moment follows a trend throughout the poem of Dante appropriating Virgil as a proto-Christian who anticipated the birth of Christ and Christianity.⁷ Thus, just as Dante claims his guide for his own religion, despite facts to the contrary, Milton claims Dante. This parallel appropriation

⁶ Milton was part of an emerging tradition in Early Modern Europe to see Dante as proto-Protestant. For example, works by George Webbe and François du Jon the Elder claim that Dante's conflict with the Catholic Church was a result of his proto-Protestantism. For a complete list of references to Dante's proto-Protestantism, see Boswell (*Dante's Fame*). Boswell argues "that [Dante] had been excommunicated and his books burnt at the behest of the bishop of Rome because of his use of unvarnished truth was proof enough for them that Dante was a proto-Protestant" (xv). Milton's emphasis on the censorship of Dante places him within this tradition of claiming Dante as proto-Protestant.

⁷ Reading Virgil as a proto-Catholic was not uncommon in the Italian Renaissance; however, Dante was one of the earliest examples of reading Virgil as such in the Medieval period. That said, he was far from the only one, and by the time Milton wrote *Paradise Lost*, such a gesture would have been commonplace. What does distinguish Dante's claiming of Virgil, however, is how he frames Virgil's movement towards Christianity. As Burrow notes, while many see Virgil as leading the way towards Christianity, most poets and theologians, such as Augustine, regard him as "not quite a Christian," which is often seen in a negative light. Burrow argues that, for many Christian poets, Virgil "presents a secular vision of imperial power which a Christian reader must seek to leave behind." In contrast, Dante describes Virgil in a more positive way as he "leads the way to the Christian era" (80). Furthermore, while Dante is not the only person to read Virgil's proto-Christianity as positive, he is one of the few to be unambiguous in his acceptance of Virgil.

strengthens the idea that a remodelled Dante acted as a poetic and spiritual model for Milton's own development.

In a 2013 article, Ethan Smilie examines the relationship between Lucifer's punishment in *The Comedy* and that of Satan in *Paradise Lost*; however, before beginning his own analysis of how "Milton's demons undergo punishments that are fitting for the specific sins they commit in Heaven," Smilie claims that "Dante's influence on Milton has been largely neglected by commentators" (92). While more works examine the poetic influence of Dante on Milton than the three Smilie notes, Smilie correctly observes that relatively little research on the relationship between Dante and Milton extends beyond an analysis of allusions to *The Comedy* in *Paradise Lost*. Indeed, much of the criticism surrounding Milton's use of Dante's epic examines the punishments of the sinners. Many scholars, including Smilie, have noted Milton's use of the contrapasso.⁸ In his examination of Satan, Stephen Dobranski draws attention to the scene where Satan is transformed into a serpent against his will as punishment. By looking to the phrase "punished in the shape he sinned" (10.516), Dobranski notes that Milton invokes Dante's contrapasso in his punishment of Satan (493). Irene Samuel recognised long beforehand that this use of the contrapasso is a means of establishing the justness of God's punishment, since Satan and his fellow fallen angels are given a punishment befitting their treacherous crime (112). This serpent scene in Book 10 of *Paradise Lost* is a popular point of comparison to the metamorphosis in *Inferno* 25. Like Smilie, Dobranski, and Samuel, George F. Butler argues that Satan's punishment in *Paradise Lost* is directly influenced by Dante's treatment of Satan: "With

⁸ Contrapasso refers to the punishments in Dante's *Inferno* which reflect the crimes of each sinner in the different circles of Hell. For example, in Canto 13, those who committed suicide are transformed into trees and, unlike most of the other sinners, are not permitted to return to their bodies on the final judgement day. Given that they once rejected their bodies, they will never again be permitted to inhabit them.

his transformation into a serpent, the true nature of Milton's Satan becomes apparent: he resembles Dante's satanic monster chewing the sinners. He also brings to mind Ugolino, who gnaws on Ruggieri's head as if he were a dog chewing a bone" (149). What Butler brings to light by drawing out the connection to an animal unable to control his appetites is not only the acts of chewing and consuming, which are present in both poems, but also the lack of agency or ability to exercise the will. In *Paradise Lost*, the transformation that was once voluntary becomes mandated by God, who forces Satan (and the other fallen angels) periodically to assume the form of a serpent and eat an apple made of ashes. While Satan is not forced to relive his punishment eternally in *Paradise Lost*, Milton's poem embraces the Dantean contrapasso, given that Satan's punishment parallels his sin.

While some critics such as Maggie Kilgour have rightly noted Milton's indebtedness to Ovid in the depiction of Satan's metamorphosis, Milton's portrayal of Satan's transformation from angel to serpent can largely be attributed to Dante. According to Butler, Wallace, Samuel, and Schork, *The Comedy* acts as a source for the scene in *Paradise Lost* when Satan returns to find his fallen comrades transformed into serpents before he himself is forced to adopt the form he once willingly chose. Not only is Satan's just punishment reminiscent of Dante's contrapasso, but Satan's return to Hell — expecting the triumphant praise of his comrades, only to be met with hissing — is a direct reference to *Inferno 25*, in which the hissing serpents coil around Vanni Fucci. The metamorphosis in *Inferno 25* which influenced Milton is certainly "Ovidian-inspired" (Wallace 244); this Ovidian influence in Dante's text makes it somewhat difficult to discern whether Milton had Ovid or Dante in mind when representing this episode in his own poem. In fact, Milton likely considered both as he wrote *Paradise Lost*. That said, the divine

justice, which Samuel notes as the driving force in Milton's poem (111-12), coupled with the hissing mentioned in both poems, indicates that Dante's poem was a more immediate influence on *Paradise Lost* in this case.

What distinguishes Schork's examination of Satan's transformation in Book 10 of *Paradise Lost* from that of the previously mentioned scholars, and which strengthens the connection between Dante and Milton, is his discussion of "negative simile or comparison," which he defines as "a special class of extended comparisons in which the poet emphasises the status of his primary tenor by denying the apparent superiority of his comparative analogy." Schork goes on to say that "[a]ll negative similes pivot on a hyperbolic reversal of expected proportion, which is employed more for ornamentation than proof of an argument" (70). Schork notes that out of over six-hundred similes in *The Comedy*, only thirty-three are negative, and that Milton uses negative similes almost as infrequently, with only eleven of his 110 similes being negative. Schork further observes that these negative similes are used not only infrequently but also randomly throughout both Dante's and Milton's poems. Thus, when there are instances in both epics in which "similar material is set in a distinctive negative simile" (71), there is substantial evidence that the passages are related, and Dante's influence on Milton can safely be established. Schork draws attention to two such instances. The first is the snake episode in Cantos 24 and 25 of *Inferno* and Book 10 of *Paradise Lost*. The second occurs when the narrators in both epics describe frozen lakes. In *Inferno* 32, the farthest reach of Hell is bordered by the river Cocytus. This river contains the last group of sinners, the traitors. In this lake, the bodies of the sinners, including Lucifer, are frozen and immobile. Similarly, in Book 1 of *Paradise Lost*, when the narrator first lays eyes on the traitorous Satan, he is chained to a lake

which is paradoxically burning and frozen. Thus, Schork claims that Milton is influenced by both Dante's content and form when constructing his own version of Satan.

What Schork also draws attention to but does not expand on is the relationship between Dante's and Milton's versions of Hell. The entire cosmology of Milton's poem is heavily indebted to Dante. Russell M. Hillier, who acknowledges and largely agrees with Schork's discussion of the similarities between Dante's frozen and fixed Lucifer and Milton's chained Satan, suggests that the most noteworthy connection between the two poems is Milton's use and adaptation of Dante's cosmology. Hillier suggests that Dante's ninth circle of Hell is particularly influential in Milton's construction of his Hell (216-17). He further suggests that this is not the only moment of such transplantation: Dante's Mount Purgatory is replaced by Milton's Eden.⁹ Hillier aptly notes that "Milton, in standard Puritan fashion, dismisses the very idea of a spiritual middle state of Purgatory" (217). What we should then see, according to Hillier, if Milton were simply crafting an orthodox Protestant epic, would be the absence of Purgatory. Instead, Milton, working within a Dantean tradition, simply transmutes the topography of Purgatory into Eden. Hillier notes the physical similarities between the two locations: both are high atop a mountain and "offer only a single point of access" (218). This not to say that the correlation between Purgatory and Eden is absolute. Hillier does draw attention to Milton's adaptation of the location by stating that "there is, however, a significant difference between these two representations. Milton's mountain has no name. What is more, he has stripped his mountain of any allegorical qualities or magical attributes so that his structure has no purgative function" (218). Richard J.

⁹ Irene Samuel's "*Purgatory* and Eve's Dream" supports Hillier's claim. Samuel claims that Eve's dream intentionally echoes Dante's own visionary dream in *Purgatory* 9 (Samuel 5-7). While Samuel does not claim that the similarities in the dreams are linked to Milton's appropriation of Purgatory in Eden, and Hillier does not incorporate Samuel's chapter in his own article, it stands to reason that Milton's allusion (5.28-93) to Dante's experience in Purgatory indicates Milton's transplantation of Purgatory into Eden.

Durocher supports Hillier's observations: "knowing that Milton in *De Doctrina Christiana* dismisses the Catholic concept of Purgatory as a physical place because he found it lacking in scriptural support, one might be tempted to imagine that Milton had no use — or at best a satirical use — for Dante's poem" (160). Durocher goes on to note that there are ten overt references to Purgatory in *Paradise Lost* and many more in Milton's body of work (159-161). Thus, both Hillier and Durocher argue that Milton maintains the concept of Purgatory while modifying it for a Protestant poem; despite key differences, which can be partly explained by accounting for religious differences, *Paradise Lost* maintains much of the cosmological structure of *The Comedy*.

While Hillier and Durocher consider Milton's Protestantism, critics generally overlook religious differences when examining the relationship between Dante and Milton. As Deirdre Serjeanston argues, potential literary influences on Milton's poetry often receive little attention because scholars have largely neglected to consider how Milton's Protestantism affects his engagement with and modification of his sources. This lack of consideration has led to relatively little scholarship which goes beyond examining potential allusions to Dante in Milton's work. Only recently have scholars such as Hillier and Robert Hollander attempted to push the examination of the relationship between Dante and Milton beyond line references and allusions. Hollander provides the most ambitious argument for the relationship between Dante and Milton when he suggests that Milton's poem should be read as a response to Dante. Hollander draws attention to the possibility that Milton added "The Verse" to the 1668 edition of *Paradise Lost* to effect a connection between his epic and Dante's poem, which begins with the *Epistle to Cangrande* (1). Hollander, who draws attention to the common biblical citations in both poems,

their combination of an elevated style with deep vernacularity, and Milton's numerous mentions of Dante in both his poetry and his *Commonplace Book*, suggests that Milton's attempt to distance his poem from *The Comedy* is a result of political and religious necessity (15-6).

Their religious differences, however, are not the only differences Milton would have faced. After the failure of the English Revolution in 1660, Milton became increasingly opposed to monarchism; thus, by the time he wrote *Paradise Lost*, he would have shunned the "monarchical trappings" (Lewalski, *Life*, 363) of Dante's poem. Milton's obvious aversion to the monarchical sentiments of Dante's poem — which calls for a king to take command of the divided city states and unite Italy — combined with Milton's apparent antipathy for Dante's Catholicism has led many scholars to look to the classical epics instead of Dante as a source for Milton's poetic structure. Despite Nigel Smith's argument that during the English Revolution and early Restoration, when Milton would have been writing *Paradise Lost*, Royalist writers preferred Virgil and Parliamentarian writers favoured the style of Lucan, scholars have typically looked to Virgil as sources for Milton's epic poem. But Dante's epic is an important source text for Milton. Milton's reliance on Virgil, moreover, may strengthen the claim that Dante was on Milton's mind as he wrote *Paradise Lost*. Dante's use of Virgil as one of his two guides and Dante's admission that Virgil was a substantial source of inspiration in his own poetic career reinforce the connection between Virgil's and Dante's epic careers; thus, any echoing of Virgil can often be read as an indirect reference to Dante.

Of course, Virgil — in his own right — is inarguably one of the sources for Milton's poem, and this paper does not attempt to dismiss or diminish the connections between Milton and his classical predecessors, including Virgil, Homer, and Ovid. In *Allegory and Epic in*

English Renaissance Literature, Kenneth Borris notes that the epic is an “encyclopaedic genre that aims to sum up the experience of its culture” (54) and that the epic genre contains “a relatively full sampling of a total generic repertoire” (57). I would like to extend Borris’ argument about the diverse nature of epics to suggest that, in *Paradise Lost*, there is not just a “full sampling” of genres but also a *simultaneous* engagement with multiple generically diverse texts. Achinstein’s exploration of Milton’s use of allegory in the representation of the Parliament of Hell at the beginning of *Paradise Lost* substantiates Borris’ claim that Milton’s poem involves a complex system of allegory which rejects the idea that one can “reduce allegory to a binary system of one-to-one correspondences” (56). According to Achinstein, Milton employs the royalist genre of the Parliament of Hell in an attempt to teach his reader how to interpret allegory and demonstrate the multiplicity of meaning in such allegorical texts (182-92). As such, it stands to reason that understanding the complexities of epic in *Paradise Lost* allows for connections to be drawn to Dante without dismissing Milton’s obvious reliance on classical writers.

Despite the connections between Dante and Milton, and the recent increase in scholarship that attempts to explore the depth of the relationship between Dante’s and Milton’s epics, no work has yet examined the relationship between the poetic structure of *The Comedy* and *Paradise Lost* in terms of their respective narrators. My thesis, which builds on the work of recent critics such as Hollander who have attempted to advance the conversation about the relationship between Dante and Milton, takes a new approach by examining the narrative structures and narrators of the two epics. While working with Hillier’s ideas of *Purgatory* and the notion that religious differences need to be taken into account, I demonstrate that the narrative structure of Milton’s poem draws on classical epics as well as Dante’s religious poem. I begin

with an examination of two classical epics: Homer's *Iliad* and Virgil's *Aeneid*.¹⁰ In Chapter 1, I investigate the role of the narrator as well as the narrator's changing relationship to the Muse in the classical epics. Then, in Chapter 2, I shift my attention to Dante's and Milton's poems. I continue this analysis of Dante and Milton in Chapter 3.

As part of my examination of Dante's poem, I consider the narrator's journey, since one of the most important aspects of Dante's poetic structure is the trope of the pilgrimage. Given that his poem is part of the exemplum genre, his central protagonist, the narrator, must undergo a journey, or pilgrimage, in which his growth serves as an example to the reader of how to live a virtuous life. This concept of the journey becomes most obvious in *Purgatory*, where Dante is forced to undergo the process of purification through the sacraments. Of course, because Milton's Protestantism prohibits him from leading his narrator through Purgatory or receiving any Catholic sacraments, Milton demonstrates his narrator's progression differently. Instead of moving through Purgatory and being purified through the sacraments, Milton's narrator's growth is attributed to what Barbara Lewalski calls "interpretative choices" ("Interpreting God's Word — and Words — in *Paradise Lost*" 79). This concept of interpretative choices is closely linked to Achinstein's argument that the poem seeks to offer a sort of educational guide; however, unlike Achinstein's chapter on reading allegory, which engages in reader-response criticism, Lewalski's work focuses on the characters within the poem and their interpretative choices. My thesis

¹⁰ While there are numerous sources of influence on Dante and Milton — most notably, Hesiod, who is the first poet to link himself to the narrator of his poem; the Hellenistic writers (including Apollonius of Rhodes), who see the shift from oral to written epics; Ovid, who eliminates the standard invocation; and Lucan, the republican writer, who, like Virgil, uses an intrusive narrator (Asso 162-3) — this paper focuses on Homer and Virgil, as they had a substantial impact on *both* Dante and Milton. Furthermore, Homer becomes somewhat of the standard for epic invocations of the Muse and Virgil is the most innovative in terms of how he represents his inspiration through the Muse. Thus, Homer and Virgil prove essential in both understanding the relationship between Dante and Milton and recognising the ways in which Dante and Milton recast their Christianized Muse.

combines Achinstein's and Lewalski's arguments and extends their analysis to the narrator of *Paradise Lost*. In so doing, I argue that Milton engages with classical ideas of the epic narrator and Dante's concept of the narrator's journey.

To explore the extent to which *Paradise Lost* is indebted to Dante's poem, I apply a hybrid of different theories of influence and adaptation. The terminology established in Harold Bloom's *Anxiety of Influence* provides much of the foundation for my analysis. Bloom's theory is largely invested in creating a method of evaluating the success of poets and justifying the existence of the canon;¹¹ while I am neither interested in using Milton's poetic relationship with Dante to justify his position in the canon nor in evaluating the success of either poet as Bloom does, I apply Bloom's related concepts of "Clinamen" and "Tessera". Bloom defines Clinamen as "poetic misreading or misprision proper" and he suggests that this concept describes the instances when "a poet swerves away from his precursor ... as a corrective movement in [the later poet's] own poem, which implies that the precursor poem went accurately up to a certain point, but then should have swerved, precisely in the direction that the new poem moves" (14). While I do not place the same emphasis on the "poet's deliberate misinterpretation" (30) that Bloom does, I do adopt the thesis that the poet works in the tradition of his precursor so that he might adapt and extend the ideas presented in the early works. This model proves useful in examining Milton's relationship to Dante and how Milton adopts and modifies ideas of narrative authority in particular.

¹¹ Bloom argues that a poet's success is determined by how effectively he modifies his source. As an example, he argues that, of all the Victorian writers that were influenced by Keats, Tennyson was the most successful, as he, in comparison to Arnold, Hopkins and Rossetti, was able to work within the tradition of his influence while producing something that was distinctly his own.

The second and closely related term from Bloom's text is Tessera, which he defines as "completion and antithesis" (14). Bloom states that "[a] poet antithetically 'completes' his precursor, by so reading the parent-poem as to retain its terms but to mean them in another sense, as though the precursor had failed to go far enough" (14). While these two terms are linked, as both involve the adaptive or corrective reading of the precursor's work, what is distinctive here is this idea of "antithetical" completion. Bloom argues that "the juxtaposition of contrasting ideas is balanced on parallel structures, phrases, words" (65). This concept of "contrasting ideas" in "parallel structures" proves useful in examining the journey of Milton's narrator in relation to Dante's own pilgrim and narrator; while Milton "swerves" when establishing ideas of narrative authority, I demonstrate that the journey and progression of his narrator through the poem can be seen as an antithetical completion of Dante's epic: whereas the journey in Dante's poem is used to reinforce the absolute power of a monarch or single political authority and the Church, the journey of Milton's narrator serves to illustrate self-reliance and critical interpretation founded on reason.

While these terms are particularly useful in understanding Milton's poetic relationship to Dante, some qualification is required: I modify Bloom's ideas of anxiety by incorporating the theory of influence found in David Fishelov's *Dialogues with/and Great Books*, and Bortolotti and Hutcheon's idea's of adaptation as established in "On the Origin of Adaptations: Rethinking Fidelity Discourse and 'Success' — Biologically." The primary element of Bloom's theory is the concept of anxiety;¹² yet Bloom exempts Milton from any of the anxiety that plagues almost

¹² Bloom links his ideas of influence and the resulting anxiety to Freud's idea of the family romance (8) and he states that "the poet, in writing his poem, is forced to see the assertion against influence as being a ritualized quest for identity" (65). For Bloom, the fear of influence can become a "neurosis" (66) and the struggle to overcome this fear is emotionally violent.

every other poet. Bloom contends that, despite being influenced by Spenser, Milton “was incapable of suffering the anxiety of influence, unlike all of his descendants” (34). While Bloom may be right to suggest that no such *anxiety* — at least as he conceives of it — can be found in Milton, his idea of Milton is founded on a Johnsonian idea of influence which seeks to place Milton, among other great writers including Shakespeare, above influence.¹³ Bloom, like many of the Romantic poets, appears to see Milton as the idealised “genius” who, by virtue of his originality, must be exempt from influence. Bloom’s understanding of influence, however, is deeply steeped in a Romantic mindset, and it is unlikely that a Renaissance poet, such as Milton, would have understood the implications of influence as Bloom does.¹⁴ Thus, it seems that, for Bloom, there is something misleading, even insulting, about considering the influence Milton’s predecessors had on *Paradise Lost*. Yet by working with a hybrid of Bloom’s theory and Fishelov’s ideas of influence, I show that Milton’s adaptation does not reduce the achievement of his poetic creation. In his own case study of the formation of the canon, Fishelov argues that any poet who achieves greatness actively engages in a dialogue with his predecessors. Unlike Bloom, Fishelov does not see the relationship between a poet and his predecessors as a source of anxiety (46); where Bloom suggests a poet’s success is determined by how well he is able to overcome the tradition established by his predecessors, Fishelov argues that it is through the connection to

¹³ Bloom describes Johnson’s idea of influence as one that celebrates originality and innovation. For Johnson, argues Bloom, Milton’s greatness was derived from the fact that “He was naturally a thinker for himself, confident of his own abilities, and disdainful of help or hindrance” (qtd. in Bloom 34). Bloom also says that Johnson believed that “of all the borrowers from Homer, Milton was the least indebted” (34).

¹⁴ Given that Bloom is a Romantic scholar, his interpretation of Milton is influenced by his post-Wordsworthian understanding of Milton; however, Milton likely would not have seen himself in this light. While Milton certainly possessed a great degree of confidence in his poetic ability, he likely would not have had a problem with borrowing from his predecessors and likely would have expected his readers to immediately recognise his literary allusions. Bloom later slightly revised his comments on certain Renaissance poets in *The Anatomy of Influence*, where he suggests that Milton’s Satan may have been influenced by other Renaissance characters, including Hamlet. Despite this revision, and ample evidence to the contrary, Bloom still largely rejects the idea that Milton’s poem, in its entirety, could have been influenced by previous poets.

great writers of the past that the poet is able to establish his own poetic prominence.¹⁵ Given Milton's lack of anxiety, I combine Fishelov's idea of an intentional and un-anxious echoing with Bloom's concept of Clinamen and Tessera so that these terms can still productively be used to examine the relationship between Milton and Dante.

The last element of Bloom's theory that I revise is the idea that poets deviate from their source material as a means of achieving their own poetic identity. While I do not deny the possibility that deviations are, in part, the result of a desire for a unique poetic identity, I assess the implications and motivations of Milton's use and adaptation of Dante's epic in his own poem by drawing on Bortolotti and Hutcheon's idea of adaptation as a cultural imperative that is as necessary as biological evolution. Bortolotti and Hutcheon state that

Cultural selection, like natural selection, involves differential survival through a process of replicating into future generations. We would posit that, like its biological homologue, cultural selection is therefore both conservative and dynamic. As in biology, there can be directional or stabilizing selection. When an environment changes in one particular identifiable direction, then we expect the former, as **adaptations** move toward a new cultural norm. (449)

To examine the implications of Milton's modification of Dante's epic, while still considering the differences between the medieval Catholic tradition from which Dante writes and the Renaissance Protestant tradition from which *Paradise Lost* is created, I apply the idea of

¹⁵ Like Fishelov, Robert Hollander argues that Milton intentionally engages with Dante's poem as a means of elevating his own poem; Hollander argues that Milton creates what Fishelov would call a pseudo dialogue with Dante, one which he would expect his "fit audience" (7.31) to recognise easily. Similarly, George F. Butler argues that in *Paradise Lost* Milton intentionally creates echoes between his Satan and the significantly different version of Satan found in *The Comedy* so as to link the two characters. In doing so, Milton shares in Dante's eminence as a poet.

adaptation through “directional ... selection” in examining Milton’s revision of Dante’s epic. In Milton’s case, one of the “environment[al] changes” is a move from Catholicism to Protestantism. Beyond changes that indicate aesthetic concerns, both epic poets adapt certain elements of the epic tradition so that their own poem fits within the religious context from which it was conceived. Thus some of Milton’s changes need to be read as necessary, given the Protestant context from which he was writing. This thesis combines the idea of the necessity to adapt to survive within “a new cultural norm” with Fishelov’s idea that each time something is added to a previous work “this new element serves different ideological goals” (102). Thus, Milton’s adaptation of Dante is both religiously motivated and an indication of his political and aesthetic concerns; I read Milton’s epic as not only a necessary adaption of a Catholic epic for a Protestant tradition but also as a republican-leaning poem which resists any absolutist or autocratic voice in favour of interpretative freedom. It is also worth noting that, for the purpose of my thesis, the concept of adaptation is used in a fairly general sense, as it is in Bortolotti and Hutcheon’s article: they note that, “like genes, narratives are ‘replicators,’ defined by Dawkins as ‘anything in the universe of which copies are made’” and “for [their] purpose in discussing the process of cultural adaptation, the Dawkins replicator would be a core narrative idea (or in short, a narrative)” (22).¹⁶ Thus, when I speak of Milton’s adaptation of Dante’s epic, I mean to suggest that Milton is copying and adapting the idea of a biblical narrative in which the narrator undertakes a journey, which results in his own purification. My own analysis is largely

¹⁶ I also consider Hutcheon’s *Theory of Adaptation*, which includes a discussion of “cultural revision”; however, Hutcheon’s book provides a somewhat more restrictive understanding of what can be counted as adaptation and is largely concerned with remediation.

concerned with the narrator of each poem and his relationship to the events and characters of the respective poem.

To explore the role of the narrator in each poem, I begin in Chapter 1 with an examination of the traditional role of the Muse. I examine Homer's use of the Muse and her role as an indisputable figure of authority within the *Iliad*, and compare her to Virgil's Muse. The relationship between Virgil's narrator and the Muse is similar to that found in the *Iliad*; however, a shift in medium from oral to written texts facilitates a newfound agency for the narrator. I then explore how Dante and Milton Christianise the Muse for their poems. Dante replaces his Muse with Virgil while Milton presents an internalised Muse which reflects his Protestantism. In both cases, the poets renegotiate how narrative authority is derived. In Chapter 2, I argue that the narrator of *Paradise Lost* does not derive his poetic authority from his relationship to Milton.¹⁷ By comparing *Paradise Lost* to "Sonnet 16" and *The Second Defence*, I suggest that Milton's narrator is a poetic invention that is distinct from Milton the poet. Finally, in Chapter 3, I compare the narrator's journey in *The Comedy* to that of *Paradise Lost*. I argue that the two are more similar than scholars have previously acknowledged. In both cases, the narrator undergoes a moral and intellectual transformation which allows him to better fulfil his role as epic narrator. The journeys are presented, however, very differently: Milton's Protestantism and republicanism compel him to remodel Dante's design. The result of Milton's modification, as I will show, is a narrator who experiences a level of freedom that is unprecedented in epic.

¹⁷ My use of the term "poetic authority" throughout this paper is derived from Guillory, who states that poetic authority is tied to a rhetoric that causes the reader to be "moved to believe not only something but someone" (vii). Poetic authority, then, is tied to persuasion, more specifically the poet's or narrator's ability to persuade his reader that what he says is beyond doubt. While Guillory is concerned with the poet's authority, I use his terminology to examine the narrator's speeches throughout *Paradise Lost*. Poetic authority, as I use it to consider the narrator, is closely tied to Booth's concept of the reliable narrator. To obtain poetic authority, the narrator must appear reliable.

Chapter 1

The Tradition of the Epic Narrator and the Role of the Muse from Homer to Milton

In *Destabilizing Milton: "Paradise Lost" and the Poetics of Incertitude*, Peter C. Herman argues that *Paradise Lost* is characterised by an uncertainty and ambiguity surrounding authority. This chapter seeks to extend the uncertainty that Herman notes to Milton's epic narrator. By examining the evolution of the Muse's role in two classical texts — Homer's *Iliad* and Virgil's *Aeneid* — and in Dante's *Comedy*, I demonstrate that Milton engages with, and modifies, all three of these epics to construct a poem that radically de-centers authority. By problematizing the role of the Muse in his poem through the four proems, Milton presents a narrator unlike those of his predecessors: Milton's narrator tells his narrative with a reduced appeal to external authority. Like Dante, Milton re-invents the Muse by Christianizing her; however, he also replaces Dante's external guides with an internalised Muse to reflect his Protestantism. While the poem's invocation of the Muse suggests that the poetic structure of *Paradise Lost* is grounded in classical epics, the Muse Milton invokes is far from traditional. Milton's narrator calls for a Muse that prefers "Before all temples the upright heart and pure" (1.18): already in this first invocation, Milton emphasises the difference between the classical Muse, called down from atop "the Aonian mount" (1.15) to speak through the narrator, and his more internalised Muse, which resides within him and "instructs" (1.19) him. Furthermore, the narrator's journey in *Paradise Lost* takes its inspiration from Dante's protagonists, and the deliberate combination of the two forms leads to a poem that rejects the standard function of the Muse while also rejecting Dante's God-given prophetic authority. By examining first how Dante uses his two guides to de-centre

authority (as a means of constructing a political poem) and secondly how Milton responds to Dante's guides, I argue that Milton, while drawn to Dante's modification of the poetic structure of the epic, does not believe Dante pushes his de-centering far enough, and thus modifies Dante's poem to create an epic with a republican resonance. While both Dante's and Milton's narrators change their perspective throughout their respective poems, only the narrator of *Paradise Lost* is forced to consider his own poetic authority. The once confident and ambitious poet of *Paradise Lost* becomes uncertain by the end of the poem. This uncertainty is linked to his increasing consciousness of his fallen nature as well as his skepticism towards the Muse's influence and his own ability to make use of the Muse's inspiration. Given that republicanism, unlike monarchism, demands an active engagement and constant critical interrogation of authority figures and the rejection of any absolute political authority, the poetic de-stabilizing of authority — which is linked to Milton's renegotiation of the Muse's absolute authority — parallels Milton's desire for a more critical populace that would not simply accept the political authority of any leader without a degree of skepticism and interrogation. Thus, both Dante's and Milton's constructions of their narrators and the poetic structure of their respective poems become deeply political gestures.

The Narrators of Homer's *Iliad* and Virgil's *Aeneid*

To explore the relationship between the poetic structure of *The Comedy* and *Paradise Lost*, I consider the classical models that both poets adapt; an examination of the changes in poetic structure from the classical poems of Homer and Virgil sheds light on the politics of

narration in Dante's and Milton's epics. I focus on Homer's *Iliad*, as it was the more popular of Homer's two epics during the Augustan period, and likely had a greater impact on Virgil's own poetic development (Griffin 13-15).¹⁸ Virgil's own poem is traditionally broken into two halves: the first half is modeled after the *Odyssey*, and the second half uses the *Iliad* as its model. David Quint states that these two halves demonstrate a movement in narrative form, the first half being associated with romance and the second half with epic (50). Given that my paper is concerned with tracking the development of the epic, a focus on the *Iliad* is only logical. Indeed, Homer's *Iliad* became the standard and model for epics for nearly 200 years until Virgil composed his Latin epic.

Much modern scholarship on Homer's *Iliad* deals with questions about the epic narrator. Given that the poem was originally part of an oral tradition and meant to be spoken over multiple sessions — perhaps as many as 12 — the narrative did not have to be perfectly coherent, at least not in the sense of the modern novel (Scodel 46-8). That said, many scholars believe that untangling the apparent inconsistencies in the poem is dependent on gaining a fuller understanding of Homer's epic narrator. The debate about how Homer's epic narrator should be understood can be broken down into three camps: those who take the invocation completely seriously, and thus believe that the narrator acts as a mouthpiece for the Muse; those who see the Muse as a source for inspiration, yet argue that the narrator is a somewhat “self-conscious narrator” that asks the Muse for advice and then recounts the events to the audience in his own terms; and finally, those who are skeptical of the role of the Muse and see Homer's narrator as a

¹⁸ Griffin states that the *Iliad* was central in ancient Roman education and culture: he notes that, aside from numerous manuscripts from the period, there exists a substantial body of commentaries, grammars, and dictionaries on the poem. He states that while the *Odyssey* was read and revered as well, it was considered the lesser poem and thus was commented on and used less frequently (13-14). Both the Greeks and the Romans considered the *Iliad* the greatest work in all Greek literature (22-23).

completely “self-conscious narrator” that appeals to the Muse strictly out of tradition.¹⁹ What unites all of these positions is the agreement that, regardless of the type of relationship between the narrator and the Muse, the narrator is the primary authority figure in the poem; whether the invocation is genuine does not change the fact that an appeal to the Muse grants the narrator poetic authority in the poem; that is, the narrator’s account was meant to be accepted by the audience as reliable by virtue of this invocation.²⁰ Indeed, the narrator acts as a grounding figure for the poem; the narrator has a role that is, if anything, made more important in light of the oral tradition, which requires a sense of unity across multiple sessions of the retelling. This unity is achieved by the consistent narrative commentary. Furthermore, the orality of the poem emphasises the authority of the narrator in terms of how he evokes emotional responses. Nancy Felson argues that when Homer’s narrator expresses sympathy for the characters within the poem, the audience is encouraged to share the emotional response. She suggests that this mimetic response is linked to oral poetry because the listener of an oral performance is not a judging

¹⁹ For a discussion of the narrator as mouthpiece for the Muse, see Russo and Simon, who argue that the narrator receives the song from an external source and simply sings what the Muse presents. Essentially, the narrator and the Muse are indistinguishable. For the second category of scholars, see Finkelberg, Lataez, and Murrey, who suggest that the Muse is no more than a source of inspiration, which is demonstrated by the six addresses to the Muse asking for information; there would be no need for multiple addresses if the narrator were simply a mouthpiece for the Muse. Similarly, Radfield argues that the Muse is a source of information: Radfield further diminishes the role of the Muse by eliminating the idea that the Muse acts as a source of inspiration. Finally, for discussions of the invocation as purely artificial, see Minton, who argues that the appeals are in no way genuine; Scholes and Kellogg, who suggest that the only reason the invocations are present in the poem is due to the fact that that it was standard practice for Greek epics to begin in this fashion; and Jong, who argues that the narrator should be read as one of the many focalizers in the poem and the invocations should be seen as “part of the fiction” (46). The term “self-conscious narrator” is taken from Booth’s discussion of different types of narrators in which he suggests that the “self-conscious narrator” is one that imagines himself as a narrator and is self-reflexive in his role.

²⁰ Minton argues that Homer’s appeal to the Muses is not a genuine appeal but instead part of a formula that was required by all epic narrators during the period. He further asserts that, according to traditional scholarship, one of the purposes of this formulaic invocation (which listeners would readily recognise) was to “inspire confidence and belief in his hearers and focus their attention on what was to follow” (293). In her commentary on the narrator’s relationship to his audience, Minchin also suggests that the appeal to the Muse guarantees the narrator’s authority: “its [the song’s] divine source is a guarantee of its authenticity and its quality” (28).

participant; the role of the audience hearing Homer's poem was to feel and respond emotionally, not to interpret or question what was being presented (138-140).

As previously stated, Virgil's *Aeneid* was largely influenced by Homer's *Iliad*, yet one key difference between the societies they emerge from needs to be considered: Homer's poem was part of an oral tradition and likely was not written down until long after the poem's creation, whereas Virgil's poem began as a written text. Of course, Virgil likely would have encountered Homer's *Odyssey* and *Iliad* as written texts (Toohey 33). During the Augustan period, there existed not only written versions of Homer's poems but a large body of related scholarship, which Virgil had read before beginning work on his own epic (Schlunk 6-8). What this means, in terms of Virgil's poetic development, is that he was aware of the criticism surrounding the flaws in Homer's poem and thus attempted to adapt the poem in a way that would eliminate these problems (Hexter 29-30). Ralph Hexter looks to an example in Book 10 of the *Iliad* in which Agamemnon can see into the Trojan camp despite being behind a wall; Virgil modifies this section in his own poem by specifying that Agamemnon had stood on high ground and thus was above the wall. Changes such as this, suggests Hexter, are required on Virgil's part given the criticism surrounding Homer's text. This type of change — in light of Bortolotti and Hutcheon's article — could be considered, in part, a necessary adaptation, one that is required given the shift away from an oral tradition. Aside from being necessary, this change also increased the authority of Virgil's narrator by increasing the verisimilitude of his narrative.

These corrections to the text are not the only culturally driven changes: considering the written tradition from which the *Aeneid* emerges, the invocation that was once of the utmost importance has lost some of its value. Francesca D'Alessandro Behr argues that when the

Hellenistic poets began to write epics, as opposed to composing them orally, the relationship between the Muse and the poet shifted (194). In his discussion of the relationship between the Muse and the poet when epics were meant to be performed and heard, not read, Eric Alfred Havelock states that “responsibility for the composition of both the *Iliad* and *Odyssey* is assigned to the Muse, who is invited to ‘sing’ the *Iliad*, ‘recite’ the *Odyssey*” (20). Havelock goes on to state that the narrator “is there, but as a performer, not as author. He mediates between the Muse, whoever she is, and the audience, as though his verses were not his own, but derived from a source external to himself, a source which he called ‘Muse’” (20). Whether this invocation is serious or not is largely irrelevant, as the appeal to the Muse gives the appearance of the narrator acting as a mediator.

As the epic medium shifted to a written text, the narrator’s role as mediator became somewhat less clear, and as a result, the role of the Muse is marginalized while the narrator takes on a more active role in the story. In Virgil’s poem, the narrator interjects more often, such that what was once a nearly invisible presence in Homer’s poem now becomes an active participant in the development of the poem.²¹ Despite no longer participating in the oral tradition of Homer’s poem, as the *Aeneid* was almost certainly meant to be read, Virgil chooses to maintain the idea of singing as metaphor for poetic creation. An examination of Virgil’s opening lines demonstrates that, despite maintaining the language of Homer’s invocation, the narrator diminishes the role of the Muse in his poem. Homer begins the *Iliad* with the line “Anger be now your song, immortal one” (1). To begin, the narrator refers to the poem as “your song” (referring

²¹ Behr argues that the *Iliad* seems to proceed by itself in such a way that the audience forgets that it has been carefully arranged. In contrast, the treatment of apostrophe in Virgil’s poem ensures a more active role for the narrator.

to the Muse), thus crediting the Muse for the poetic creation. Virgil's poem begins somewhat differently. The opening lines of the *Aeneid* are as follows:

Arms and the man I sing of Troy, who first from its seashores
 Italy-bound, fate's refugee, arrived at Lavinia's Coastlands

 Muse, let the memories spill through me. What divine will was wounded,
 What deep hurt made the queen of the gods thrust a famously righteous
 Man into so many spirals of chance to face so many labours?
 Anger so great: can it really reside in the spirits of heaven? (1.1-2, 8-11)²²

The thematic similarities between the two invocations is immediately apparent, and Virgil would have expected his reader to be aware of the link between the two poems from the beginning. Thus, he would have also expected his audience to notice the differences at the beginning of the poem: the emphasis that was once placed on the Muse is now shifted to the narrator, as the poem begins with the declaration that "I sing." What was once the Muse's song becomes that of the narrator. It is not until line eight that the narrator invokes the Muse, and even there the narrator does not ask the Muse to sing the song, but instead asks for inspiration: he asks that the "memories spill through me." Thus, the narrator retains more control over the poem than Homer's narrator does of his poem: unlike Homer's narrator, who essentially becomes a mouthpiece for the Muse, the narrator of the *Aeneid* is only brought inspiration in the form of "memories," which he is free to recount as he sees fit. If, according to Behr, the narrator of the

²² Some editions, including that of Fitzgerald, begin with the line "I sing of warfare and a man at war" (1.1). Beginning the poem with the word "I" emphasises the role of Virgil's narrator.

Iliad becomes almost invisible, then the narrator of the *Aeneid* is clearly announcing his presence at the outset of the poem.

While Homer's narrator may have declared the subject matter for the poem in the *Iliad*, his voice becomes inextricably linked to the Muse after the invocation. In contrast, even after the Muse is invoked, the *Aeneid* makes it clear that the poem is being told in the voice of the narrator, a point that is made apparent through the "subjective style" for which Virgil's poem is famous.²³ And it is through this subjective style that the political nature of Virgil's poem becomes apparent. In his commentary on Virgil's deviation from Homer's style, James O'Hara suggests that, despite the multiple dissenting voices that are heard throughout the poem, Virgil's subjective style produces a controlled text with a single authoritative perspective to which all other voices, particularly dissenting voices, are subordinate (254). Of course, this single authoritative voice complements Virgil's political ambition in his poem. The poem celebrates the ability to be united under a single voice, which is not altogether surprising given that the poem was written near the beginning of the Augustan period, which marked the end of civil war and its associated instability. In fact, Quint argues that:

Virgil's politicization of epic for the ends of empire demanded a curbing of the Homeric heroic will, and the flatness and passivity of Aeneas became the virtuous traits of the hero-leaders of imperial epic ... As opposed to the wandering Odysseus and the rebellious Achilles, the hero of empire became an executive type who places duty over individual desire, the goals of history over the present

²³ See Otis for a detailed understanding of the "subjective style," linked to the deliberateness and self-consciousness of Virgil's narrator, who carefully frames each encounter in a way that ensures the Trojan war and the Roman cause are justified.

moment. The reaches of political power would thus extend not merely over space and time, but over the inner man. (95)

In Virgil's poem, submission to the empire, or to a single figure of authority, is celebrated and deemed heroic. Thus Virgil's decision to modify the role of the Muse and the narrative voice in his poem becomes both a facet of the changing cultural practice during the period as well as a political gesture which privileges the State over the individual.

Dante's Adaptation of the Epic Narrator

The suppression of the individual's will in favour of the needs of the State present in Virgil's poem is undoubtedly what drew Dante to Virgil and what led Milton to reject many of the principles of the *Aeneid* and construct what some scholars consider to be one of the most anti-Virgilian poems ever written.²⁴ Given Dante's reverence for Virgil and Milton's apparent disdain for the Roman poet's politics, it may initially seem somewhat surprising that Dante forgoes the traditional invocation and structure of Virgil's poem and that Milton seems to reject Dante's modification of the epic structure by returning to the classical literary formation. Dante's poem, however, does not reject the philosophical and political principles established in Virgil's poem; Dante may remove the invocation of the Muse, yet he maintains the idea that human will should not be exercised without the guidance of the State and that the needs of the State should be placed above the desires of the individual. While Dante may de-centre the singular narrative authority celebrated in Virgil's poem, he does so only to divide power between two institutions:

²⁴ For discussions of Milton's poem as anti-Virgilian, see Quint and Burrow.

the State and the Church. This division of power is a distinctly and explicitly political move on Dante's part. Despite returning to the classical structure, which includes an invocation of the Muse, *Paradise Lost* appropriates the uncertainty of the protagonist found in Dante's poem. This appropriation, however, should not be seen as a duplication, as Milton rejects the model of Dante's poem which provides two guides to counteract the protagonist's uncertainty. Milton's adaptation of Dante's poem is what Bloom calls Clinamen: Milton works with Dante's de-centering of authority but pushes it further by outright rejecting the idea of an absolute figure of poetic authority in his poem.

John Freccero states that the opening Canto of *The Comedy* should be read as autobiographical (79). Yet there is no information presented in this Canto that would suggest it should be seen as autobiographical, perhaps with the exception of the opening line of the poem, which is in the first person: "In the middle of the journey of *our life*, I came to / myself" (1.1-2; emphasis added). Virgil's poem also begins in the first person, yet Virgil and his narrator are often seen by scholars as distinct entities. It is true that, later in the poem, Dante encourages this association between himself and his protagonist; however, Dante undermines the connection in *The Epistle to Cangrande*.²⁵ Despite the evidence to the contrary presented in *The Epistle to Cangrande*, Teodolinda Barolini suggests that we should simply accept the claims presented in the poem at face value because that is how Dante would have expected his reader to react (13). She further suggests that we should read *The Comedy* as a Fundamentalist would read the Bible — because that is how Dante would have expected his contemporary readers to approach the

²⁵ For an example of how Dante encourages this reading, see *Inferno* 10, in which Dante encounters Farinata, one of Dante's political enemies, who engages in a political argument with Dante. He also meets the father of Dante's best friend, who immediately questions why his son is not also present. Such encounters are used to reinforce the claim that the journey presented in *The Comedy* is one Dante underwent. That said, this claim to truth is more than likely simply a means of gaining legitimacy for the poem.

poem — and thus accept the work he creates as absolute truth (16). While the average medieval Italian reader of *The Comedy* may well have read as Barolini argues contemporary readers should, Dante does not invite a Fundamentalist reading of the poem and his ideal reader would not have accepted everything presented in the poem as an unquestionable truth. In *The Epistle to Cangrande*, Dante explains how poetry, including his epic, should be understood:

For the clarity of what will be said, it is to be understood that the meaning of this work is not simple, but rather it is polysemous, that is, having many meanings. For the first meaning is that which derives from the letter, another is that which one derives from the things signified by the letter. The first is called “literal” and the second “allegorical” or “mystical” ... Having seen this, it is evident that the subject around which these alternate meanings revolve must be double. And therefore the subject of this work must be considered first according to the letter, then considered allegorically. (7-8)

In the epistle, Dante describes different levels of reading and, in so doing, suggests that to stop at the literal level is to miss much of the poem’s meaning.²⁶ Furthermore, later in the epistle, Dante suggests allegorical reading is the most important and profound level. Indeed, Dante is largely dismissive of the literal level of interpretation. It is also worth noting that Dante takes his examples of allegorical reading from the Bible. For instance, he looks to Psalm 114 to suggest that the passage, on a literal level, may be about the Jews leaving Egypt, but on an allegorical level it is about redemption through Christ or moving from sin to salvation. By taking his examples from the Bible, Dante preemptively dismisses any potential claim, such as Barolini’s,

²⁶ For Dante, there are four layers of interpretation: literal, allegorical/mystical, moral, and anagogic. For a full description of each, see Anderson (especially 333).

that his poem should be read only literally, since it is written in a way that places it on the same level as scripture.²⁷

Dante's insistence that his poem be read allegorically seems to suggest that the poet should not be confused with the protagonist, or, at the very least, that their connection may possess multiple significances: the protagonist, then, is more than just a representation of Dante, and becomes a character within the poem.²⁸ I would like to return briefly to the opening line of the poem, which supports this claim that Dante, the poet, should not be confused with Dante-protagonist. The opening line suggests that the journey through the three realms is not just Dante-protagonist's journey, but instead, "our" journey. The significance of this all-inclusive "our" is that Dante-protagonist is both a heroic figure as well as a stand-in for the reader. The importance of Dante-protagonist's relationship to the reader and the significance of the journey will be further discussed in Chapter 3. For now, what is important is that Dante-protagonist is a character within the fictional world of the poem that deserves the same level of critical attention and interpretation as any of the other characters, and that neither Dante-protagonist nor Dante-narrator should be confused with Dante the poet of *The Comedy*. Brownlee suggests that Dante-protagonist should be seen as a Christian Aeneas (100). The connection between Dante-protagonist and Aeneas is worth exploring further in terms of how it relates to the relationship between Virgil and Dante-protagonist.

²⁷ Dante encourages the idea that *The Comedy* should be read through the ideas presented in this letter. For instance, in *Inferno*, Virgil reveals the prophesy of the "greyhound" (1.101) who will return order to the world. This greyhound is a direct allusion to Cangrande, as his name means "large dog." Furthermore, Dante begins *Purgatory* 2 with a reference to Psalm 114, which is also a key point of reference for his theory of literary criticism presented in the letter. Finally, Dante dedicates *Paradiso* to Cangrande. Thus, in each of the books of *The Comedy*, direct reference is made to Cangrande, and as a result, to the letter.

²⁸ I will hereafter use Brownlee's terminology: I will refer to the version of Dante that travels through Hell, Purgatory, and Heaven as Dante-protagonist to distinguish him from the narrator (Dante-narrator) and Dante the poet proper (Dante).

An examination of Canto 1 of *Inferno*, where one would typically expect to see the invocation of the Muse, reveals that this standard epic convention is present: the invocation has not been eliminated but augmented, in a way that replaces the Muse with Virgil. The poem opens with Dante, the pilgrim, lost “in a dark wood” (1.2); he admits to being confused and frightened (1.4-12). After encountering three beasts — the spotted leopard, the lion, and the she-wolf — Dante-protagonist sees a spirit who proclaims he was the poet that “lived in Rome under the good Augustus in the time of the false and lying gods” (1.72). Dante-protagonist immediately connects the description to Virgil and responds by saying:

You are my master and my author, you alone are
he from whom I have taken the pleasing style that
has won me honor.

See the beast for which I have turned back: help
me against her, famous sage, for she makes my veins
and pulses tremble. (1.85-90)

A few things are worth noting in this exchange. The first is that Virgil denounces the Roman gods as “false and lying,” a point to which I will return shortly. What I currently wish to focus on is Dante-protagonist’s response to Virgil. In the invocation from the *Aeneid*, Virgil’s narrator requests the Muse to act as his inspiration as he writes the poem. Similarly, in *The Comedy*, Dante-protagonist declares that it is Virgil who inspired his “pleasing style,” thus indicating that Virgil has acted, to some extent as his Muse throughout his poetic career.

Of course, the role of the Muse is not simply to act as a poetic influence in terms of style; the Muse is responsible for bringing the narrative to the poet’s imagination. Virgil’s narrator asks

that the Muse “let the memories spill through” him, thus demonstrating that the Muse is required to provide the narrative of the events which the narrator wishes to sing about. Dante-protagonist’s appeal to Virgil can be seen to function in the same way, once the fundamental difference between the stories being told is considered. This fundamental difference is that the narrator of the *Aeneid* wishes to sing about a historical war, whereas *The Comedy* is about the narrator’s spiritual journey: Dante’s epic is a recounting of events that a version of himself experienced with the help of his guide Virgil. When Dante-protagonist refers to the beast he turns away from, he is speaking of the she-wolf that, as is revealed later in the poem, stands guard in front of Mount Purgatory. Dante-protagonist is prohibited from going to Mount Purgatory because he has not completed the first part of his divinely ordained journey through Hell. Thus, when Dante asks Virgil to “help [him] against her,” he is asking that Virgil help him overcome the obstacle that stands between him and Purgatory. Of course, the only way to do so is to undergo his journey through the nine circles of Hell and, as such, his plea to Virgil is ultimately a request for help in beginning his journey. Just as the Muse provides the required insight for the narrator of the *Aeneid* to begin his song, Virgil provides Dante-protagonist with the conditions — the confidence to move forward and the knowledge of how to proceed through Hell to reach Mount Purgatory, which was blocked by the three beasts — by which his journey, and in turn his poem, can begin. Thus, the invocation of the Muse is not eliminated in Dante’s poem; the Muse is simply replaced by Virgil.

What is somewhat different from the invocation in the *Aeneid*, in this exchange between Dante and Virgil, is how authority is allocated. As previously mentioned, the narrator of the *Aeneid* takes priority over the Muse; however, that dynamic is inverted in *The Comedy*. Dante’s

response to Virgil begins with the line, “you are my master and my author”. Here it is important to consider the Italian, which reads, “Tu se’lo mio mastro e’l mio autore.” The two words I wish to focus on are “mastro” and “autore”. The word “mastro” means both teacher and master or sovereign, so Dante is both paying respect to his predecessor for teaching him through the *Aeneid*, while also establishing a relationship in which Virgil is his superior. The second word, “autore,” demonstrates that Dante reveres Virgil as a poetic inspiration generally, but also suggests that Virgil plays a role in the creation of the version of Dante presented in the poem. I would like to suggest that this creation refers to more than just Dante-protagonist’s poetic development. Instead, Virgil becomes the authoritative voice within the poem, at least in *Inferno*, to which all others are subordinate. If we consider the relationship between Dante-protagonist and Aeneas, it becomes clear that the willing submission of Aeneas to the needs of the empire that is celebrated in the *Aeneid* is also present and respectable in the protagonist of *The Comedy*. Furthermore, despite Brownlee’s suggestion that Virgil is a problematic source of inspiration due to his paganism, it is important to note that the Virgil in the poem is not the poet proper, but rather Dante’s poetic recasting of him. Dante’s Virgil dismisses his own religion when he states that he lived during a time of “false and lying gods;” the implication is that, had Virgil lived later, he would have embraced Christianity. Thus Dante distances Virgil from his paganism and claims him as a proto-Catholic. As such, Dante is able to overcome any religious obstacles which would keep Virgil’s poem from acting as a benign influence; Virgil, in Dante’s poem, is not the classical pagan poet but rather the poet of empire who represents the stabilizing authority of a single State power. Dante’s Virgil is not the historical Virgil: Dante recasts him to suit his poetic design. As

such, the version of Virgil in Dante's poem should no more be considered a historically accurate figure than Dante-protagonist.

I began by stating that, despite removing the invocation, Dante maintains the political principles established in Virgil's epic. Now that the relationship between Dante-protagonist and Virgil has been firmly established, I wish to consider how the narrative technique of Dante's poem is related to his political theory, as that is presented in *The Comedy*. Despite Alessandro Passerin d'Entrèves' argument that *The Comedy* should be read on its own, removed from Dante's earlier, less orthodox works, including *De Monarchia*, the trend in recent scholarship is to consider Dante's prose works when reading his epic. Charles Davies, for example, denies the foundation of d'Entreves' argument that Dante's *De Monarchia* is unorthodox because it rejects the role of the Church in society; instead, Davies suggests that while *De Monarchia* focuses on establishing a governmental system removed from the Church, it does not dismiss the role that religion exercises in guiding the individual (77-8). Through its poetic structure, *The Comedy* extends the arguments regarding religion that Dante began to develop in *De Monarchia*.

When Dante was writing *De Monarchia* and *The Comedy*, Italy had yet to become a country; instead, what is now Italy was divided into many city states, each of which had its own system of government. Dante's ideal society was one of unity ordered by a single governing body or monarch outside of the Church. In *De Monarchia*, Dante writes that "the human race is best ordered when in all its movements and motions it is controlled by one Prince as by one mover, by one law as by one motion. On this account it is manifestly essential for the well-being of the world that there should exist a Monarchy or unified Principality which men call the Empire" (9.1). This belief that humanity requires a guiding and corrective political structure is

also present in *The Comedy*. Indeed, what was once a suggestion for the optimization of society in *De Monarchia* becomes in *The Comedy* a requirement for the salvation of the citizens of Rome, Florence and the surrounding city states. In *Purgatory* 16, as Dante wanders on the third terrace of Purgatory, he encounters Marco Lombardo. As the two men begin talking, Marco states that, since his death, the world had fallen into moral decay. Curious, Dante asks what has caused this moral decay on earth. Marco responds by saying that “of some lesser good it [man] first tastes the flavour; / there it is deceived and runs after it, if a guide or / rein does not turn away its love” (*Purgatory* 16.91-3). Marco follows the familiar argument of St. Augustine and suggests that the misuse of free will is the source of the problem. What is interesting here is that Marco removes responsibility from the individual and suggests that Italian society has made humans too weak willed to avoid temptation, and society will keep failing humanity “if a guide on / rein does not turn away its love.” Of course, for Dante, each person required two guides. Ferrante encapsulates Dante’s idea: “God ordained both the pope and the emperor to guide man, but in different spheres and for different ends” (36). That said — given that Marco and Dante are engaged in a discussion that is primarily focused on the political state of Florence in this Canto — the guide Marco refers to here is unambiguously a political one. Earlier in *Purgatory*, Dante-protagonist vocalizes his view on the current state of Florence: “See how this beast has become savage, not being / governed by the spurs, ever since you seized the / reins” (6.94-6). The “you” Dante-protagonist refers to here is the Church, which has extended its control beyond its rightful “sphere.” The suggestion, then, is that the Church needs to relinquish its control over the political realm so that an appropriate political leader or emperor may unite the city states and make use of the “spurs,” or laws, so that the appetites of the citizens may be controlled.

Dante's concern regarding the Church's control over the political realm is something that appears consistently throughout the poem. Stewart Farnell argues that "to explain the ills of the world the *Comedy* points primarily to the corruption of the Church ... [and its] lust for temporal power (whose corollary is the usurpation of the rightful authority of the Empire)" (117). The corruption of the Church and usurpation of power are corrected through Dante's guides; by having Virgil guide Dante through the first half of his journey, unhindered by his spiritual guide, Beatrice, *The Comedy* rebalances the power dynamic between Church and Empire. Of course, their separation and equality does not require their complete independence from one another; Dante imagines a system in which the two parties work together for the greater good of each other and society. Dante's portrayal of Justinian provides an example of the ideal relationship between Church and government. When Dante-protagonist encounters Justinian, the emperor says, "blessed Agepetus ... supreme shepherd of God, directed me / with his enlightened words to true faith" (*Paradiso* 6.16-18). Justinian, then, represents the proper relationship between the pope and an emperor: the pope acts as a religious guide who does not attempt to claim control but instead offers the support that Justinian requires to achieve his political goals.²⁹ Thus, the two figures together ensure the success of the empire.

The same type of relationship exists between Virgil and Beatrice. While Beatrice is entrusted with guiding Dante-protagonist through Heaven, Virgil is responsible for guiding

²⁹ For an account of Justinian's rule and the expansion of the Byzantine Empire under his control, see Evans or Rosen (especially 482-560). While Justinian may have been partially successful in recovering much of the lost Roman territories, Dante's poem seems to overstate Justinian's relationship to Agepetus; Agepetus was unable to convince Justinian not to invade Italy. Furthermore, Justinian was famous for creating the *Corpus Juris Civilis*, which Dante references throughout *Paradiso* 6. Dante suggests that this document gave power to the State (6.88-90) and suggests that it was Constantine's fault that the Church was able to seize control (6.1-6); however, the first part of the *Corpus Juris Civilis*, the *Codex Justinianus*, united Church and State. Thus, here we can see one of the few examples of Dante's reconstruction of history and historical figures to fit his narrative. These moments are especially telling of how Dante's political ambitions shaped his text.

Dante-protagonist through Hell, the realm associated with the material world, and he is largely successful in doing so; however, in some instances his guidance alone is not sufficient. One example occurs as the two attempt to enter Dis and are stopped by spirits guarding a gate. After speaking to these angels, Virgil returns to Dante-protagonist and says, “though I am angered, do / not be dismayed, for I will overcome this test, / however they scurry about inside to prevent it” (8.121-23). Despite Virgil’s reassurance, Dante-protagonist’s expression becomes grave (9.1) and he admits that Virgil’s “speech made [him] afraid” (9.13). Dante-protagonist’s fears are justified as Virgil is unable to convince the gate keepers to let them pass and instead Magaera, Allecto, and Tisiphone appear and taunt Virgil. Virgil’s treatment of Tisiphone in Book 6 of the *Aeneid* and Allecto in Book 7 seems to motivate their unwillingness to let Virgil pass. Thus, by virtue of being the poet of the *Aeneid*, the very thing that qualifies him to be Dante-protagonist’s guide, Virgil is unable to help Dante to the next stage of his journey. Here, then, is a moment when the political guide alone is insufficient.

Unlike Dante-protagonist, Virgil’s response is not to become overwhelmed or even anxious; instead he trusts in his heavenly counterpart to send aid. After a few moments, an angel arrives, opens the gate, and banishes the spirits. Then Virgil tells Dante-protagonist to “direct [his] / beam of sight out over the ancient foam, there where the smoke is darkest” (9.73-5). When Dante-protagonist looks, he sees a figure and notes that, “Well did I perceive that he was sent from Heaven, / and I turned to my master, who made a sign that I / should stand still and bow to him” (9.85-7). In his edition of *Inferno*, Robert M. Durling argues that Dante uses the Platonic understanding of sight, which suggests that “vision results from the joining of light emitted by the eye with external light” (80). Despite Dante’s awareness that Aristotle had conclusively

refuted this claim, by using phrases such as “beam of sight” Dante invokes Plato’s understanding of light and vision in *The Comedy*. Given that sight is linked to this joining which requires external light, the fact that Dante-protagonist is able to see the Angel clearly indicates that the angel must be bringing light into a place that was previously dim. Thus, we see the Angel doing something that Virgil is unable to by virtue of his damned condition. To move forward in this particular moment requires divine assistance. Furthermore, Virgil’s response to the divine aid is noteworthy. He tells Dante-protagonist to “bow,” a clear indication of Virgil’s gratitude and submission. Virgil recognises his limitations and graciously accepts the aid of his divine counterpart; but the divine intervention is not ongoing. Recognising her role and respecting Virgil’s position, Beatrice sends the required assistance, then has her attendant return to his rightful realm. The poem presents a structure in which Dante-protagonist has two separate yet complementary guides in Virgil and Beatrice. Given Dante’s belief that the Church and State needed to be independent, yet cooperative, institutions, and that the Church needed to recognise its boundaries, Virgil and Beatrice exemplify the ideal relationship between the Church and State. Thus the structure of the poem reflects Dante’s argument for religious and political reform in Italy.

Milton’s Poetic Authority and the Muse of *Paradise Lost*

Milton’s poem rejects the poetic structure and the guides of *The Comedy* and instead seems to return to the classical structure, which includes an invocation of the Muse. While Milton does return to the classical epic formula for his own poem, the influence of Dante’s epic

can be seen in Milton's de-centering of authority: like Dante, who shifts authority to the poem's two guides, Milton rejects the idea of the central figure of absolute power found in both Homer's and Virgil's epics. Milton's return to the classical epic structure allows him to perform what Bloom calls a Clinamen by pushing Dante's de-centering of authority further: instead of dividing absolute authority between two figures, Milton creates a poem with no figure of absolute authority; thus, Milton's narrator is unable to completely derive his poetic authority from any external source. While Milton's Romantic readership attempted to cast God in the role of oppressive and tyrannical monarch, my own claim is far less radical.³⁰ Instead, I argue that in Milton's poem God becomes a problematic figure whose authority is not certain or beyond skepticism; in Dante's poem, Virgil and Beatrice derive their unquestionable authority from God, yet in *Paradise Lost* the multiple re-tellings of the same events throughout the poem problematizes God's authority.³¹ Thus, by recasting the role of the Muse and subjecting any external source of power in the poem to interrogation, Milton extends Dante's de-centering of poetic authority.

By examining Milton's narrator in relation to those of his epic predecessors, particularly Dante, it becomes clear that *Paradise Lost* is a poem with no stable authoritative centre: the narrator of *Paradise Lost* is forced to tell his poem with limited reference to certain figures of

³⁰ For example, see Shelley's *Defense of Poetry*, in which he writes that "Milton's Devil as a moral being is as far superior to his God as one who perseveres in some purpose which he has conceived to be excellent in spite of adversity and torture, is to one who in the cold security of undoubted triumph inflicts the most horrible revenge upon his enemy, not from any mistaken notion of inducing him to repent of a perseverance in enmity, but with the alleged design of exasperating him to deserve new torments" (9). See also Bryson's "Divine Evil and Justification in *Paradise Lost*," in which he argues that, in his poem "Milton," Blake characterises God as "the worst sort of tyrant he could personally imagine" (88).

³¹ On the subject of the ambiguity surrounding God and his questionable authority, see Herman's "Incertitude, Authority, and Milton's God" or "*Paradise Lost*, Contributory Negligence, and the Problem of Cause" and Bryson's *The Tyranny of Heaven: Milton's Rejection of God as King*.

authority, since the Muse's role is qualified in Milton's poem. The epic tradition that the narrator inherits is one where the role of the Muse has become increasingly extraneous. The function of the Muse shifts from Homer, whose authority comes entirely from the Muse, to Virgil, who foregrounds his own authority but maintains it through an appeal to the Muse, and finally to Dante, who eliminates the Muse entirely and replaces her with a poet, Virgil. This movement is replicated in the narrator's four invocations in *Paradise Lost*, in which the narrator becomes increasingly less assured of the Muse's guidance as the poem progresses. In the first invocation, there is no indication of any doubt or hesitation regarding the Muse. By the second poem, the narrator laments the fact that the Muse "revisits not these eyes," (3.23) which is both a comment on his blindness and the Muse's lack of engagement. That said, his concern is with *revisiting*, thus suggesting a confidence in the earliest invocations; however, the second invocation is slightly less bold and confident than the first. In contrast, the final two invocations in the poem are distinguished by their uncertainty. In the final invocation, as the narrator considers the possibility of the poem's failure, he says he will undoubtedly fail "if all be mine, / Not hers who brings it nightly to my ear" (9.46-7). Here his uncertainty is plainly evident: if he were certain of the Muse's inspiration, there would be no need to consider possibility of the poem's failure.

Furthermore, there is a shift in the corporeal sense that the narrator evokes: in the first two invocations, his appeals are to sight and seeing. The narrator first asks the Muse, "what in me is dark *illumine*" (1.23); in the second invocation the narrator speaks of "holy light" (3.1), stating that "God is light" (3.3), and he likens the Muse's guidance to a "sovereign vital lamp" (3.22). The repeated references to light and illumination link the Muse's guidance with the sense of sight; however, by the final invocation the Muse brings the story to his "ear," which

shifts the connection to the sense of hearing. The significance of the shift in the sense organs being invoked becomes apparent when we consider Plato's distinction between sight and sound, since, just like Dante's poem, *Paradise Lost* embraces the Platonic idea of sight.³² In the *Timaeus*, Plato argues that sight offers the most direct access of all the senses to the essential nature of things. He argues that sight was the first sense given to humans: "the pure fire which is within us and related thereto they made to flow through the eyes in a stream smooth and dense, compressing the whole eye, and especially the centre part, so that it kept out everything of a coarser nature, and allowed to pass only this pure element" (2.26). Given that sight is associated with a purer understanding, the narrator's shift to suggest that the Muse later offers him information through his faculty of hearing greatly diminishes the narrator's authority. Furthermore, the image of whispering in his ear at night is reminiscent of the angels finding Satan "Squat like a toad, close at the ear of Eve" (4.800) when he makes his first attempt to convince Eve to sin. Here, the ear becomes a sense organ that is easily used to deceive or harm. This concept of the vulnerability of the ear is not unique to Milton; for example, in Shakespeare's *Hamlet*, it is through the ear that Claudius poisons his brother. This appeal to the ear then, in the final invocation of *Paradise Lost* encourages a skepticism and lack of certainty in the authority the narrator allegedly gains through the Muse.

The epic tradition Milton inherits, which sees the Muse emptied of much of her authority, is the same tradition from which *The Comedy* emerges: both are forced to reconsider how narrative authority is achieved. As previously mentioned, Dante de-centers authority by shifting it to his two guides. Yet in *Paradise Lost*, Milton seems to mock Dante's decision to shift

³² For scholarship on Milton's use of Plato see, Irene Samuel's *Plato and Milton*.

authority to his guides. As Satan attempts to get the key which will allow him to reach Adam and Eve, Sin responds to his request by saying “Thou art my father, thou my author, thou / My being gav’st me; whom should I obey / But thee, whom follow?” (2.864-66). The statement that Satan is her “author” recalls Dante-protagonists’s claim that Virgil is his “master and [his] author” (1.85). Milton, then, presents a demonic parody of Dante-protagonist’s decision to relinquish his authority and blindly follow Virgil: the willing subordination in *The Comedy* is linked to the Fall of humanity, since it is linked to Sin’s decision to be subservient to Satan, which ultimately puts him in a position to tempt Eve. Thus, while Milton seems to respect Dante’s de-centering of authority, he suggests that Dante’s poem falls short. Instead of recasting the Muse (whose role has faded over time) and granting absolute authority to another figure in the poem, Milton embraces the uncertainty associated with this lack of external poetic authority. Milton reinvents the role of the Muse: instead of granting her absolute authority by turning the narrator into mouthpiece for the Muse, or suggesting, as Dante does, that the Muse should be blindly and indiscriminately obeyed, Milton calls on his Muse to facilitate an internal change by illuminating something that already exists within himself. This internalised recasting of the Muse emphasises the role of the narrator in the poem. The Muse still maintains her role in the narrator’s growth; however, Milton allows his narrator an unprecedented freedom as the narrator becomes responsible for interpretation and is obligated use his reason to negotiate the events of the poem.

While the political implications of Dante’s poem are largely clear and easy to identify, Milton’s poem is somewhat more difficult to unravel, and while any conclusive arguments about Milton’s politics cannot be derived from the way Milton re-distributes authority, what can be

determined is that the poem radically de-stabilizes poetic authority, and that this de-stabilizing parallels Milton's rejection of absolute authority. A further examination of how Milton works within a Dantean tradition, particularly in relation to the ways in which the narrators' journeys are represented in each poem, will illuminate how the poetic structure of Milton's poem is tied to his adaptation of Dante and his political beliefs.

Chapter 2:

Milton and the Narrator of *Paradise Lost*

In the previous chapter I argued that, due to the changing role of the Muse through the history of the epic, and as a result of Milton's Protestantism and republicanism, *Paradise Lost* de-centers authority, and the narrator of *Paradise Lost* is both unable and unwilling to derive his poetic authority from the Muse in the same way as his classical counterparts. I further asserted that this unwillingness to rely on the traditional Muse demonstrates that the narrator does not entirely derive his authority from an external source. Of course, that argument might require some qualification: in light of the trend in Milton criticism to assume that the narrator speaks in Milton's own voice, the argument that the narrator does not derive his poetic authority from any external sources requires an examination of the relationship between Milton and his narrator.

Two prevalent and commonly accepted claims in Milton scholarship need to be addressed: first is the argument that the authority of the narrator is automatically beyond question or skepticism by virtue of Milton's unquestionable authority as poet; second is the assertion that there is no separation between Milton and his narrator. William Kerrigan claims that the narrator, or the "I" presented in *Paradise Lost*, is always Milton and that, given his reputation as a poet, there is no room to question the narrator's authority (262-64). An examination of *De Doctrina Christiana* and *Eikonoklastes*, however, demonstrates that Milton would have adamantly opposed the idea that a text, or figure within a text, should be above question by virtue of the author's credibility. My aim in this chapter is to justify the necessity of examining the narrator *without reference to* Milton and his power and control as poet.

To assert Milton's authority as poet in *Paradise Lost*, John Guillory looks to the Epistle to *De Doctrina* and suggests that the rhetoric of the Epistle metonymically uses Milton's name to establish authority by inserting passages from the Bible: Milton's name establishes a circular type of authority in which direct engagement with scripture grants authority to Milton's words, and subsequently his name, such that anything else written under his name — the rest of the tract and any other pieces of his writing — is granted authority (105). William Kerrigan extends Guillory's argument and suggests that the authority established in the Epistle is carried over into all of Milton's poetic works, including *Paradise Lost*, that invoke the Bible. The narrator of *Paradise Lost*, by this way of reading, requires no claim to prophetic inspiration, since his reading of the Bible grants him the divine authority that Kerrigan suggests is implicit in the text. Even though, as Guillory acknowledges, *Paradise Lost* has a more complex relationship to scripture than do his prose works — since it expands on the biblical story, unlike *De Doctrina* which simply offers a repetition — the principle remains the same: by virtue of the close engagement with scripture, the narrator's authority is beyond question. Kerrigan's and Guillory's readings of authority, however, overlook some of the complexities of Milton's understanding of authority: both the passages of *De Doctrina* that Guillory chooses to cite as well as statements throughout Milton's prose works suggest that authority cannot simply be tied to a person, even if that person aptly quotes scripture for his purpose. In the Epistle, Milton writes:

For we are ordered to find out the truth about all things, and the daily increase of the light of truth fills the church much rather with brightness and strength than with confusion. I do not see how anyone should be able or is able to throw the church into confusion by searching after truth, any more than heathen were

thrown into confusion when the gospel was first preached. *For assuredly I do not urge or enforce anything upon my own authority.* On the contrary, I advise every reader, and set him an example of doing the same myself, to withhold his consent from those opinions about which he does not feel fully convinced, until the evidence of the Bible convinces him and *induces his reason to assent* and to believe ... Most authors who have dealt with this subject at the greatest length in the past have been in the habit of filling their pages almost entirely with expositions of their own ideas. They have relegated to the margin, with brief reference to chapter and verse, the scriptural text upon which all that they teach is utterly dependent. I, on the other hand, have striven to cram my pages even to overflowing, with quotations drawn from all parts of the Bible and to leave as little space as possible for my own words, even when they arise from putting together of actual scriptural texts. (*CPW* 6.121-22; emphasis added)

In his analysis of this section of the text, Guillory focuses on the second half, in which Milton expresses his belief that his text is different from other texts that claim divine authority because of its close engagement with the Bible. Guillory concludes from these lines that Milton claims a degree of authority by linking his writings to scripture and, to some extent, this commentary is accurate: Milton justifies his own project in these lines and grants his work an unusual degree of legitimacy. What this passage does not do, however, is demand an unconditional acceptance of what follows the Epistle. Even if one were to accept the claim that Milton's contemporary readers would have granted his texts an almost scriptural level of authority by virtue of his

relationship to the Bible, the passage cited above makes it clear that, for Milton, his quotation of scripture does not translate into unquestioned authority.

Beyond Milton's own admission that his purpose is not to "urge or enforce ... his own authority," the beginning of this passage emphasises reason and the necessity of seeking truth, which are also foundational points of *Areopagitica*. *Areopagitica* offers a more comprehensive account of Milton's views on reason and truth; thus, a brief look to the tract provides further evidence that Milton would not advocate for his name, or any name, acting as a source of authority. Stephen B. Dobranski notes that, in *Areopagitica*, Milton personifies truth as a dissected and scattered body in order to argue that a great deal of effort is required to reconstruct truth (199). The emphasis on the act of seeking in both prose texts indicates Milton's belief in the need for a strong critical engagement based in reason. In *De Doctrina*, Milton argues that, regardless of the assumed authority of a text, reason must align with what information is being presented, and that only then should one assent; one of the implications of Milton's rejection of anything that does not correspond with reason is that everything, including scripture, calls for reinterpretation in light of reason.

For Milton, reason is linked to choice and the ability to interpret; the freedom to exercise reason is foundational in Milton's prose, including *Areopagitica* and *De Doctrina*. In *Areopagitica*, Milton turns to the Genesis account of Adam and Eve to advance his point regarding the exercise of reason: "Many there be that complain of divine Providence for suffering Adam to transgresse, foolish tongues! When God gave him reason, he gave him freedom to choose, for reason is but choosing, he had bin else a meer artificiall Adam, such an Adam as he is in the motions" (*CPW* 2:527). This argument regarding Adam's free will is an

essential part of *Paradise Lost* as well; what makes Adam human is his ability to exercise reason, and as such, the suggestion of any absolute authority being established by right of the author as opposed to reason is in direct opposition to what Milton argues here. Furthermore, Milton's rationale for presenting an argument against the licensing order of 1643 was that the order would restrict people from exercising their reason, since choosing, for Milton, requires the individual to be informed; choosing based on tradition or as a result of the interpretation of another is not the same as exercising reason. Stephen M. Fallon states that, in Milton's mind, "adherence to custom is one of the great causes of human error and misery" (314). Part of this movement away from custom requires that people be able, and willing, to interpret scripture and reject anything that cannot be reconciled with reason.

As Alexandra Walsham notes, after the Reformation the ability to read and interpret the Bible was associated with liberty because it was the means by which people could break free from the tyranny of those interpreting for them (144). The belief that the people were "imprisoned in ignorance and superstition" (142) by not being allowed to read the Bible for themselves is foundational in *Areopagitica*, in which Milton writes that, "Truth is compar'd in Scripture to a streaming fountain; if her waters flow not in a perpetuall progression, they sick'n into a muddy pool of conformity and tradition" (*CPW* 2:543). This understanding of Truth as something that is constantly in progress, along with Milton's claim that it is "not impossible that [Truth] may have more shapes then one" (*CPW* 2:563) demonstrates Milton's conviction that an efficacious society must constantly seek truth. In *Areopagitica*, Milton suggests that a total understanding of truth is impossible, yet is something that people need to constantly and laboriously seek. Citizens must "work hard and think for themselves" (Dobranski 199). This

process of seeking truth, of course, required people to consider dissenting views, since simply accepting traditional or authoritative interpretations, even those relating to the Bible, was to allow truth to become a “muddy pool of conformity.” Milton’s elevation of reason over a blind acceptance of another’s reading of scripture, then, negates any claim that his authority as poet is beyond question due to his close relationship to the Bible. Indeed, simply to accept everything Milton writes based on his authority as an author is to turn Milton’s work into an idol to be worshiped. Certainly Milton would not have approved of an idolatrous reverence for his work. Instead he would have wanted his texts to be read in the same way that he read and interpreted all printed materials, including the Bible.

While *De Doctrina* and its thematic connection to *Areopagitica* in terms of authorial authority and critical reading seem to suggest Milton would not have wanted his narrative authority to be assumed in his prose or in *Paradise Lost*, the argument presented in these texts is somewhat abstract and theoretical; in contrast, *Eikonoklastes* presents a far more concrete example of Milton’s rejection of authority being grounded in the reputation of the author. *Eikon Basilike*, King Charles’ supposed autobiography, was hugely successful; in fact, Elizabeth Skerpan-Wheeler argues that, after the publication of *Eikon Basilike*, Charles became the first celebrity (914). The success of Charles’ publication prompted numerous replies, many of which attacked the supposed authorship of *Eikon Basilike*. One such text was *Eikon Alethine*, which presents an image to replace the one in *Eikon Basilike*. Marshall Grossman notes that this image is “principally invested in denying the king’s authorship of *Eikon Basilike* [and] presents his work as uncovering a true image which has been concealed behind a false one” (286). The goal

of many of the responses to *Eikon Basilike* was both to curb the public's interest in the text and to diminish the authority of the work by suggesting Charles was not the author.

Milton's own response to *Eikon Basilike* takes a dramatically different approach, since he chooses to ignore the question of authorship. Milton argues that authorship has no effect on the validity of what is being presented in the text. Milton acknowledges that the text primarily receives its authority by being authored by the king, yet Milton chooses not to attack the authorship of the book: "Save only that a King is said to be the Author, a name, then which there needs no more among the blockish vulgar, to make it wise and excellent, and admir'd, nay to sit it next the Bible, though otherwise containing little else but common rounds of tyranny" (*CPW* 3:339). Milton attributes the tendency to associate authority with the author to the uneducated rabble that he repeatedly expresses disdain for throughout his prose.³³ Instead of attempting to undermine the authority of *Eikon Basilike* by questioning its authorship, Milton chooses to provide counter-arguments to each of its statements. Milton states that "as to the author of these Soliloquies, whether it were [undoubtedly] the late King, as is vulgarly beleev'd, or an secret Coadjutor, and some stick not to name him, it can add nothing, nor shall take from the weight, if any be, of reason which he brings" (*CPW* 3:346). Undermining the king's authorship — who, by virtue of divine right, would receive unquestioned support from many of his contemporaries for anything he wrote — is secondary for Milton; despite his fierce contempt for the support the king's name alone was able to amass, and despite his repudiation of Divine Right, Milton chooses to focus on neither of those things and instead attempts to undermine the logic of the

³³ For a discussion of Milton's increasingly limited understanding of who makes up "the people," see Hammond.

Eikon Basilike.³⁴ Reason is privileged above all else; regardless of authorship, if the text were to bring forward any truth, it should be accepted. Milton, however, argues that the King's book does not deal in truth or reason, and instead *Eikon Basilike* presents a fictionalized version of history. Given Milton's rejection that *Eikon Basilike* should derive authority from its author, despite the King's repeated attempts to establish his connection to God — both in the written text and in the frontispiece — it seems illogical to assume that Milton himself would argue for his own authority as a writer to be established by anything other than the value of his writing. To demand his authority be accepted in either *De Doctrina* or *Paradise Lost* by virtue of his name would be to place him in league with the king, who duped the “blockish vulgar” into idolizing his book.

The next point I wish to address in order to problematize further the narrator's authority in *Paradise Lost* is the assumption that Milton's is the narrative voice of the poem. Much Milton scholarship presupposes this connection between Milton and his narrator. Guillory, for instance, argues that Milton “does not admit any distance between himself and the poet in the poem, and we can sense in the refusal to admit this distance a hunger for the literal, for the nonfigurative ground of the poetic act” (104). The notion that Milton desired his poem to be read literally has been challenged by numerous critics.³⁵ The point I dispute is that Milton is unquestionably the narrator of *Paradise Lost*; by complicating the relationship between Milton and his narrator, I suggest that the narrator of *Paradise Lost* is a literary device — albeit one that occasionally

³⁴ Milton's rejection of Divine Right is apparent in many of his prose works, most notably in *The Tenure of Kings and Magistrates*, in which he argues the arbitrariness associated with Divine Right. Peters argues that, for Milton, the King was merely a magistrate who had no special connection to God (229-30). And while, as Zaller notes, people were beginning to question the legitimacy of Divine Right during the reign of Charles I, it was still a prevalent ideology in the period. During the English Revolution and even after 1660, as England became more secular, Divine Right was not dead (Burgess 97).

³⁵ See, for instance, Achinstein, who argues that Milton attempts to teach through allegory, or Borris, who suggests that allegory is the definitive mark of English Renaissance epics, specifically in Spenser's *Faerie Queene* and *Paradise Lost*.

reflects the Miltonic self — and that he changes over the course of the poem. As previously mentioned, the trend in scholarship is to make this connection between Milton and his narrator, due to the apparent similarities in the opinions and characteristics between the two.³⁶ Certainly, the narrator of the poem and Milton do share many similarities, yet to assume there is no “distance” between them is to reduce the complexity of Milton’s narrative. By comparing the narrator’s blindness in *Paradise Lost* to Milton’s representation of his own blindness in “Sonnet 16” and *The Second Defence*, I complicate the idea that the allusions to blindness in *Paradise Lost* indisputably link Milton and his narrator: I argue that Milton’s narrator deserves the same level of critical scrutiny as any other character in *Paradise Lost*, and that Milton’s narrator should be treated in a similar fashion as Dante’s narrator, which is to say as a literary invention which is distinct from the poet behind the poem.

Despite the trend in scholarship to assume the connection between Milton and his narrator, two major works attempt to undermine this supposition, most notably Anne Ferry’s *Milton’s Epic Voice*. Ferry argues that, in *Paradise Lost*, “the narrative voice is as deliberate an invention as the other characters in the poem and essential to its meaning” (20). Ferry’s argument regarding the *deliberateness* of Milton’s construction of the narrator emphasises the lack of critical attention that the narrator of *Paradise Lost* has received in Milton scholarship; she attempts to overcome this neglect in her own work. While her argument (on the narrator’s fallen nature) was well received, Ferry’s attempt to distinguish between Milton and his narrator was largely overlooked. Instead, scholars tend to apply Ferry’s argument about the fallenness of the

³⁶ Most major editions of *Paradise Lost* reinforce the connection between Milton and his narrator: Fowler’s and Lewalski’s editions — the two most commonly used versions in scholarship — both promote this reading. In his edition, Fowler, who perhaps makes the claim that the narrator and Milton are one and the same more directly than any other editor, states that the four preambles are “*in persona auctoris*” (388n1-50).

narrator to Milton, the poet, as opposed to the fictional narrator. Robert McMahon builds on Ferry's claim by maintaining the distinction between the Bard (or narrator, as I call him) and the Poet (Milton) that Ferry establishes. McMahon charts the temporal significance of this distinction:

There are two poets of *Paradise Lost*: John Milton, its author, the poet behind the poem; and his narrator, the Bard, the poet within the poem. John Milton was a person in history, the author of many works, a writer who composed his epic in whatever sequence of operations he found suitable. The Bard is a literary figure who exists in the present. He is the speaker of *Paradise Lost*, composing it “now” in the order of its self-presentation, “singing” it in the ongoing present of our reading. (1)

The argument that the narrator of *Paradise Lost*, a poet in his own right, composes and experiences the events of the poem in the “now,” just as Dante-protagonist does, destabilizes the authority of the narrator, as his knowledge — regarding Satan, God, the War in Heaven, and, most significantly, his own role as epic poet — is incremental throughout the poem. This claim that the narrator composes the poem in the “ongoing present of our reading” is also important for my discussion in Chapter 3 of the narrator's journey: if we accept that the narrator is speaking in a continuous present, he is unable to revise his earlier comments, such that the development of the narrator can be tracked. Thus, the second proem can modify the first and so on. The result then, is that the third and fourth proem should be privileged over the first and second.³⁷ Indeed, when read this way the proems become a useful tool in understanding the narrator's poetic development.

³⁷ Some critics emphasize the narrator's prophetic role and see the first two proems as primary. For such arguments, see Broadbent or Wittreich.

My own interpretation of the narrator aligns, in all substantial and relevant points, with Ferry's and McMahon's; however, I maintain that what Ferry's and McMahon's texts lack is justification for the distinction between Milton and his narrator. Perhaps this lack of attention to *how* the narrator is depicted, and how this depiction is in direct contrast with Milton's self-representation in earlier works, is the reason the idea has remained largely unacknowledged. A brief examination of the narrator's blindness, a point that is often used to establish the link between Milton and the narrator, may help to substantiate the argument for their distinctness.

While providing an exact date for the composition of "Sonnet 16" is challenging, what can be established is that Milton wrote this poem sometime after started to lose his eyesight.³⁸ Milton thus likely composed the poem within a couple of years of *The Second Defence* (1654). In "Sonnet 16," the speaker laments his blindness, since he fears that as a result of it, he will no longer be able to put his skills as a poet to use in the name of God:³⁹ "And that one talent which is death to hide, / Lodged with me useless, though my soul more bent / To serve therewith my maker" (3-5). The word "talent" refers both to the speaker's poetic ability as well as the parable of the talents (Matthew 25:14-30).⁴⁰ By alluding to the parable of the talents, the speaker emphasises that his talents — his poetic abilities — were given so that he might write in support of his maker. The speaker's lamentation, however, is cut short when the volta occurs part way through line eight and Patience reminds him that "God does not need / Either man's work or his own gifts, who best / Bear his mild yoke, they serve him best" (9-11). The speaker's questions,

³⁸ While scholars are divided on the exact date of composition, the poem was likely written sometime between 1652 and 1655. For a full list of potential dates, see Carey's notes on the poem in his edition of *The Complete Shorter Poems*.

³⁹ For a discussion of Milton's blindness as it relates to this poem, see Sasek and Gossman and Whiting.

⁴⁰ For a discussion of how Milton's poem registers the idea of the speakers poetic ability, see Parker ("The Dates of Milton's Sonnets on Blindness").

then, are revealed to be somewhat ridiculous and perhaps even arrogant: the speaker is confronted with the reality that God neither needs nor expects anything from him and that to question his plan is frivolous as well as pompous. Furthermore, the transition from the first part of the sonnet is demarcated by a semicolon midway through the eighth line — as opposed to a period at the end of line eight, as is fairly standard in Italian sonnets — thus emphasizing the premature and easy shift from the speaker’s concerns to the poem’s resolution. The volta highlights the speaker’s willingness to forget his own complaints and accept his blindness.

While *The Second Defence* does not present the same anxiety and despair as the octave of “Sonnet 16,” Milton foregrounds the idea of one’s proper duty in his discussion of his blindness in this tract as well. Milton begins his discussion of his blindness with a sentiment that would be familiar to any readers of “Sonnet 16”: “It is not so wretched to be blind, as it is not to be capable of enduring blindness” (4.553). Just as in “Sonnet 16” Milton easily accepts his blindness as providential, in *The Second Defence* his blindness is neither a punishment nor something lamentable. After his argument about his ability to endure his blindness, Milton proceeds to offer a long list of virtuous men who were also blind, to defend himself against the claim that his blindness was a divine punishment:

since my enemies boast that this affliction is only a retribution for the transgressions of my pen, I again invoke the Almighty to witness, that I never, at any time, wrote any thing which I did not think agreeable to truth, to justice, and to piety. This was my persuasion then, and I feel the same persuasion now. *Nor was I ever prompted to such exertions by the influence of ambition*, by the lust of lucre or of praise; it was only by the *conviction of duty* and the feeling of patriotism, a disinterested passion

for the extension of civil and religious liberty ... my resolution was unshaken, though the alternative was either the loss of my sight or the desertion of my duty. (*CPW* 4.553; emphasis added)

Again, the appeal to duty is central to Milton's argument: his writing does not serve to benefit him personally in terms of earthly glory. Thus, despite his earlier hesitation to write a response to *Eikon Basilike*, which he readily admits to in *Eikonoklastes* and again in *The Second Defence*, Milton states that "when [his] medical attendants clearly announced, that if [he] did engage in the work, [his eye sight] would be irreparably lost, their premonitions caused no hesitation, and inspired no dismay" (4.554). The identity Milton creates is that of an instrument, who, with no interest in personal glory, serves his cause and his beliefs in true civil liberty.

Of course, in *The Second Defence* Milton actively tries to construct his public image as he responds to the personal attacks against him in *Clamor*;⁴¹ while his response is motivated by his desire to undermine the charges against him that would threaten his cause, the tract certainly is a crucial piece in understanding Milton's beliefs. Despite sharing characteristics with the historical Milton, the narrator of *Paradise Lost* is different from the figure in other texts in which Milton represents himself, which suggests a distance between the narrator of *Paradise Lost* and the narrative voice of Milton's earlier works. Thus, it is problematic to assume the narrator in *Paradise Lost* is somehow his true personality coming through despite Milton's efforts to construct his public image in his earlier works, particularly *The Second Defence*, which is more concerned with self-representation than any of his other works. Given the correlation between

⁴¹ The title page of *Clamor* attributes the work to Peter Du Moulin, Alexander More, and Samuel Bochart. Milton wrongly assumes that More is the author of the text and in his own response provides a counter attack against More.

“Sonnet 16” and *The Second Defence* — and the nature of *The Second Defence*, which seeks to construct a public image — it seems to follow that it is, at least, equally plausible that the beliefs expressed in “Sonnet 16” and *The Second Defence* are revealing of Milton’s true convictions as those beliefs and opinions expressed in *Paradise Lost*. As such, the assumed connection between Milton and the narrator of *Paradise Lost* becomes more complicated than many scholars acknowledge.

Unlike the speaker of “Sonnet 16” and of *The Second Defence*, the concerns of the narrator of *Paradise Lost* regarding his duty and responsibility to God appear secondary to his own ambition. The ideas regarding duty, ambition, and acceptance of blindness seem inverted in *Paradise Lost* when compared to Milton’s earlier works. In the first proem, for instance, the narrator declares that his goal is to “justify the ways of God to men” (1.26; emphasis added). The use of the plural on “ways” and “men” is telling in that it reveals the narrator’s ambition: the aim is not simply to recount the story of Adam and Eve and justify God’s punishment of his first creations, but instead to justify *all* of God’s actions as they relate to all of humanity. Aside from the obviously ambitious task of retelling the Genesis tale of the Fall, made all the more zealous by his desire to justify God’s ways, the above line demonstrates a degree of presumptuousness: the narrator assumes both that God requires justification — or at least that the fallen readers of *Paradise Lost* need God’s actions to be justified — and that he is skilled enough to undertake the task.

It is useful to consider the difference between Dante’s poem and *Paradise Lost* in order to appreciate the narrator’s brazen ambition. Both Dante and Milton write biblical epics that attempt to expand on and, at least to some extent, justify God’s actions: in *The Comedy*, Dante is

sure to offer rationales for each sinner’s punishments and repeatedly remarks that the imprisonment of Satan and the sinners is for the benefit of humanity. Yet the two poems begin very differently. Dante’s poem begins more humbly, with a confused and disoriented protagonist who is encouraged to undertake his divinely ordained journey. When Dante remains immobile and unsure during his first meeting with Virgil, his guide tells him:

for your good I think and judge that you
 shall follow me, and I shall be your guide, and I will
 lead you from here through an eternal place

.....
 To whom [Beatrice] then if you shall wish to rise, there will
 be a soul more worthy of that than I; with her I shall
 leave you when I depart. (*Inferno* 1.112-15, 121-23)

Let us recall, first, that Dante-protagonist did not summon Virgil. Instead, according to Dante’s narrative, Virgil arrives at the request of God to guide Dante. Furthermore, Virgil’s foreknowledge of how Dante’s journey will progress — his knowledge that he is to guide him through Hell and some of Purgatory before they will meet Beatrice — removes any doubt that this is a divinely predetermined path. Not only is the journey predetermined, but Dante’s retelling thereof is as well. At the end of *Paradiso*, St. Bernard prays to the Virgin Mary and asks her to “preserve the health of [Dante-protagonist’s] affects, after so great a vision” (33.35-6). Given that “affects” here means memory, the prayer designed to protect his faculties — along with the constant references throughout the poem to remembering accurately — indicates God’s desire for Dante to retell the story for the good of humanity. Thus the journey and subsequent retelling of

his journey become Dante's divinely appointed duty; his work is removed from any attempt at personal poetic glory. In contrast, despite the narrator's claim that he has been divinely inspired, there is no evidence of a divine imperative for Milton's narrator to begin his account of the Fall. There are, instead, a number of indications that he is, at least in part, motivated by ambition and a desire for personal glory.

The opening invocation of *Paradise Lost* indicates the narrator's poetic ambition. As he first calls to the Muse, he acknowledges that he requires the Muse's assistance because he "with no middle flight intends to soar / Above the Aonian mount, while it [his song] pursues / Things unattempted yet in prose or rhyme" (1.14-16). The narrator's intent to soar "with no middle flight" is in direct contrast with Du Bartas' *Divine Weeks and Works* (Lewalski, *Rhetoric of Literary Forms*, 30). The Muse of Du Bartas' poem is cautious and restricts herself to the "middle Region" (1.1.36). In the following lines, the rationale for this middle flight is described: "Least, if she should too-high a pitch presume, / Heav'ns glowing flame should melt her waxen plume" (137-38). The allusion to Icarus, whose wings were melted as the result of his ambitious flight, suggests that Du Bartas' deliberately cautious Muse will be successful. The passage regarding the Muse's caution also begins by alluding to Capaneus (127-30), a figure who was struck down and killed by Zeus after proclaiming his superiority to the god. Interestingly, in *Inferno* 14 Dante places Capaneus in the third ring of the seventh circle, which is reserved for those who commit violence against God. By presenting himself as more ambitious than Du Bartas' muse, the narrator of *Paradise Lost*, perhaps unintentionally, forges a connection between himself and Icarus and Capaneus, which suggests both self-harming ambition and pride that injures God. This connection among Icarus, Capaneus, and the narrator of *Paradise Lost*

substantiates the claim that the narrator places his desire for personal glory at the same level as any duty he may feel towards God.

The problematic allusions in the first proem that reveal the narrator's distance from the writer of *The Second Defence* are also present in the second proem, which further supports the distinction between the poet and the narrator. While considering his blindness, the narrator states that:

where the Muses haunt

.....

Nightly I visit: nor sometimes forget

Those other two equalled with me in fate,

So were I equalled with them in renown,

Blind Thamyras and blind Maeonides,

And Tiresias and Phineus prophets old. (3.27, 33-6)

Not only is the consideration of "renown" problematic, because it once again signals the narrator's preoccupation with personal glory, but the narrator's discussion of his "fate" in relation to the four listed figures is inconsistent with Milton's claim in *The Second Defence* that his blindness was not a punishment. Thamyras and Phineus were both punished with the loss of their sight. Thamyras, moreover, lost his sight after his arrogance led him to challenge the Muses. Scholars have often remarked that this proem is the most personal and emotional in *Paradise Lost*; thus, the fact that Thamyras is the first name that comes to the narrator's mind is telling, particularly if we consider McMahon's claim that the narrator is telling the poem in the "now" and does not have the opportunity to go back and revise the story he tells: the narrator's first

thought is to link himself with Thamyris, a figure whose ambition is punished with blindness. The link between the narrator and Thamyris both demonstrates the narrator's ambition and indicates that the narrator may feel his own blindness is a sort of divine punishment: both of these ideas are in direct contrast with how the writer of *The Second Defence* conceives of himself. The narrator's problematic allusions to classical characters throughout the poem demonstrate an ambition and pride that is contradictory to the self-image Milton constructs in his earlier works, which suggests that the narrator and Milton are two distinct figures and should be treated as such.

The final instance I wish to examine to demonstrate the distance between Milton and his narrator also occurs in the second poem. When the narrator once again invokes the aid of the Muse, he repeats the phrase, "Thee I revisit" (3.13 & 21) and in the second such instance states that:

thee I revisit safe,
 And feel thy sovran vital Lamp; but thou
 Revisit'st not these eyes, that rowle in vain
 To find thy piercing ray, and find no dawn; (21-24)⁴²

These lines are in direct opposition to the shift in "Sonnet 16" where the speaker moves from lamentation to acceptance of his blindness. A semi-colon marks this shift in "Sonnet 16" and likewise in line 22 of *Paradise Lost*; however, the shift has the opposite effect. In *Paradise Lost*, the narrator moves from confidence and acceptance of his poetic role to lamenting his blindness. Furthermore, as already discussed, the source of his sorrow lies not in his inability to serve God

⁴² Quoted from the 1674 edition of *Paradise Lost*.

but in a feeling of inadequacy, since, while the narrator acknowledges that his “fate” is the same as that of the blind poets and prophets of past, he is not “renown[ed]” as they were and continue to be. The narrator is only able to take comfort from the fact that, like these famous blind poets, his physical blindness may be an opportunity for insight:

So much the rather thou *celestial light*
 Shine inward, and the mind through all her powers
 Irradiate, there plant eyes, all mist from thence
Purge and disperse, that I may see and tell
 Of things invisible to mortal sight. (3.51-55; emphasis added)

These lines are reminiscent of the first invocation, in which the narrator asks of the Muse, “what in me is dark / Illumine” (22-3); however, the most immediate echo is of Beelzebub’s expression of hope in Book 2. As Beelzebub presents his argument on the course of action the fallen angels should take, he says:

with neighbouring arms
 And opportune excursion we may chance
 Re-enter heaven; or else in some mild zone
 Dwell not *unvisited* of *heaven’s fair light*
 Secure, and at the brightening orient beam
Purge off this gloom (2.394-400; emphasis added).

By linking the narrator’s hope to that of Beelzebub, Milton ironizes the narrator: the narrator’s desire for an external authority to grant him poetic authority becomes demonic. Furthermore, this desire for an external guiding force is explicitly repudiated by God in Book 3. During his

explanation to the Son about how he created all beings free, God states that “They [Adam and Eve] trespass, authors to themselves in all / Both what they judge and what they choose” (3.122-23). Despite his foreknowledge, God explains that he refuses to interfere with Adam and Eve because to do so would be to deprive them of their freedom.

The narrator, then, while sharing Milton’s blindness, perceives his own disability very differently than Milton does in “Sonnet 16” and *The Second Defence*. Indeed, instead of enduring his “mild yoke,” the narrator seems to reject God’s gift of freedom by calling for an external authority to guide him. That is not to say Milton’s own experiences did not influence his creation of the narrator; they undoubtedly did. However, the possibility that the narrator is a poetic creation of Milton certainly exists; the problematic ambition and misguided desire for earthy glory exhibited by the narrator both demonstrate the distance between Milton and his narrator and suggest that, at least at the beginning of the poem, the narrator lacks the necessary qualities to narrate the poem. Certainly the narrator of a Christian poem such as this would need to demonstrate a humility that the narrator lacks in the opening books. Much like Dante’s narrator, however, the narrator of *Paradise Lost* becomes increasingly suitable for his role as the poem progresses.

By arguing that Milton would not have approved of his readers accepting his authority on the grounds of his previous political and poetic achievements and establishing that Milton and his narrator are distinct from one another — along with my claims in Chapter 1 regarding the diminished role of the Muse in *Paradise Lost* — I maintain that the narrator of *Paradise Lost* does not derive his poetic authority from any external source, or, at least, that there is no stable and unquestionable figure from which he can obtain his poetic authority. The result, then, is that

Milton's narrator, unlike the narrators of his predecessors' poems, is not above the reader's critical interrogation. Furthermore, the distance I have established between Milton and his narrator is essential for my discussion in Chapter 3 of the narrator's journey: in order reasonably to speak of the narrator's development in *Paradise Lost*, such a distinction must be made.

Chapter 3

The Narrative Journey: The Development of the Narrators in

The Comedy and Paradise Lost

In the previous two chapters I have argued that Milton's narrator, unlike his classical counterparts or Dante, does not derive his poetic authority from any external source. The narrator's self-sufficiency — an ability to use reason and interpret without reference to tradition or an external source of authority — becomes an important aspect of his journey in *Paradise Lost*. As previously mentioned, the narrator, while claiming to be inspired, does not have a Dantean guide to depend on and instead must learn to use his reason and exercise his free will appropriately throughout the poem. In her discussion of free will in *Dante and Milton*, Samuel contends that the growth of Dante-protagonist is analogous to the development of Adam (207-220). I wish to build on Samuel's observation and suggest that Milton's narrator exhibits the same type of moral and intellectual transformation as Adam. In fact, the narrator's growth may even be more profound than Adam's development. Given that the narrator of Milton's poem is a poet in his own right, I argue that *Paradise Lost*, like *The Comedy*, anticipates the narrative of the *Künstlerroman*, and that the narrator's personal development through the poem is reflected in his growth as a poet. By maintaining the distinction that Samuel argues for between Dante's and Milton's understanding of free will, I demonstrate that the narrator is educated by Raphael in a way that resembles Adam's education and leads to a dramatic shift in tone in Book 7.⁴³ While

⁴³ Samuel argues that Dante presents a more Aristotelian view of free will whereas Milton embraces a Platonic notion of free will. For Dante the will has to be conditioned so that moral choices become habitual. In contrast, Milton stresses the necessity of education so that people are able to properly exercise their reason. In both cases, the person must learn to use the will to make moral decisions.

Milton's Protestantism reduces the representation of Purgatory to satire in *Paradise Lost*, Milton's focus on providing his narrator with an intellectual and moral education — which parallels Dante-protagonist's journey in Purgatory — is not simply the result of a religious necessity. Instead, the focus on education to develop the narrator's rational capabilities is a reflection of Milton's politics. Just as Dante's understanding of free will and his emphasis on the institutions that are required to condition the will reflect his desire for a strong political structure in Florence, Milton's emphasis on the individual's eventual self-sufficiency through education corresponds with his free-will theology and his political aspirations for England to adopt a republican government, which he may have held before but certainly held after the failure of the English Revolution: given that, as mentioned in the Introduction, Milton believed that the revolution failed because the people of England, who did not fully understand the terms of liberty, were not ready for a republican government, Milton uses *Paradise Lost* to educate people to use the will freely, that is, without a reliance on tradition, which Milton views as a type of illogical limitation. To demonstrate the narrator's freedom and increasing self-sufficiency and ability to interpret accurately, I examine the parallel between Dante's and Milton's narrators and consider Milton's narrator's changing relationship to Satan and his representation of Satan throughout *Paradise Lost*.

As discussed in Chapter 1, Dante-protagonist begins his journey with a profound lack of confidence and requires the support and encouragement of his guide, Virgil, to begin his journey. While this lack of confidence in his ability to move through Hell is present throughout *Inferno*, what also becomes apparent is Dante-protagonist's poetic hubris and his inability to control his emotions. The first substantial example of Dante-protagonist's pride occurs when he enters

Limbo, the circle of Hell to which Virgil belongs, and meets Homer, Horace, Ovid, and Lucan. Dante begins by acknowledging the poetical achievements of these men: “So saw I come together the lovely school of that / lord of highest song, who soars above the others like / an eagle” (4.94-6). The high praise of these four men — who later accept Dante-protagonist as a poet worthy of joining their ranks — is both used to emphasize Dante-protagonist’s own poetic prowess and to demonstrate his misguided pride in being accepted into this group. Dante-protagonist’s pride becomes apparent when the narrator states that “they / made me one of their band, so that I was sixth / among so much wisdom” (4.100-102). Dante-protagonist takes great pride in being accepted among these great poets as the sixth member. It is important to remember that before Dante writes *The Comedy*, his poetry was secular and he spent much of his time worshipping Beatrice’s earthly beauty.⁴⁴ Thus, these pagan poets, confined to the first circle of Hell, embrace Dante not as the great Catholic poet he will become after his journey, but as the poet of his secular verse.

In his meeting with these great pagan poets, the numerology — which emphasises the numbers four and six — is significant, as it demonstrates Dante-protagonist’s misguided pride. Numerology is important throughout *The Comedy*, and any mention of the number three or a multiple of three encourages an allegorically religious reading of the passage: given Dante’s obsession with numerology, it is likely no coincidence that Dante chooses to make himself the sixth poet among the greats. Nor is how he divides the poets in the group coincidental: Dante

⁴⁴ Dante’s early poetics were part of a movement called *dolce stil novo* (sweet new style) which emphasized female beauty and the poet’s development as a lover. For example, see Dante’s poem “Tanto gentile e tanto onesta pare” (So gentle and so dignified she appears) from his collection *Vita Nuova*. The sonnet praises Beatrice’s beauty and grace. Compare this with Dante’s first meeting with Beatrice in *Purgatory* 30. Beatrice becomes a Christ figure and scolds Dante for his descent into sin after her death (115-45). Finally, after Dante has been purged of his earthly vices, in Canto 32, when Dante gets his first view of Beatrice when she removes her veil, there is no discussion of her beauty, just of her purity and virtue.

creates a scene in which the separation of himself and Virgil from the other poets creates a group of four, which later becomes a group of six as the two groups become one. The reference to the four poets Dante encounters who “soar” like “eagles” is a debased allusion to the Four Evangelists, Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John. The image of the eagle is a complex one in *The Comedy*. Often, when referring to Virgil, or the relationship between the Church and Florence, the eagle becomes a symbol of Empire.⁴⁵ The eagle, however, is also the symbol of John the Evangelist.⁴⁶ This connection is made clear in *Purgatory* 9 when Dante-protagonist dreams of the eagle flying in the sky as he ascends to the gates of Purgatory (19-20). This ascension, which marks the beginning of his journey towards Beatrice and God, acts as a parallel to the fourth gospel and thus develops the connection between the eagle and John. Furthermore, in Revelation 4:6-8, in which the Four Evangelists, in their symbolic forms, surround the throne, it is stated that “the four beasts had each one of them six wings about him” (8). Again, the numbers four and six are present in the description of the Evangelists. Thus, the numerology in *Inferno* 4 encourages a connection between the poets Dante-protagonist meets in this early stage of his journey and the authors of the four gospels, and this connection will be used by Milton in *Paradise Lost* to demonstrate his narrator’s own ambition and pride.

While Dante-protagonist may initially feel pride in his acceptance among the poets, the parallel between the pagan poets and the Christian writers indicates Dante-protagonist’s misunderstanding of his role as poet. Dante-protagonist desires the renown of his classical

⁴⁵ For example, when, in *Paradiso* 6, Justinian states that “Once Constantine reversed the eagle’s flight / against the course of Heaven which it pursued ... the bird of God remained on Europe’s edge” (1-6), the eagle becomes the emblem of the empire.

⁴⁶ For information on John the Evangelist’s symbol, see the entry on “Saint John” in the *Columbia Electronic Encyclopedia*.

counterparts; however, his divinely appointed mission to transcribe his journey as accurately as possible places his text yet higher, near the level of scripture. This encounter in Limbo, then, acts as evidence of Dante-protagonist's shortcomings as a Catholic poet and signals the necessity of the purification process he will undergo through Purgatory.

Dante-protagonist's recognition of his failure as poet begins almost immediately as he descends through the levels of hell. After leaving Limbo and moving to the second circle of Hell, which contains the lustful souls, Dante-protagonist encounters Francesca. After Dante-protagonist inquires, Francesca tells him the story of her adulterous relationship with her lover Paulo.⁴⁷ In her account of her relationship with Paulo, Francesca states that it was reading the tale of Lancelot and Guinevere that first led them to sin: "Many times that reading *drove* our eyes / together and turned our faces pale; but one point / alone was the one that *overpowered* us" (5.130-32; emphasis added). In Francesca's narrative, the lovers become passive, and their uncritical approach to reading compels the two to give in to temptation: they are unable to resist their impulses as they read of the romance between Lancelot and Guinevere. Upon hearing this story, Dante-protagonist becomes unable to control himself and faints:

While one of the spirits was speaking in this manner,
 The other shed such tears that, out of pity,
 I felt myself diminish, as if I were dying,
 And fell down, as a dead body falls. (139-142)

This fainting is demonstrative of Dante-protagonist's failure to control his emotions.

Furthermore, Dante's "pity" is misplaced. His inability to remain objective and maintain a

⁴⁷ The affair and murder of Francesca da Rimini (1255-1285) and Paolo Malatesta (1246-1285) by Francesca's husband Giovanni Malatesta (c.1240 - 1304) would have been well known to Dante's contemporaries.

critical distance from Francesca's story is likely linked to Dante-protagonist's relationship with Beatrice; as he listens to Francesca tell her story, his realisation of how close he had come to being condemned to the second circle of hell provokes the emotional response. Given that this circle contains the souls of those who are subject to their passions, Dante-protagonist's lack of self-control further reinforces the connection between himself and those who inhabit this circle. What is more important, however, than Dante-protagonist's lack of self-control — which will be addressed in his journey through Purgatory — is the role secular literature plays in sinning. As previously mentioned, much of Dante's work leading up to *The Comedy* was centred on his love for Beatrice. Dante's *Vita Nuova*, just like the French romance *Lancelot of the Lake*, is an expression of courtly love. Thus Dante is faced with the realisation that his poetry was likely partially responsible for leading some down a path similar to that of Paolo and Francesca.

The Comedy condemns secular literature for its potential to influence society negatively: Dante's decision to turn to religious epic in his attempt to reform society demonstrates his belief in the need for virtuous poetry that will act as a positive example for his countrymen; for Dante, it is the responsibility of the poet to write religious literature. This belief is in direct contrast with Milton's belief that no form of literature is inherently evil; for Milton, the reader is responsible for the interpretation of literature. Dante-protagonist's fainting, in which he describes his fall as being like that of a "dead body," and his subsequent resurrection in the third circle of hell, acts as a moment of rebirth, and the rain in this circle reinforces this idea of rebirth and renewal (6.19). The end of *Inferno* 5 is the last time that Dante-protagonist is unable to control his emotions, and while much of his journey remains before he will be ready to write his biblical epic, his experience in the circle of the lustful marks a turning point. While, as James Miller observes,

literal ascension in Purgatory and Heaven is linked to enlightenment (249), this act of ascension is complicated due to the cosmology of Hell in Dante's poem: descent and ascent are linked so that downward movement becomes necessary for his eventual rise through the later realms. This relationship between downward and upward movement is made clear as Dante-protagonist climbs down Lucifer's body: when they arrive at Lucifer's waist, everything becomes inverted and, by moving in the same direction, the duo begins to climb upwards (34.106-126). Thus, while Dante-protagonist may be moving downward to a new circle of hell between *Inferno* 5 and 6, the transitions still marks a moment of enlightenment in the same way as an ascension through Purgatory and Heaven.

After this ascent, and as Virgil and his charge begin their journey in *Purgatory*, there is a dramatic shift in tone, which is to be expected given the new location. The transition to *Purgatory* begins with Virgil washing Dante-protagonist's cheek with morning dew — a modest parallel of baptism — and the plucking of a “humble plant” (1. 134), which reinforces the notion of Dante-protagonist's rejection of the pride that was on display in *Inferno* 4. The shift in tone is also marked by a closer engagement with scripture: whereas *Inferno* is, at best, loosely based on scripture, *Purgatory* has some biblical grounding: *Purgatory* 2, for instance, contains the poem's first direct quotations from scripture.⁴⁸ While Dante's decision to expand on scripture is sometimes seen as a form of poetic hubris, paraphrasing and expanding on the Bible were not forbidden for medieval Catholic poets (Benfell 115). Furthermore, the formula Dante often takes when working with scripture is to pair Latin from the Bible with a vernacular addition.⁴⁹

⁴⁸ For example, see *Purgatory* 11.1-24, in which Dante expands on chapter 6 of Matthew's Gospel. In fact, Dante does more than expand this prayer, as the final tercet of Dante's version has no biblical equivalent.

⁴⁹ The pairing of Latin with Italian can be seen in *Purgatory* 17.67-9, which is taken from Matthew 5.9.

Arguably the use of Italian to expand the biblical citations indicates dissent from the Catholic Church as opposed to any poetic hubris. During the period when Dante was writing *The Comedy*, the study of the Bible was reserved for the clergy and, to maintain control, the Church attempted to keep the Bible away from the laity by ensuring the text was not translated from Latin (Alexander 29).⁵⁰ Dante's rendition of Purgatory in *The Comedy*, then, marks a shift not only in tone, but also indicates a change in the poet's poetic ambition. While *Inferno* was largely Dante's poetic creation, *Purgatory* attempts to remain true to scripture while Dante still exercises his poetic liberty by adding elements — such as the concept of Purgatory as a place of suffering and purification— which have no biblical counterpart. Furthermore, *Purgatory* presents a closer engagement with the Bible without conforming to the will of the Church: the poem demonstrates a moral conditioning of the will that is in accord with the Catholicism of Dante's day, yet the poem expands on the biblical tradition of Purgatory in a way that allows for Dante's nonconformist religious views of the disestablishment of Church and State.

Despite Purgatory proving to be a productive space to facilitate moral growth in Dante's poem, and Milton's need to eliminate Purgatory from his Protestant poem, the narrator of *Paradise Lost* undergoes a very similar journey of purification in which he learns to be a humbler Christian poet. Instead of Purgatory, Milton relies on Raphael's historical narrative to educate his narrator. Furthermore, as discussed in Chapters 1 and 2, one of the major differences between the narrator's journey in *Paradise Lost* and that of the narrator in *The Comedy* is that Milton's narrator must undergo poetic growth without reference to an external source of absolute authority. While it may be the Muse's ability to "illumine" "what in [him] is dark" (22-3) and

⁵⁰ Pope Innocent III insisted that the Bible be reserved for scholars and clergymen, and after Innocent III, prohibitions against translating and selling the Bible only became more frequent.

Raphael's narrative that enables the narrator's growth, both influences emphasise the narrator's self-reliance. The Muse does not speak through him nor dictate his actions; the Muse simply effects internal change. The narrator also must interpret Raphael's words for himself. The narrator of *Paradise Lost* does not have Dante's guides or Milton's insights and instead is dependent on himself; that is, he is forced to make his own interpretative choices when presented with multiple diverging narratives (such as the different explanations of Satan's rebellion and the War in Heaven presented by Satan and Raphael). The narrator's ability to use his reason and interpret the narratives he is presented with improves as the poem progresses, and this growth is directly tied to the narrator's diminishing pride throughout the poem. Much like Dante-protagonist, as the narrator becomes humbler, he is better able to understand his role and thus becomes more able to accurately narrate the events of the poem.

Like Dante-protagonist, the narrator of *Paradise Lost* is excessively ambitious and prideful at the beginning of the epic. One of the ways that this ambition, pride, and eventual humbling can be tracked in the poem is through the narrator's changing connection and response to Satan. In Books 1 and 2, the narrator's ambition seems to parallel that of Satan. The narrator's desire to exceed the poetic achievements of past poets by writing about "Things unattempted yet in prose or rhyme" (1.16) is not entirely dissimilar from Satan's "ambitious aim / Against the throne and monarchy of God / [to] Raise[] impious war in heaven" (1.41-3). David Daiches draws attention to the ambiguity of the narrator's desire to write of "Things unattempted," as it is unclear if the narrator means "unattempted" in English literature, epic literature, or literature in general, which would include the Bible (63). Regardless, both the narrator and Satan attempt to assume a position of preeminence. The narrator recognises Satan's unabashed attempt to

challenge God as both “proud [and] vain” (1.43-4), yet he does not recognise the same pride in his own poetic ambition. This connection between the narrator and Satan is only strengthened by the trend in scholarship to read Satan as a poet figure. For example, Christopher Grose argues that Satan sees himself as a poet and that he casts himself in the role of epic hero (232). Bloom’s theory of influence uses Satan as an example of the “archetype of the modern poet” who fails because he is unable to resist the pressure of influence (19).⁵¹ Bloom argues that Satan is at his strongest when he shuns God, the “potent and present ... ancestral poet” (20), and fails when he is no longer able to construct a narrative of history without reference to God’s account (25). By reading the problem of influence through Satan, Bloom reinforces the connection between Satan and the narrator, who is a poet in his own right attempting to move beyond the shadow of his predecessors. Furthermore, when Satan is seen as a poet figure, there is an interesting parallel between the relationship Milton’s narrator has to Satan and the relationship between Dante-protagonist and the classical poets in Limbo. Milton’s exaggeration of Dante’s poem is another example of Clinamen: while the poetic aspirations of Dante-protagonist in *Inferno* are opposed to divine scripture by virtue of being linked to classical pagan poets, Milton makes the poetic ambition of his narrator outright Satanic.

The narrator’s similarity to Satan in the opening books plays a role in demonstrating the narrator’s arrogance and ambition, but more revealing is the narrator’s treatment of Satan in Books 1 and 2. The narrator’s desire to surpass his classical counterparts is apparent in the first proem. Of course, to compose a truly exceptional epic poem, the narrator needs to portray an epic character in an answerable lofty style and flaunt his poetic prowess. The narrator finds this

⁵¹ See also Forsyth, who suggests a connection between Satan and the narrator in terms of rhetoric, particularly in discussions of hope and despair (81-85).

subject in Satan; as soon as he sees the grandiose Satan, he begins creating parallels between his newfound epic character and Virgil's Aeneas. The scholarship that seeks to examine how *Paradise Lost* uses the figure of Aeneas is vast, yet the majority of scholars tend to see allusions to Aeneas in portraits of either the Son or Adam. There are, however, a few scholars who explore Satan's relationship to Aeneas. Francis Blessington argues that the connection between Satan and Aeneas is established so as to emphasise the differences between the two figures; for Blessington, Satan becomes a parody of Aeneas in an attempt to make Satan's villainy more obvious (16-18). Katherine Calloway offers an alternative reading and suggests that the parallel between Aeneas and Satan is used to emphasise the superiority of Milton's Christian epic over the classical counterparts. According to Calloway, Aeneas is the most Christian of all the classical heroes that appear in the poems of Milton's predecessors, so by creating a parallel between the anti-hero Satan — a figure that is indisputably inferior to the Son in *Paradise Lost* — and Aeneas, Milton demonstrates the superiority of a Christian hero (87-9). Despite Blessington's and Calloway's difference of opinion about the purpose of the parallel between these two figures, both attempt to understand Milton's allusion to Aeneas in the portrait of Satan in a way that removes the tension caused by linking the villainous Satan with the flawed but heroic Aeneas. The tension that both scholars notice, however, is only problematic if the narrator's voice is assumed to be Milton's. While Milton does not present Satan as a hero, the narrator of the poem — who, being a self-aware narrator, wishes to exceed the poetic accomplishments of his classical counterparts — is motivated by his ambition and seizes the opportunity that Satan presents to surpass his classical counterpart in terms of poetic splendour.

The parallel between Satan and Aeneas, then, is not just an indication of Satan's character, or Milton's literary criticism, but also of the narrator's problematic poetic aspirations.

To demonstrate that the parallel between Satan and Aeneas is an overstated connection created by the narrator of the poem, I wish to take a closer look at one of the examples that Calloway, among others, identifies as demonstrating the similarity between Satan and Aeneas.⁵² In Book 1 of the *Aeneid*, the narrator offers the following description of Aeneas rallying his men after they land at Carthage: "He, sick as he was with his worries, / Masked his expression with hope, kept gloom in his heart, deeply buried" (1.208-09). The parallel in *Paradise Lost* comes as the narrator comments on Satan's speech to Beelzebub: "So spake the apostate angel, though in pain / Vaunting aloud, but racked with deep despair" (1.125-26). The echoing of Virgil's poem that scholars note is undeniable: Satan's self-possessed posturing appears to mirror that of Aeneas. That said, it is important to consider the speaker of these lines. In both cases it is the narrator who speaks, which in itself does not take away from the parallel between Satan and Aeneas. What does, however, indicate that Milton's narrator is attempting to make a connection between these two figures where none otherwise exists is the difference between the speeches leading up to these moments. In Virgil's poem, in his speech to his men, Aeneas says, "Crewmates, by now we are hardly strangers to evil and hardship. / We've suffered worse. God will grant us an end to these sufferings also ... Take heart once again and dispel your fears and depression" (1.197-202). Aeneas focuses on the effect of the turmoil on the entire group: Aeneas repeats the words "we" and "us" throughout and makes clear that his goal is to reassure his men. In contrast, Satan is far more concerned with himself through his speech:

⁵² Cardinale, Martindale, and Steadman also note the similarity between these two scenes.

Yet not for those [punishments],

Nor what the potent victor in his rage
 Can else inflict, do I repent or change,
 Though changed in outward lustre, that fixed mind
 And high disdain, from sense of injured merit,
 That with the mightiest raised me to contend,
 And to the fierce contention brought along
 Innumerable force of spirits armed

That glory never shall his wrath or might
 Extort from me (1.94-101, 110-11)

The first thing worth noting is that Satan is not speaking to all the fallen angels: instead of engaging with all his fallen troops immediately — as Aeneas does — Satan begins by speaking only to Beelzebub. In so doing, Satan does exhibit his strengths as a tactician; however, he uses these skills to serve himself, as speaking to Beelzebub first ensures he has the required support to orchestrate his plan for revenge. Even though Satan begins his speech by commenting on how Beelzebub has been “changed” (1.84), Satan refuses to take any responsibility and uses Beelzebub’s change in appearance as a means of insisting on his own unchanged mind. Indeed, Satan seems far more concerned with convincing Beelzebub that his outward change is not representative of a change in character and that he is still a fit leader despite their defeat at God’s hand. Of course, this is all self-serving, as he needs the support of Beelzebub before he can address the rest of his fallen army. Furthermore, initially Satan is not concerned with inspiring

any hope or courage in all his fallen comrades. The emphasis on himself over his men can be seen in the repetition of “I” and “me” in the above quoted lines. While Satan does later shift to speaking in the first person plural (1.120-22), the fact that his first concern is with himself reveals an egocentrism that has no counterpart in Aeneas. While Aeneas’ speech demonstrates his capacity to be an inspiring leader, Satan’s speech lacks any such indication of his ability as a leader that has his followers’ interests foremost in his mind; his need to reassure Beelzebub that he, and the rest of the fallen angels, “preferr[ed]” him to God’s “utmost power” (102-3), is an indication of his lack of confidence that his cohort still accept him as their leader.

Despite all his self-interested action, Satan does later express concern for his fellow fallen angels; however, he does not do so for nearly 500 lines (604-62). In this address to his followers, there is another parallel between Satan and Aeneas: the narrator notes that, as Satan attempts to begin his speech, “Tears such as angels weep, burst forth” (1.620). Given Satan’s previous pronouncements that he refuses to “repent or change” and that he has “A mind not to be changed by place or time” (1.253), the tears he sheds as he speaks to his men are plainly counterfeit: clearly Satan is attempting to play the part of epic hero. Lewalski argues that these lines encourage a comparison of Satan with Aeneas (*Rhetoric of Literary Forms*, 57). The difference, however, is that Aeneas’ tears are a genuine expression of his sorrow regarding the misfortune of his men. Once again it is the narrator who invites this comparison, and while the narrator of *Paradise Lost* may not be entirely wrong to suggest there are some similarities between Satan and Aeneas — at least in terms of Satan’s attempt to mask his despair in this speech — it is only through a disregard for the artificiality of Satan’s poses that the narrator is able to forge a sustained connection between Satan and Aeneas. Thus, the connection between Satan and Aeneas

that renders Satan's actions heroic is nothing more than Satan attempting to play the role of epic hero. The narrator's willingness to accept the connection between Satan and Aeneas is a further indication of the narrator's willingness to accept Satan's posturing.

The narrator's attempt to draw out the parallels between Satan and Aeneas is somewhat self-interested: the narrator of *Paradise Lost* needs an epic character if his poem is to compete with the classical epics he wishes to surpass. The narrator makes immediate use of Satan to flaunt his prowess as an epic narrator: almost immediately after forging the connection between Satan and Aeneas, the narrator launches into an epic simile in which he compares Satan to Leviathan (1.193-220).⁵³ Satan ends up being a very legitimate source of temptation for the narrator; not entirely dissimilar from the way Eve is drawn to Satan's words, the narrator is drawn to his grand rhetoric. In the case of both Eve and the narrator, the promise of glory and supremacy is a motivating factor in Satan's ability to tempt; while the narrator is not deceived in the same way as Eve, his need to qualify his own statements and remind himself of Satan's wickedness indicates that he is at least drawn to Satan.⁵⁴ Of course, it is not just Satan that proves to be a fruitful subject for the narrator's poetic ambition: descriptions of Satan's army of fallen angels also prove fertile for his poetic displays. After describing the sheer number of angels that

⁵³ As indicated by Whaler, Book 1 also contains more epic similes than any other of book of *Paradise Lost*, which is indicative of the narrator's attempt to establish his poetic superiority early in the poem and suggests that the description of Satan requires this elevated language. It is worth noting that in later books no such language is used to describe Satan, which I argue is the result of the narrator's changing response to him as opposed to a deterioration on Satan's part.

⁵⁴ The narrator's need to qualify of his own statements as well as Satan's — to remind both himself and the reader of Satan's wickedness, so as to distance himself and encourage the reader to do the same — occurs most frequently around Satan's most enticing speeches. For example, before Satan gives his first speech to the fallen angels, the narrator states that "Satan, with *bold* words / Breaking the horrid silence thus began" (82-3; emphasis added). By using the word "bold" the narrator suggests Satan's words are courageous and thus appears to express a degree of admiration for Satan. Directly following the speech, however, the narrator suggests Satan is "Vaunting aloud" (126); Satan now becomes boastful and excessively prideful. The sudden shift in the narrator's attitude is indicative of his attempt to pull away from Satan's powerful rhetoric and heroic appeal.

Satan commands, the narrator remarks that “never since created man, / Met such embodied force” (1.573-74). The narrator’s design is transparent: by suggesting the armies he describes are unmatched — in size at least — in world history, the narrator elevates his description above those of his predecessors. Thus, the narrator’s poetic prowess is revealed through his description of the fallen angels, and the narrator of *Paradise Lost*, in his mind at least, becomes the supreme poet through his epic catalogues and similes. The narrator’s chance at poetic glory then, becomes intimately tied to Satan and his fallen angels. Following the description of the building of Pandaemonium, we see another example of Milton ironizing his narrator, when the once massive Satan and his huge army are reduced to “smallest dwarfs” (1.779) who resemble “bees / In spring time” (768-69). Just as Milton mocks the narrator’s desire for an external source of authority, so too does he ridicule the narrator’s epic ambition with this humiliating diminution. The narrator, however, continues to tie his poetic aspirations to Satan.

The narrator’s link to Satan becomes literal in Books 2 and 3 as the narrator moves upward with Satan. After Satan “Puts on swift wings” (2.631), the narrator describes Satan’s journey as “harder beset / And more endangered, than when Argo passed / Through Bosphorus betwixt the jostling rocks” (2.1015-17). For over 400 lines, the narrator follows Satan and hardly ever distances his journey from Satan’s: it is with Satan that the narrator leaves Hell. In the second proem, when the narrator states that he “Escaped the Stygian pool, though long detained / In that obscure sojourn” (3.14-5), he most explicitly links himself to Satan. Both Satan and the narrator have left Hell, yet the words “escaped” and “detained” seem somewhat more applicable to Satan’s situation than that of the narrator; thus, the narrator’s sympathy for Satan — as demonstrated by his willingness to take on Satan’s perspective as he narrates parts of Books 1 and

2 — seems to be ongoing in the opening lines of Book 3. Furthermore, the deliberate echoing of Dante's description of his ascent "from the lowest pit of the / universe" (22-23) in *Paradiso* 33 forges a connection between Dante-protagonist's journey and that of the narrator in *Paradise Lost*. The intentional imitation of Dante's poem is what Fishelov calls a pseudo dialogue: Milton, with no hint of anxiety, creates a link between his poem and Dante's in a way that he would expect his audience to recognise. In so doing, Milton not only links his narrator's journey to Dante-protagonist's pilgrimage, but also encourages a critical reading of any modifications he makes to the structure of Dante's poem. Just as in Dante's poem, this upward movement marks the beginning of the narrator's humbler poetic aspirations; however, the ways in which both figures achieve their newfound poetic modesty is vastly different. While Dante-protagonist is conditioned through the continual guidance of Virgil and Beatrice, Milton's narrator is offered an education of sorts and remains free to do with it what he will: that is, Milton's narrator is permitted a freedom that Dante-protagonist is not, as Dante-protagonist is only able to ascend to heaven once he has completed his pilgrimage through Purgatory, whereas Milton's narrator immediately rises to a God's-eye view at the outset of Book 3.

As previously mentioned, the development of Milton's narrator is somewhat more difficult to track than that of Dante's narrator due to Milton's rejection of Purgatory. According to John N. King, Milton builds on Ariosto's parody of Dante's *Purgatory*, and the narrator partakes in a tradition of Protestant propaganda which misrepresents Catholicism (89-90).⁵⁵ The narrator's development, however, can be tracked through his changing response to Satan as well as through

⁵⁵ Samuel Johnson argues that Milton's desire to mock the Catholic idea of Purgatory causes him to "disgrace his work" with a degree of indecorum derived from imitating Ariosto's "levity" (139). Using Bortolotti and Hutcheon's model of adaptation, Milton's rejection of Purgatory is what we can consider a religiously motivated change that manifests itself in parody.

the shift in narrative tone. As A. J. A. Waldock rightly argues, the version of Satan in Books 1 and 2 is dramatically different from the version we see through the rest of *Paradise Lost*: Satan is, as Waldock remarks, “never as impressive again” (81). Satan’s changing nature, which many have noted, is in part due to his moral deterioration and degradation.⁵⁶ This degradation, however, is not the only cause for Satan being less “impressive” in the later books of the poem. The narrator’s distance from Satan and his changing relationship with him also frames Satan in a way that makes the fallen angel less spectacular. The narrator’s changing perception of Satan begins in Book 3 when the narrator first sees God and the Son. Until Book 3, the only potentially heroic or epic character the narrator has access to is Satan; however, after some distance is created between him and Satan, the narrator is able to embrace the Son as a worthier hero and Satan is never as impressive *to the narrator* again.

Furthermore, God’s speech in Book 3 forces the narrator to reconsider some of his earlier pronouncements. In the first book, the narrator asks:

what cause

Moved our grand parents in that happy state,

Favoured of heaven so highly, to fall off

From their creator, and transgress his will

For one restraint, lords of the world besides?

Who first seduced them to that foul revolt? (1.28-33)

The response that the narrator receives is that it was “the infernal serpent[.] he it was whose guile / Stirred up with envy and revenge, deceived / The mother of mankind” (1.34-6). While this

⁵⁶ For discussions of Satan’s deterioration see Lewis and Carrithers and Hardy.

answers the narrator's second question, the Muse's response removes any culpability from Adam and Eve: Satan becomes the sole *cause* of the Fall. And the narrator willingly accepts this answer in Book 1. Of course, the narrator's question anticipates this answer, because he links the cause with the seduction. The unanticipated effect of this way of phrasing the question is to give Satan the power he so desperately craves. Satan's rejection of the naturalness of his subordination to God leads to his desire to be "self-begot, self-raised" (5.860). Katherine Acheson argues that, throughout *Paradise Lost*, Satan attempts to become "a cause rather than an effect" (62). While the narrator unknowingly fulfils Satan's desire to be "a cause," God is swift to qualify Satan's role in the Fall by placing the blame on Adam. God rhetorically asks, "whose fault? / Whose but his [Adam's] own?" (3.96-7) and goes on to say He "made him [Adam] just and right, / Sufficient to have stood, though free to fall" (98-9). God reframes disobedience in a way that emphasises Adam and Eve's active role in their own demise. Of course, God does not deny Satan's deception, yet he denies that Satan was the sole *cause* of the Fall: "man falls deceived / By the other first: man therefore shall find grace, / The other none" (3.130-32). While God confirms that Satan was successful in deceiving Adam and Eve — and as such is partially to blame for the Fall — God also places the blame on humanity for being overcome by Satan's deception. This is in contrast with the narrator's pronouncement in Book 1 where Satan is portrayed as solely responsible for the Fall. God's willingness to extend grace to humanity is the first incident of mercy in an otherwise harsh and judgemental speech, and his lack of mercy for Satan does demonstrate his recognition of the role Satan has played in the Fall. What Adam and Eve are guilty of, it would seem, is being deceived despite having the tools and knowledge to resist this temptation. To avoid any claim to ignorance, God sends Raphael to Eden to discuss

Satan's planned temptation (5.224-45). And while Adam and Eve do not seem to gain enough from this education to resist Satan's temptation, the narrator certainly seems to benefit from hearing God's pronouncements in Book 3 and the subsequent education provided by Raphael. The narrator's growth, in terms of his ability to resist Satan's tempting rhetoric, can be seen in the narrator's description of and commentary on Satan's temptation of Eve in Book 9. What begins in Book 3, then, is the development of the narrator; the narrator gains a new perspective as he distances himself from Satan, which gives him the ability to interpret events later in the poem more accurately.

Despite God's words on the subject of Satan, the narrator's change is not instantaneous: just as in *The Comedy*, the development is gradual. In *Paradise Lost* the narrator's development, however, is not facilitated by a journey through Purgatory. Instead, in Milton's epic the Catholic sacraments found in *Purgatory* are replaced by Raphael's educational narrative. In fact, Books 5 and 6 play as large a role in the narrator's growth as they do in the education of Adam and Eve. The education that Raphael offers Adam, and through him Eve, also instructs the narrator. In his commentary on Raphael's role in *Paradise Lost*, Marshall Grossman states that:

Raphael's account of the war in heaven and the creation of the world is meant to be interpreted by Adam and applied to his own situation, to provide a historical context for Adam's moral choice in Book IX. Adam will then be able to use Raphael's narrative in much the same way that seventeenth-century Protestants were to use biblical narrative; that is, by abstracting from the narrated events a structural pattern that illustrates the historical manifestation of God's eternal decrees and creates a context for moral choice in analogously structured contemporary situations. (91-2)

Grossman's argument for how Adam and seventeenth-century readers were meant to use Raphael's narrative is equally applicable to the narrator. Before hearing Raphael's account of the war (having only heard from Satan on the matter), the narrator does not have a full description of events that transpired; thus he is not entirely at fault for his sympathy for Satan in Books 1 and 2. Raphael's narrative, then, becomes an instructional guide for both Adam and the narrator in their handling of Satan. The replacement of Purgatory with Raphael's history of the war in Heaven emphasises the difference in Dante's and Milton's views on how humanity best learns. Believing that humans need to be conditioned to use their will properly, Dante directs his narrator through a journey which does exactly that: in his journey, Dante-protagonist is taught by his two guides how to use his will properly. Thus by the end of the poem, he has been conditioned to use his free will appropriately. In contrast, Milton opts to educate his narrator in a different fashion. Instead of being encouraged to follow the example of a guide, Milton's narrator and reader are presented with multiple diverging narratives throughout the poem so that they may cultivate their ability to use their reason. Dante's version leaves very little room for interpretation by the individual; instead, Dante advocates for unquestioned obedience to authority figures, who take the form of his guides in *The Comedy*. In contrast, Milton gives his narrator and reader the opportunity to learn from and interpret events for himself by removing the certainty of an external figure of authority in the form of either guide or Muse. Instead, the narrator, like Adam and Eve, has God's "umpire conscience" (3.195) to help guide him and is free to proceed as he sees fit; correspondingly, the narrator's changing response to Satan is one of the ways that his improved ability to interpret can be seen.

To demonstrate the narrator's changing response to Satan, I wish to look at Satan's temptation of Eve. The same rhetorical strength that once enticed the narrator is on display in this scene, yet the narrator is not drawn in the way he is in Books 1 and 2. When Satan first appears in Book 9, the narrator describes him as a "mere serpent in appearance" (9.413). The narrator later qualifies this statement and says "pleasing was his shape, / And lovely, never since serpent kind / Lovelier" (9.503-5). This description of Satan in his new form is very different from what the narrator presents in Book 1 when he describes Satan's movement to the shore (285-315). In Book 1, the narrator emphasises Satan's grandeur and masculinity: he goes to great lengths to describe Satan's "massey" (285) shield which hangs "on his shoulders like the moon" (287) and his "spear" which is equal to "the tallest pine" (292) and would be equivalent in height to a "mast / Of some great admiral" (293-94). The narrator notes that Satan is forced to use his spear to "support uneasy steps" (295), but this not presented as a weakness; instead the narrator comments on Satan's ability to "endure" (299). The narrator's lengthy description, in which he seems rather impressed with Satan's march, demonstrates the narrator's willingness to accept Satan's histrionic pose. Indeed, his acceptance of Satan's heroic posturing is linked to his epic ambition: this is another instance of Satan providing the narrator with an opportunity to display his poetic talents. Certainly the subsequent speech Satan provides to rally his troops warrants a degree of respect: it is undeniable that Satan possesses a rare degree of rhetorical mastery. Yet, that which is praiseworthy in Book 1 is also present in Book 9. Just as in the earlier book, Satan is able to assess what is required of him and strike the correct pose to ensure his success.⁵⁷ While

⁵⁷ Satan's ability to take on the required role in different situations is what American writers during the American Civil War would praise. For example, see Melville's *Confidence Man* — a novel about the central character's different disguises and deceptions — in which the protagonist praises Milton's Satan for his ability to adapt and play different parts.

Satan's speech in Book 9 (532-48) proves to be equally proficient, and the narrator admits "into the heart of Eve his words made way" (550), the narrator now feminises Satan: no longer the heroic commander that waged war on God, now he is "lovely." The term "lovely" draws an implicit parallel to Eve's beauty, a comparison in which Satan's appearance is clearly inferior. With the short and simple description "lovely," it seems as though the narrator is actively trying to diminish Satan's achievements.

Part of the reason the narrator no longer treats Satan as heroic is because he is better able to interpret Satan's histrionic poses and recognise the artificial and deceptive nature of Satan's speeches. While the narrator's ambition had previously left him vulnerable to Satan's grandeur and rhetorical ability, his education and new perspective on Satan allow him to see the shallowness of Satan's words. After the failure of Satan's first sophisticated attempt to convince Eve to eat from the tree, the narrator remarks that he begins again with a new tactic:

The tempter, but with show of zeal and love
 To man, and indignation at his wrong,
New part puts on, and as to passion moved,
 Fluctuates disturbed, yet comely, *and in act*
Raised, as of some great matter to begin.
 As when of old some orator renowned
 In Athens or free Rome, where eloquence
 Flourished, since mute, to some great cause addressed,
 Stood in himself collected, *while each part*,
 Motion, each act won audience ere the tongue,

Sometimes in heighth began (9.665-75)

Unlike in previous descriptions of Satan's speeches, the narrator here emphasises the tempter's malevolent role playing. While the narrator had previously described Satan in dramatic terms, he often conceived of him as creator or director as opposed to actor. For example, before Satan first addresses his fallen men, the narrator states that the men remained unmoving until "as a signal giv'n, the uplifted spear / Of their great sultan waving to direct / Their course" (1.347-49) prompts them to get up. In these lines, the narrator's emphasis is on Satan's ability to command his army, as opposed to his performance; and this stressing of Satan's ability to command extends into Book 2. As the narrator comments on Satan's planned revenge, he asks:

for whence

But from *the author of all ill* could spring
 So deep a malice, to confound the race
 Of mankind in one root, and earth with hell
 To mingle and involve, done all to spite
 The great creator? (2.380-385; emphasis added)

Once again, the narrator grants Satan a level of influence that God would like to diminish. Not only do these lines construct Satan, the "author of all ill," as the antithesis of "The great Creator" but they also are in direct conflict with God's statement that Adam and Eve are "authors to themselves in all" (3.122). Where the narrator wishes to emphasize Satan's impact and authority, God instead stresses the freedom to choose with which he endowed each person.

After Book 3, the narrator develops to a point where he stops viewing Satan as a cause and instead accepts Adam and Eve's culpability in the Fall. The narrator — as a result of the

education he receives from Raphael — is able to see through Satan's poses in a way he was unable to in Books 1 and 2 and thus no longer assigns him power he does not deserve. Of course, I do not mean to suggest that the narrator was ever in doubt of Satan's malevolence: the narrator was always aware of Satan's true nature and even cautions the reader throughout the first two books. The narrator, however, seems to fall victim to Satan's charm in the opening books — in his grand descriptions of Satan — which aids Satan's attempt to appear as an epic hero. After Book 3, on the other hand, the narrator becomes increasingly able to interpret Satan accurately, and the result of the narrator's improved ability to interpret is twofold: the narrator's commentary on Satan makes him appear less heroic, and it shifts blame for the Fall back to Eve, since she too should have been able to use reason to see past Satan's deceit. In Books 1 and 2, the narrator creates a problematic link between Satan and Aeneas due to his own blind ambition. In contrast, in the above lines Satan is linked to "some old orator" by virtue of his eloquence. This connection, however, is not positive, since he is not linked to these orators through an ability to use logic or reason to persuade, but rather due to his ability to win his "audience ere the tongue ... began" by playing a bombastic, irrational, and thus counterfeit role. The narrator goes on to criticise Eve for falling victim to Satan's performance and suggests that Satan's "words replete with guile / Into her heart *too easy* entrance won" (9.733-34; emphasis added). Eve's willingness to accept Satan's deceitful argument, and her inability to see past his ruse, link her to the "fools" and "silly gazers" (CPW 3:342) Milton criticises in *Eikonoklastes* who were unable to see past the deceit of *Eikon Basilike* to reveal the problematic logic it presented. In criticising Eve, the narrator revises his earlier statement which faulted Satan for Eve's deception. Instead, he now takes the same position as God by suggesting that, while Eve was deceived, she is

responsible for falling prey to Satan's temptation: in the narrator's recharacterisation of Satan and his role, Eve becomes an "author to [herself]" (3.122). Thus, through his changing perception of Satan, and his criticism of Eve, we can see how the narrator has developed through the poem.

Interestingly, the narrator's ability to resist Satan's temptation inversely correlates with his certainty in his inspiration. It is as the narrator becomes increasingly self-sufficient that he is more suited to narrate the story of the Fall. This increased self-sufficiency, of course, comes with an added danger that does not exist in his predecessors' epics: for Milton's narrator, there exists the possibility that he might fail. This risk, however, is a necessary one in Milton's Protestant epic, which emphasises the involvement of the narrator: there is an unavoidable danger associated with the freedom to exercise reason. The necessity of this freedom, despite the potential problems, is expressed both in God's speech (3.80-134) as well as in *Areopagitica* (*CPW* 2:527). Yet the narrator expresses his despondency over the Muse's potential lack of authorization of his poem when he says that his poem will surely fail if "all be [his] / Not hers" (9.46-7): what can be seen here, as well as his anxiety, is a humility that did not exist in his first two invocations. These lines should not be seen as a rejection of the importance of self-sufficiency, but instead should be viewed as a statement of the poet's modesty. The journey of the narrator in *Paradise Lost*, then, is the opposite of that presented in *The Comedy*. Where Dante-protagonist needs his two guides to help him, and only becomes suitable to narrate his own journey after he has been conditioned by his guides, Milton's narrator benefits from the freedom of choice derived from the vitiation of authority in his poetic cosmos. What can be seen here is what Bloom calls Tesseract: Milton uses the structure of the narrator's journey which Dante

established, but uses it to prove the opposite point. Where Dante stresses the individual's reliance on external sources of authority, Milton places the individual at the centre of his poem.

Given that Milton believed the English Revolution failed because of the people's inability to be critical and think independently, the narrator of *Paradise Lost* — who is free to interpret and make use the information he is provided with, and is forced to undergo his journey without reference to any certain external source of authority — becomes an example of Milton's ideal citizen. Milton employs the same type of rhetoric as Dante to suggest that the narrator's journey is shared by the reader as well. In Chapter 1, I drew attention to the opening lines of *Inferno* which indicate that the poem is representative of "our journey." By saying "our" instead of "my," the narrator establishes himself as a proxy for the reader in the poem. Milton also invokes the first-person plural pronoun in the opening lines of his poem. In discussing man's Fall, the narrator states that the apple "brought death into the world, and *all our* woe / With loss of Eden, till one greater man / Restore *us*, and regain the blissful seat" (1.3-5; emphasis added). In these lines, Milton establishes a connection between his narrator and the reader that parallels the one found in Dante's poem. Thus the narrator becomes an example which Milton encourages his readers to follow.

Throughout the poem, Milton's narrator becomes better able to distance himself from the corrupting influence of Satan and use his reason to negotiate multiple narratives. This use of reason to govern is exactly what Milton calls for in his prose tracts, including his impassioned and final plea with the English people before the Restoration in *The Readie and Easie Way*. In this tract he advocates for a government in which "no single person but reason only swaies" (*CPW* 7:427). Thus, just as Dante uses his protagonist to demonstrate the value of a

political and religious leader to guide the individual, so too does Milton use his narrator to advocate for an education which teaches one how effectively to use reason, and the resulting ability to interpret, which leads to a greater degree of self-sufficiency.

Conclusion

Dante's and Milton's Narrators and Questions of Authority

In Chapter 1, I argued that the changing role of the Muse leads to Dante and Milton both inheriting a tradition which has diminished the degree of poetic authority the narrator can derive from invoking the Muse. Where Dante, immediately seeing the limitation of the pagan Muse, replaces her with his guides, Milton's narrator becomes increasingly aware that the Muse of his poem — which is distinct from the pagan Muse in that she is an internalised form of inspiration that instructs and aids — may not be guiding him. This reinvented role of the Muse in Milton's poem is a source of uneasiness for the narrator as the emphasis on his role in the poem leads to an increased possibility of failure. Following from this examination of the Muse, in Chapter 2 I demonstrated that the relationship between Milton and his narrator is more nuanced than has traditionally been maintained, and as such, the narrator of *Paradise Lost* does not unquestionably derive his poetic authority through a connection to Milton. Building on my observations in the first two Chapters, Chapter 3 argues that both Dante's and Milton's narrators undergo a transformation through the poems and that Dante's growth is directed by his attending guides while Milton's undergoes his journey with limited reference to external sources of authority. I further asserted that, in both cases, the means by which the narrator's growth is facilitated is telling of each poet's political aspirations for his respective country. Indeed, both narrators become examples of ideal citizens: Dante's narrator, with the support of his political and spiritual guides, is purged of his vices, while Milton's more self-sufficient narrator becomes more able to resist Satan's temptations as a result of his education. A significant difference between the two

poems, however, is the ways in which they represent the narrator's poetic authority. In *The Comedy*, the narrator's poetic authority is beyond question: in contrast, *Paradise Lost* invites a skeptical and critical response to its narrator and the narrator is used by Milton as a device to encourage critical reading.

In Chapter 3 I argue that Dante-protagonist and the narrator of *Paradise Lost* undergo similar journeys and share some limitations at the beginning of their respective poems; however, by letting his narrator recount the events of the poem in retrospect, Dante's narrator is able to maintain his poetic authority. By telling the poem in retrospect, the narrator of *The Comedy* has already undergone purification and is thus a perfect and wholly reliable narrator. In contrast, Milton's narrator tells his poem in the present. Furthermore, unlike in *The Comedy*, there is no divine validation of the narrator's interpretations. The final canto of *Paradiso* removes the possibility of any skepticism of the narrator's authority; however, this scene finds no counterpart in *Paradise Lost*. The difference in narrative structure can be understood through Bloom's term Clinamen: Milton embraces Dante's uncertain and fallible characterisation of Dante-protagonist, but suggests Dante did not push this de-centering of authority far enough, since he does not extend it to the narrator of *The Comedy*. Thus, by rejecting the narrative structure of Dante's poem and eliminating any divine confirmation of the narrator's authority, Milton creates a poem in which skepticism of the narrator is possible because the narrator's authority is qualified.

Scholars' rejection of a single authoritative voice, even in the narrator, becomes apparent when one surveys the existing scholarship on Milton's *Paradise Lost*, and their unwillingness to accept the narrator's commentary becomes increasingly obvious when one compares the body of Milton scholarship to that of Dante. While both poets command a great deal of critical attention,

Dante critics — with few exceptions — are not nearly as divided on how *The Comedy* should be read. A look at the historical trends in reading Milton makes this division quite clear: the Romantics, for example, were inclined to ignore the narrator's warning and read Satan as a heroic and revolutionary figure, while C.S. Lewis attempted to redeem Milton's God from the claims of Shelley and his Romantic contemporaries. Of course, the inclination to read God as a tyrant did not disappear following C.S. Lewis' attempt to justify God: William Empson's response in *Milton's God* firmly established the two camps in Milton criticism. While Stanley Fish may have attempted to reconcile these two positions by shifting focus to the reader of the poem, recent works by Peter C. Herman and Michael Bryson make it clear that these debates are not yet over. Such a radical divide in how the central characters should be read certainly seems to support the claim that the narrator's authority in *Paradise Lost* can legitimately be interrogated. Unlike with *The Comedy*, where scholars are inclined to accept the commentary of the narrator, Milton scholars seem to ignore the narrator's commentary on Satan and God, among other things. I would argue, moreover, that these very different reactions to *Paradise Lost* are encouraged by the poem and its author. Thus while Milton's poem, like Dante's, presents its reader with an example of proper conduct through the narrator, Milton's poem seems to ask more of its reader than the obedience Dante encourages. While Dante provides stable figures of authority through the narrator — stable as a result of the journey Dante-protagonist underwent before he begins narrating — and the two guides, no such certain point of reference exists in Milton's poem. This may be because, as I argue, Dante's poem calls for willful submission and acceptance of its own authority, whereas *Paradise Lost* encourages the active engagement of its

reader who is prompted, like the narrator, to make interpretative decisions without reference to a central figure of unquestionable authority.

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