



University of Pennsylvania  
**ScholarlyCommons**

---

CUREJ - College Undergraduate Research  
Electronic Journal

College of Arts and Sciences

---

May 2006

## "Account Me Man": Economic Incarnation and Common Wealth in *Paradise Lost*

Thomas Lay  
University of Pennsylvania, tlay80@gmail.com

Follow this and additional works at: <https://repository.upenn.edu/curej>

---

### Recommended Citation

Lay, Thomas, "'Account Me Man": Economic Incarnation and Common Wealth in *Paradise Lost*"  
30 May 2006. *CUREJ: College Undergraduate Research Electronic Journal*, University of  
Pennsylvania, <https://repository.upenn.edu/curej/14>.

This paper is posted at ScholarlyCommons. <https://repository.upenn.edu/curej/14>  
For more information, please contact [repository@pobox.upenn.edu](mailto:repository@pobox.upenn.edu).

---

## "Account Me Man": Economic Incarnation and Common Wealth in *Paradise Lost*

### Abstract

Recent scholarship has considered the materialist and economic logic of Medieval Catholicism's theology of redemption, and suggested that Protestant ideology suppressed an earlier economic conceptualization of belief. In this paper, I consider John Milton's *Paradise Lost*, a late work in this history that, despite its Protestant authorship, offers Christian redemption in explicitly economic terms. Milton's unusually materialist theology, I argue, constituted a political challenge to the Restoration by demystifying social hierarchies and privileging wealth shared communally ^ Commonwealth ^ over the Satanic idolatry of kingship.

### Keywords

John Milton, *Paradise Lost*, William Shakespeare, Marxism, English Revolution, economics and theology, cultural materialism, English, Stuart Curran, Stuart, Curran

“Account Me Man”: Economic Incarnation and Common Wealth in Paradise Lost<sup>1</sup>

Thomas Lay

[tlay@sas.upenn.edu](mailto:tlay@sas.upenn.edu),

[tlay80@gmail.com](mailto:tlay80@gmail.com)

“The monetary system is essentially a Catholic institution, the credit system essentially Protestant. ‘*The Scotch hate gold.*’ In the form of paper the monetary existence of commodities is only a social one. It is *Faith* that brings salvation.” So wrote Marx in the third volume of *Capital*.<sup>2</sup> John Parker has argued that Marx’s observation is more than a *bon mot* that extends base into superstructure; it is part of a “Christological theory of value” whose terms Marx derived from the theology of the Incarnation.<sup>3</sup> To Parker, Marx’s appropriation of theology was not a radical perversion of Christianity. For centuries, he argues, Christianity told an economic narrative: the story of a people bound to its landlord for a debt incurred in the theft of an apple, a debt that might only be redeemed – paid for, that is – by Christ’s body.<sup>4</sup> To put it that way sounds perverse to us, but Parker suggests that our resistance is the legacy of Early Modern Protestantism – of what Peter Stallybrass, writing in Parker’s wake, describes as a Protestant “attempt to drive the economics out of belief” by “separating out ... what is brought together in the Latin *credere* (to believe, to trust, to put credit in).”<sup>5</sup>

This line of Protestant antimaterialism will be familiar to anyone acquainted with

---

<sup>1</sup> This paper is the product of two seminars, one with Stuart Curran, and the other with Peter Stallybrass. Without their insights and guidance, both in and out of the classroom, I could not have written it. In addition, Michael Gamer, tireless as ever in his support of undergraduates, generously offered to read a partial draft, and his suggestions were crucial in helping me past some early stumbles. To all three, I owe a “debt immense of endless gratitude.”

<sup>2</sup> Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, *Collected Works*. New York: International Publishers. Vol. 37 p. 587.

<sup>3</sup> John Parker, *God Among Thieves: Marx’s Christological Theory of Value and the Literature of the English Reformation*. Diss U Pennsylvania, 1999. Ann Arbor: UMI, 1999. UMI Number 993777. See especially pp. 31-7, 67-70, and 77-88. Parker cites the passage on p. 77.

<sup>4</sup> This is the language of atonement and satisfaction, particularly in its elaboration by St. Anselm (1033-1109) in *Cur Deus Homo* (available in *Anselm of Canterbury*, ed. and tr., Jasper Hopkins and Herbert Richardson, Toronto and New York: The Edwin Mellen Press, 1976, vol. 3, pp. 39-137.) For Parker’s discussion of Anselm’s influence through Luther, see pp. 90-96.

<sup>5</sup> Peter Stallybrass, “The Value of Culture and the Disavowal of Things.” *The Culture of Capital: Properties, Cities, and Knowledge in Early Modern England*, ed., Henry S. Turner, New York: Routledge, 2002, p. 282. See also Stallybrass’s delightfully contrarian account of Christianity as “An Economic Story” in that essay, pp. 279-80.

countless attacks on Catholics for the idolatry of saint-veneration and the perverse grotesquerie of the doctrine of transubstantiation. It also characterized attacks on Jews for usury. In Shakespeare's *Merchant of Venice* for instance, the cold hard cash of Shylock's dreams of moneybags and reported cries for his daughter and his ducats are opposed by the transcendence of Portia's "quality of mercy."<sup>6</sup> But as Parker has shown, the usury by which Luther castigated Jews is but a suppressed meaning of the very Latin word – *credere* – by which he claimed salvation by faith alone (Parker 126). Moreover, the economics of belief, still perilously latent in Luther's *credit* could be eradicated in translation, for, as Parker notes (147-50), Archbishop Cranmer did just that in 1549 to the central text of the new Anglican *Book of Common Prayer*. The officially sanctioned "Great Bible," with a preface by Cranmer himself, had joined every Early Modern English bible but one in rendering the Lord's Prayer's fifth petition "forgeve us our dettes, as we forgeve oure detters."<sup>7</sup> The single exception was William Tyndale's bible of 1534, which inaccurately translated the Greek "*opheilemata*" ("*debita*" in the Vulgate) as "trespasses" rather than "debts." But Tyndale was a radical Lutheran. His translation had been banned, and in 1536, he had been burned as a heretic in Belgium at the instigation of the Tudor government Cranmer already served. Nevertheless, a decade later, in the new prayer-book's central text Cranmer followed a heretical, inaccurate, solitary exception, and as a result, most English-speakers since have learned the Lord's Prayer's fifth petition with its economic metaphor erased: "Forgive us our trespasses, as we forgive them that trespass against us."

Parker's study ends at the outbreak of civil war, his narrative of Protestant and Catholic self-differentiation now complicated by political changes and left "hanging ... like a skeleton, a

---

<sup>6</sup> Quotations from Shakespeare are from *The Norton Shakespeare*, ed., Stephen Greenblatt, et al. New York: W. Norton & Company, 1997. The quotations are from 2.5.17, 2.8.15-24, and 4.1.179.

<sup>7</sup> *The Byble in Englyshe that is to saye the conte[n]t of al the holy scrypture, both of ye olde, and newe testame[n]t, with a prologe therinto, made by the reuerende father in God, Thomas archbysshop of Cantorbury...* London, 1540, Matthew 6:12. Accessed via Early English Books Online.

contradictory, hybrid, intricate genealogy” (208). This essay, then, proposes to examine that skeleton’s curious resurrection – one that promised salvation in familiar terms, but now with radically new meanings. As the work of a mid seventeenth-century Protestant, *Paradise Lost* defies the expectations of a century’s debate by its pervasive and explicitly materialist theology of debt. In considering the poem, I hope to suggest a way to extend Parker’s research past 1642 by examining how the older terms of religious debate were reformulated with radical implications not only for theology but for politics. It will help to begin, however, with the political implications already implicit in the erasure of the economics of belief at the century’s turn.

### i: Invisible Usury, Invisible Kings

The subordination of the rhetoric of commerce had played out, of course, in a culture of proliferating commerce. Part of what makes *The Merchant of Venice* so complex is that its condemnation of usury transpires in the most commercial of cities and that Portia’s call for mercy is on behalf of a merchant who expects from his investments “return / Of thrice three times the value of [the] bond”<sup>8</sup> (1.3.154-5). The play itself was performed in a commercial theater that turned familiar stories into profits, its primary capital – clothing – dependent on a system of pawnbroking usurious in all but name.<sup>9</sup> For even as usury made a convenient scapegoat, commerce needed it to thrive: thus, the 1571 act that legalized usury at rates up to ten percent positioned itself as “An Act Against Usury,” with a stated aim of lessening the exploitative possibilities of an illegal vice by making it legal. John Wooley spoke cautiously in

---

<sup>8</sup> Admittedly, it is not from this bond that Antonio makes his profits, but it is clear from the risk involved that he stands to profit considerably should his ships return, even if nobody is thoughtless enough to state the point directly.

<sup>9</sup> See chapter seven of Ann Rosalind Jones and Peter Stallybrass, *Renaissance Clothing and the Materials of Memory*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000, esp., p. 181-4.

the act's support, arguing that usury's "mischief is of the excess, and not otherwise, since to take reasonable, or so that both parties might do good, was not hateful."<sup>10</sup> The latter contingency - "that both parties might do good" - was consistently the grounds on which usury might find support.<sup>11</sup> But in *The Merchant of Venice*, mutual benefit is not the grounds for the primary debt, by which neither Shylock nor Antonio stands to profit. Initially, it is supposed to form the basis for Antonio's secondary loan to Bassanio, which Bassanio urges as a means to win a rich lady and pay back prior debts to Antonio (1.1.146-52). But the matter having been raised once subsequently disappears: we hear no more of literal profit to Antonio, and Bassanio's ambitions for a "lady richly left" (1.1.161) are, even in their very actualization, apparently transformed by his disavowal of gold and silver caskets for lead. It is only in a bizarrely refigured context that the language of mutual benefit returns: it returns in the "quality of mercy" that "blesseth him that gives and him that takes" (4.1.181-2). In Portia's speech, mercy is as profitable as usury, but as if by magic, it is sealed off against sully in the marketplace where it might actually make that profit. For mercy to be above the marketplace, it has to be a part of of a social hierarchy. Portia, herself a representative of the upper echelons of that hierarchy (and yet by her gender usually doubly secluded from the marketplace), argues that mercy defines the height of earthly power such that fealty at society's apex to God's mercy implies society's fealty to that apex:

'Tis mightiest in the mightiest. It becomes  
The throned monarch better than his crown.  
His scepter shows the force of temporal power,  
The attribute to awe and majesty,  
Wherein doth sit the dread and fear of kings;

---

<sup>10</sup> A truncated text of the act and of Wooley's speech, together with other primary materials on usury, may be found in Jay L. Halio, ed., *Understanding The Merchant of Venice: a Student Casebook to Issues, Sources and Historical Documents*. Westport, Conn.: Greenwood Press, 2000, pp. 115-37. The Wooley quotation is on p. 125.

<sup>11</sup> Noted by David Hawkes in *Idols of the Marketplace: Idolatry and Commodity Fetishism in English Literature, 1580-1680*. New York: Palgrave, 2001, p. 105. The condition of mutual benefit was also the grounds on which Milton supported the practice. See *De Doctrina Christiana*, Book II, pp. 336-43, in *The Works of John Milton*, New York: Columbia University Press, 1934, vol. 17. See also the entry in Milton's commonplace book, in John Milton, *Complete Prose Works*. New Haven & London: Yale University Press, 1953, (hereinafter, *CPW*), vol. 1, pp. 418-9.

But mercy is above this sceptered sway.  
It is enthroned in the hearts of kings;  
It is an attribute to God himself,  
And earthly power doth then show likest God's  
When mercy seasons justice. (4.1.183-92)

With usury reduced to a rhetorical residue, the passage erases the economics of belief in a mystified language of “majesty,” and to ground the mystification, it performs a second evasion: it appeals to kings in a Republic ruled by an elected duke who at that very moment presides on stage before Portia; it invokes monarchy in the visible absence of a monarch.

Shakespeare does, of course, celebrate some of the finer aspects of the emerging economy in which he participates, both in *The Merchant of Venice* and elsewhere. Doing so, however, usually involves purging commerce of the dirty means by which it thrives and subordinating it both to religion and to earthly power, and especially kings, whether or not they exist. Thus Henry V must reject the commercial world of the tavern to be transformed into “the mirror of all Christian Kings,” “the offending Adam” “whipped ... out of him” (1.1.30, 2.0.6). In the same play, the plundering of churches by Henry’s companions is an unpardonable sin, as is the traitors’ plot to “coin [him] into gold” (2.2.95). Although the company was coining Henry into gold before its audience’s eyes, it could do so because the play’s rhetoric had condemned the offense. Indeed, the company acted, at least in a legal fiction, in service to the royal household as the Lord Chamberlain’s, later, King’s Men. Shakespeare’s Kings are at their best when, as in *All’s Well That Ends Well*, they bless the doctor’s daughters of the emerging commercial economy for service provided not in mercantile exchange but through bizarre rituals, negotiated in rhymed verse, involving folk-like plots of miraculous cures for strange diseases – the punishment for failure not bad word of mouth but death, the reward for success not remuneration but marriage, and the real agent not the enterprising young woman herself but “the

very hand of heaven” (2.3.29-30, 61) in disproof of fools who “say miracles are past” (2.3.1). It is a convenient arrangement by which kings may give the appearance of incorporating the best aspects of a crucial new class without having to lower themselves to the vulgarity of commerce. To reformulate Greenblatt’s invocation of Kafka, there is a marketplace, no end to a marketplace, only not for anyone who matters.<sup>12</sup>

What I would like to suggest then is that the suppression of the economic basis of Christianity not only defined Protestantism. It also justified social hierarchies and thus defined a Royalist agenda. In that context, Milton’s explicitly economic theology of *Paradise Lost*, inexplicable in terms Protestant ideology, starts to make sense as an assault on the “evil dayes” into which the nation had, with the 1660 Restoration of Charles II, fallen.<sup>13</sup> But before turning at last to Milton, one final foray into Shakespeare will be useful.

## ii: The Return of the Invisible King: The Fellowship of the Kingless

For us, the word “redeem” is familiar both in its Latin meaning of buying back and in its Christian meaning (more often expressed in the nouns “redeemer” and “redemption”) of deliverance from sin, but it rare now to acknowledge that the latter meaning derives from the former. The distinction seems to have been in place by Milton’s time. Shakespeare uses both senses of the word and its variant forms forty-eight times but not one instance recalls Christian redemption as an economic metaphor; rather, on the few occasions where the two senses appear to converge in pun, the point is to subordinate economic to spiritual redemption.<sup>14</sup> The plot of

---

<sup>12</sup> Stephen Greenblatt, “Invisible Bullets: Renaissance authority and its subversion, *Henry IV, Henry V*,” in *Political Shakespeare: New Essays in Cultural Materialism*, ed., Jonathan Dollimore and Alan Sinfield. Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 1985, p 47.

<sup>13</sup> Quotations from Milton’s poetry are from *The Complete Poetry of John Milton*, ed., John T. Shawcross. New York: Anchor Books, 1971.

<sup>14</sup> Based on Open Source Shakespeare’s concordance at <http://www.opensourceshakespeare.com/concordance/>.

*Measure for Measure* springs from the deputy Angelo's proposal that Isabella "redeem"<sup>15</sup> her condemned brother Claudio (2.4.53, 163) by submitting to Angelo's lust, to which she makes the opposition between redemption's temporal and spiritual meanings explicit: "Better it were a brother died at once / Than that a sister, by redeeming him, / Should die forever" (2.4.107-9). The opposition continues through a subsequent exchange between Isabella and Claudio, and is only resolved by the subordination of an exchange economy to fealty. The Duke, disguised as a monk, promises to "redeem" Claudio, while doing "no stain to [her] own gracious person" (3.1.199-200). In the Duke's monastic garb, the promise suggests a subordination of corrupt dealings to religious piety, but it turns out to be a promise that he cannot as a monk fulfill. It is only by his return to power in the final scene that he makes good on his promise, emerging from disguise as a sort of *Deus ex machine* - or rather, *Rex ex machina*, for now his title changes. After having been known only as "the Duke," he is now five times described as "royal" and seven times as a "prince," both epithets newly acquired in the final scene.<sup>16</sup> In his new royal authority, the Duke replaces Angelo's economy of bribes with one of payment for ill deeds, which he then converts to one of mercy, thereby acquiring the authority for the surprising final lines in which he asks Isabella to forgo the convent and marry him. Given his stature and Isabella's implicit debt to him, and given her repeated vows of eternal chastity, the proposal is not far from Angelo's, but the play sanctions it in a "Royal prince" (5.1.57) and not in a "precise" (1.3.50) bureaucrat. The difference between the two is that Angelo's proposal is sullied by the economic terms of redemption, whereas the Duke's redemption of Claudio creates

---

<sup>15</sup> The use combines the senses of paying for (OED 1) and freeing (OED 3).

<sup>16</sup> Admittedly, the term "Prince" may be applied to a Duke (OED 2a and 5). "Royal" is less plausible, however: while the OED does offer definitions that refer generally to sovereigns, the examples given nearly all refer to Kings and Queens. OED 8c gives "having rank comparable to that of a king," but the OED's examples are all consciously figurative (e.g., "royal merchant"). The point of an alteration in nomenclature at this point in the play, I think, however plausible that nomenclature may be, is to fudge the matter so as to appear to produce a non-existent king.

an *implicit* debt in Isabella that, crucially, is not spoken of in the economic terms I am using for it. It is that implied redemption of debt in marriage that in turn redeems for the audience the generic promise that the play has hitherto left to an unusual degree in doubt. The audience members get the resolution they had speculated on when they purchased tickets in hopes of getting more in enjoyment than they paid in coinage. Meanwhile, the company profits by denying the idea of profit. Benefit is mutual, not, it seems, by usury, but in a form of redemption that refuses to acknowledge its basis in debt.<sup>17</sup>

Consider then, by contrast, the rendering of the Incarnation in *Paradise Lost*, in the explicit terms of the redemption of debt. In Book III, God seeks, in advance of the fall, a way to “renew<sup>18</sup> / [man’s] lapsed powers, though *forfeit* and enthrall’d / By sin to foul *exorbitant* desires” (175-7) so that he may “to me *owe* / All his deliv’rance, and to none but me” (181-2). Man, it seems, has incurred an unrepayable debt, and in “*losing all*, / To expiate his treason hath *naught left*” (206-7). Man then, must die unless someone else should volunteer to “*pay* / The rigid *satisfaction*,<sup>19</sup> *death for death*” (211-2) and so “*redeem* Man’s mortal crime” (214-5). “Without *redemption*, all mankind” (222) would be damned but for the Son’s “*dearest*” (226)

---

<sup>17</sup> The only other instance I have found in Shakespeare of redemption’s two senses converging is in *Richard III*. In Act I, scene iv, Clarence entreats his hired murderers to forgo what we know to be a contracted murder “as [they] hope to have redemption / By Christ’s dear blood, shed for our grievous sins” (1.4.177-8). The murder is a matter of payment; Christ’s redemption is mystified as a matter of sin. Thus monetary redemption precludes spiritual redemption, and any pun is necessarily oppositional. Forty lines later, when Clarence promises, to great dramatic irony, that Richard – not Christ – will make the murderers a better offer for mercy (218-9), faith in an exchange economy is revealed as belief in a demi-devil. One instance between Shakespeare and Milton in which the word does refer to the economics of belief is George Herbert’s sonnet “Redemption” in *The Temple*. (George Herbert, *The Complete English Poems*, ed., John Tobin. London: Penguin Books, 1991, pp. 35-6). The sonnet starts by telling an economic story about a man’s debt to his landlord, only to reveal itself as a story of Christian redemption by its final couplet, which features another man granting his suit as he dies among “thieves and murderers.” Time has not permitted a careful study of Herbert or of the word’s history between Shakespeare and Milton, but I wonder if *The Temple* didn’t make its point by treating seriously a discourse uncommon by 1633.

<sup>18</sup> Italics in this section are mine, and in order to avoid confusion, I have changed to Roman the proper names that are italicized in Shawcross’s text.

<sup>19</sup> The OED cites this instance “satisfaction” under definition 1a: “The payment in full of a debt, or the fulfilment of an obligation or claim; the atoning *for* (rarely *of*) an injury, offence, or fault by reparation, compensation, or the endurance of punishment.”

offer. Since mankind, “*Indebted and undon, hath none to bring*” (235), the Son declares:

Behold mee then, *mee for him, life for life*  
I offer, on me let thine anger fall;  
*Account* mee man; I for his sake will leave  
Thy bosom, and this glorie next to thee  
Freely put off, and for him lastly die  
Well pleas’d, on me let Death wreck all his rage. (236-41)

The bargain is so pleasing to God that the two of them work out a deal whereby God can have his son and sacrifice him too: “Though now to Death I yield, and am his *due*,” says the Son, “yet that *debt paid*, I shall rise victorious, and *subdue*<sup>20</sup>” death itself (245-50) and so “*redeem*” (260, 281) mankind.

At this point, something new happens. The Incarnation, we discover, is not only economic, but also egalitarian. God praises the Son in the republican rhetoric of being “found / By Merit more then Birthright Son of God” (308-9). By praising merit over birthright, God puts humans on earth without social hierarchies, in fealty only to Heaven:

Here shalt thou sit incarnate, here shalt Reign  
Both God and Man, Son, both of God and Man,  
Anointed universal King; all Power  
I give to thee, reign for ever, and assume  
Thy Merits; under thee as Head Supreme  
Thrones, Princedoms, Powers, Dominions I reduce:  
All knees to thee shall bow. (315-21)

This argument of the Son’s annihilation of earthly kingship by the kingdom of heaven provides the teleology for Michael’s narrative in Book XII, a narrative of Israel’s history from kingly enthralment to liberty through the incarnation and resurrection of the Son as Earth’s only king. The trajectory starts with Adam’s lament of “Authority usurpt, from God not giv’n” (66), from which proceeds some of the work’s most boldly anti-Royalist rhetoric:

He gave us onely over Beast, Fish, Fowl  
Dominion absolute; that right we hold

---

<sup>20</sup> This instance, unsupported on definitional and etymological grounds, I claim only as a likely pun.

By his donation; but Man over men  
He made not Lord; such title to himself  
Reserving, human left from human free. (67-71)

Michael then tells Adam of Israel's enslavement in Egypt to Pharaoh and his kingly successor<sup>21</sup> (155-222), of the Babylonian captivity (339-49) under kings slightly more amicable but only because they are so "dispos'd" by God (349), and then of deliverance marred by priests who

seise  
The Scepter, and regard not Davids Sons  
Then loose it to a stranger, that the true  
Anointed King Messiah might be born  
Barr'd of his right. (356-60)

In this narrative, Michael does praise a king – David – for "piety" and "puiſant deeds" (321-2), but at the very moment that he tells Adam that David's "Regal Throne / For ever shall endure" (323-4), he proclaims kingship's endurance by means of its earthly abolition:

the like shall sing  
All Prophecie, that of the Royal Stock  
Of David (so I name this King) shall rise  
A Son, the Womans Seed to thee foretold,  
Foretold to Abraham, as in whom shall trust  
All Nations, and to Kings foretold, of Kings  
The last, for of his Reign shall be no end. (324-30)

At the close of Michael's history, the word *redeem* returns five times (408, 424, 434, 445, 573), and now, it takes a specific economic sense: that of paying for someone's liberation (OED 3) in "ransom paid, which Man from death redeems, / His [Christ's] death for Man" (424-5).

Although Milton, perhaps wary of censorship, limits redemption here to ransom from death, he places it at the climax of a narrative of ransom from kingship. Yet even here, there is a suggestion that triumph over death entails triumph over kings in Adam's "Needs must the Serpent now his capital bruise / Expect" (383-4). Modern editors uniformly gloss "capital" as

---

<sup>21</sup> Fowler notes that Milton names this king Busiris in Book I. (*Paradise Lost*, ed., Alastair Fowler, Second Ed. London and New York: Longman, 1998, note to XII, ll. 164-8). In book XII, by contrast, he is known by title rather than name as "a sequent King" (165), "the lawless Tyrant" (173) and "th' obdurate King" (205).

conflating the meanings “mortal” and “on the head,”<sup>22</sup> but the pairing of those two senses in a pun calls attention to the word itself and suggests the “capital bruise” that had dominated public consciousness since 1649: the decapitation of a King.

So far, I have not attempted to discuss the economic workings of redemption in *Paradise Lost*, but have rather traced its language, as though I were a linguist pursuing an empirical study. I will delve more thoroughly into the poem’s economy presently, but first let us pause to consider the rather schematic opposition I have set up between Milton and Shakespeare and the opposing ideologies it suggests. Shakespeare – money-lending, malt-hoarding, professional writer who buys the status of Gentleman – would like to efface the commercialism of his art (and thereby sell more tickets) and so places the stories he sells in a mystified social hierarchy to convince his audience of a value beyond price.<sup>23</sup> Milton – regicidal advocate for the Commonwealth – would like to abolish social hierarchies and bind humanity in common to God, and so he conceives of humanity’s relationship to God in flatly economic terms that leave no place for Kings as God’s earthly substitutes. But for Milton, that leaves a question: if Shakespeare’s effacement of commerce serves his own commerce, what economy does an economic Incarnation bring with it into Milton’s Commonwealth? From our perspective, my comparison would seem to suggest

---

<sup>22</sup> In addition to the Shawcross and Fowler editions already cited, I have checked Stephen Orgel and Jonathan Goldberg’s Oxford World Classics edition (2004), John Leonard’s Penguin Edition (1998), Scott Elledge’s Norton Edition (1993), and Roy Flannagan’s edition for Prentice Hall (1993).

<sup>23</sup> There are, of course, grounds for complicating this account of Shakespeare, starting, I think, with *Timon of Athens*, a play that to me seems utterly bent on deconstructing its own performance. Not only does it feature the most bizarre revelation of a death in all of Shakespeare (Timon seems to have dug, deposited himself in, and covered over his own grave, subsequently engraving a first-person account of his death on the tombstone above it, all of which we learn because a soldier finds the tombstone in the woods, and, being illiterate, makes a wax impression of it), but it also offers an elaborate demystification of capitalist constructions of value (a subject I have pursued in another essay). The play was much admired by Marx, who expounded on Timon’s soliloquies about gold (a “visible god”) in the *Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts of 1844*. See *The Marx-Engels Reader*, ed., Robert C. Tucker. New York: Norton, 2<sup>nd</sup> Edition, 1978, pp. 101-5. Still, one wonders if *Timon*’s apparent lack of completion is a consequence of its unpalatability in the commercial theater. For Parker’s account of Shakespearean drama, which differs somewhat from mine in emphasizing the role of residual religious ceremony in establishing fetishized value, see “What a Piece of Work is Man: Shakespearean Drama as Marxian Fetish, the Fetish as Sacramental Sublime,” *Journal of Medieval and Early Modern Studies*, vol. 34, no. 3, Fall 2004, pp. 643-72.

that an economic incarnation blesses the marketplace as a space with an authority of its own, an authority that might take the place of mystified Royal power. But *Paradise Lost* never makes that argument. Indeed, the oft-noted presence in the work of a counter-narrative of Satanic imperialism would seem to suggest the reverse, as would Milton's most explicit statement of his view of an ideal Republican society, *The Readie and Easie Way to Establish a Free Commonwealth* (1660), which closes with revulsion at the "rotten" idol worship (*CPW*, VII, 462) of those who would "prostitute religion and libertie to the vain and groundless apprehension, that nothing but kingship can restore trade" (461). For all of *Paradise Lost*'s economic language, not only in the Incarnation, but in the language of labor and of empire, and for all its concern with its own historical moment, the poem, I think, refuses to affirm positively a particular economic model for postlapsarian society. It ends, rather with Michael leaving Adam and Eve, the world "all before them, where to choose" but also with "Providence thir guide" (XII, 646-7). Choice, then is not the illusory "free choice" that Satan dictates from his throne in Hell (II, 19) and which we might associate with a free market. Rather, choice emerges for the reader out of the tension between the economies of Heaven and Hell. What those two economies reveal is that *Paradise Lost*'s economic theology, far from justifying the market's ways to men, rather reveals what the ideology of a market economy like Shakespeare's necessarily obscures: the idolatry by which markets construct value.

### iii: Productive and Reductive Incarnations

Blair Hoxby has recently taken up the cause of a Milton devoted until the Restoration to the free market.<sup>24</sup> To Hoxby, Milton's call in *Areopagitica* for a free press entails "putting his

---

<sup>24</sup> Blair Hoxby, *Mammon's Music: Literature and Economics in the Age of Milton*. New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2002., p. 47. Hoxby argues that Milton's faith in the market extends into *The Readie and*

faith not in men but in a system of commerce and exchange. He puts his faith in the market” (45). But David Hawkes has criticized Hoxby for an anachronistic assumption of the natural authority of markets. To Hawkes, Milton’s limited support for free trade was subordinate to his devotion to keeping religion uncommodified. Hoxby’s “enthusiasm for the market,” Hawkes argues, “goads him into making claims that students of Milton ought to recognize as satanic: ‘the market is a means by which imperfect men may, in the long term, approximate the wisdom of God.’”<sup>25</sup> As an instance of *Areopagitica*’s subordination of economy to religion, Hawkes cites Milton’s scorn for “a wealthy man addicted to his pleasure and to his profits”:

[F]ain he would have the name to be religious, fain he would bear up with his neighbours in that. What does he therefore, but resolves to give over toyling, and to find himself out som factor, to whose care and credit he may commit the whole managing of his religious affairs; som Divine of note and estimation that must be. To him he adheres, resigns the whole ware-house of his religion, but with all the locks and keyes into his custody; and indeed makes the very person of that man his religion; esteems his associating with him a sufficient evidence and commendatory of his own piety. So that a man may say his religion is now no more within himself, but is becom a dividual movable, and goes and comes neer him, according as that good man frequents the house. ... [H]is Religion walks abroad at eight, and leavs this kind entertainer in the shop trading all day without his religion. (*CPW* vol II, 444-5)

To Hoxby, this passage is a call for tradesmen to integrate religious and secular life and become “enterprisers in *all* aspects of the public sphere” (45). Just what sort of integration Hoxby is imagining is unclear; religion receives only perfunctory treatment in the chapter. To Hoxby, integration seems to mean no more than bringing an enterprising spirit to church. But this is

---

*Easie Way*, but that by 1660, trade had become an effective Royalist argument, so that Milton hedged his bets by inveighing against it at the essay’s close (77-90). He goes on to argue that the victory of the Royalist argument for trade embittered Milton to the marketplace, and he reads *Paradise Lost* as a conservative critique of trade (150-177).

<sup>25</sup> “The Concept of the ‘Hireling’ in Milton’s Theology,” *Milton Studies*, vol. 43, 2004, pp. 64-85, specifically p. 67. Hawkes here is responding to an earlier essay by Hoxby (“The Trade of Truth Advanced: *Areopagitica*, Economic Discourse, and Libertarian Reform,” *Milton Studies*, vol. 36, 1998, pp. 117-202.) substantially incorporated into *Mammon’s Music*, which Hawkes does not discuss in this essay. The passage Hawkes quotes is on p. 188 of the earlier Hoxby essay; in *Mammon’s Music*, Hoxby qualified his earlier statement: “...approximate, if never really attain, the wisdom of God” (41). See also Hawkes’ review of *Mammon’s Music* in *TLS*, 2 April 2004, p. 10 and Hoxby’s rejoinder in *TLS*, 30 April 2004. (*TLS* fails to provide page numbers with online retrieval.)

precisely the sort of thing Milton is decrying. Milton's assault on religion that becomes a "dividual movable" is a critique of tradesmen who use priests as a sort of prosthetic religion, that is in Hawkes' words alienated<sup>26</sup> and "relegat[ed] to a form of property." "Milton is appalled," says Hawkes, "by the idea that religion can be conceived of as a thing, an alienable commodity." Rather, he says, "radical Protestant[s] ... 'understood their faith, or conscience, as a part of themselves, and so as something which they owned absolutely and individually'" (68)<sup>27</sup>.

As a rejoinder to Hoxby's celebration of an *Areopagitica* that would seem to anticipate Adam Smith, Hawkes' argument is, I think, substantially right. But he makes two assumptions that, while familiar as interpretations of Protestantism, misconstrue Milton's theology, particularly in *Paradise Lost*. First, Hawkes understands commodification as a matter of valuing *things*. Second, he locates Milton's hope for non-commodified religion in the individual's ownership of his or her faith.<sup>28</sup> But in *Paradise Lost*, to "believe / in [Christ's] redemption" is to have "imputed ... by faith, his merits," by way of Christ "coming in the flesh" to redeem "the sins / of all mankind, with him there crucifi'd" (XII, 407-8, 405, 416-7). Faith *is* a matter of things – of the incarnation of flesh, and moreover, of value held in not "individually" (as we use the term) but in common, – or, in political terms, in Common-wealth.

The modern sense of the word "individual" to signify the personal – that which cannot be divided because it is the smallest divisible unit – dates from the seventeenth century, but Milton

---

<sup>26</sup> Hawkes points out in a note that "the word 'alienation' boasts a pedigree that may seem surprisingly long. It was regularly used in the seventeenth century to carry the modern sense of an illegitimate or unethical externalization of property" (84 n13).

<sup>27</sup> Hawkes is quoting Laura Bruce, *The Idea of Property in Seventeenth-Century England* (Manchester, 1998), 5.

<sup>28</sup> Hawkes repeats both of these assumptions on the next page in positing a difference "in the thought of Milton and [some of] his contemporaries – the difference between conceiving of oneself as an integral, unitary, and indivisible being, and the conception that imagines it is possible for one part of the self to alienate, or 'sell,' another. The latter notion must inevitably imagine the part of the self that is sold as a *thing*, a commodity" (69). Hawkes's essay is specific to several prose tracts, but he posits a stability in Milton's early declaration that "Antichrist is Mammon's son," which, Hawkes writes, "deserves to be understood as a definitive statement of his iconoclastic theology, and as a manifesto to which he remained faithful throughout his life (82). Hawkes also implies a continuity of his argument to *Paradise Lost* in deeming Hoxby's celebration of the market "satanic" (67).

used the word in its older meaning – that which cannot be divided off because it is a part of a whole.<sup>29</sup> When Hawkes contrasts Milton’s “dividual movable” with Protestant individual faith, he reverses what the word meant for Milton, so that Hawkes’s “individual” is for Milton a “dividual movable.” Consider Milton’s use of the word “individual” in God’s pronouncement in Book V of *Paradise Lost*:

Hear all ye Angels, Progenie of Light,  
Thrones, Dominations, Princedoms, Vertues, Powers,  
Hear my Decree, which unrevok’t shall stand.  
This day I have begot whom I declare  
My onely Son, and on this holy Hill  
Him have anointed, whom ye now behold  
At my right hand; your Head I him appoint;  
And by my Self have sworn to him shall bow  
All knees in Heav’n, and shall confess him Lord:  
Under his great Vice-gerent Reign abide  
United as one individual Soul  
For ever happie: him who disobeys  
Me disobeys, breaks union, and that day  
Cast out from God and blessed vision, falls  
Into utter darkness, deep ingulft, his place  
Ordaind without redemption, without end. (600-15)

For Milton, the “individual soul” is not the solitary person but the community. To join that community means to disavow personal thrones and dominions to participate in a communal redemptive economy.

Indeed, those who do abandon Heaven’s community are not the faithful, but rather the rebel angels. Hell is a place of kingship – of Satan’s throne (II, 1), Death’s crown (II, 673), and Molloch’s Kingly name (I, 392 and II, 43)<sup>30</sup> – because it is, again and again, distinguished by an inward turn. For Satan to declare “the mind ... its own place” (I, 254) and go off alone so that so that “none shall partake” in his personal glory (II, 465-6), has tempted many subsequent readers

---

<sup>29</sup> My discussion of the meaning of “individual” derives both from the OED and from comments in class by Peter Stallybrass. The paraphrases I give are of OED definitions 1 and 3 respectively.

<sup>30</sup> Both instances refer to him as a king because Molloch is Hebrew for “king.”

to his side. Later readers of Milton have also tended to enjoy Satan's soliloquies more than God's dreary colloquies. But for Satan, the price of that solitude is that he

like a devillish Engine back recoils  
Upon himself; horror and doubt distract  
His troubl'd thoughts, and from the bottom stirr  
The Hell within him, for within him Hell  
He brings, and round about him, nor from Hell  
One step no more then from himself can fly  
By change of place. (IV, 18-23)

Satan's first grand soliloquy in Book IV, arises out of "despair" (23, 74, 114, 156) at being cast out of Heaven's economy for

Warring in Heav'n against Heavn's matchless King:  
Ah wherefore! he deserv'd no such return  
From me, whom he created what I was  
In that bright eminence, and with his good  
Upbraided none; nor was his service hard.  
What could be less then to afford him praise  
The easiest recompence, and pay him thanks,  
How due! yet all his good prov'd ill in me,  
And wrought but malice; lifted up so high  
I sdeined subjection, and thought one step higher  
Would set me highest, and in a moment quit  
The debt immense of endless gratitude  
So burthensome still paying, still to ow;  
Forgetful what from him I still receiv'd  
And understood not that a grateful mind  
By owing owes not, but still pays, at once  
Indebted and discharg'd. (41-57)

If in soliloquy, Satan can recognize his error, he cannot by soliloquy rectify it. "Which way I flie is Hell; my self am Hell," he discovers (75). Divorced from Heaven's ever-fluid economy of debt that paradoxically sustains through owing, Satan has only himself left. "All good to me is lost; / Evil be thou my Good," he declares and embraces evil to colonize an alien space and gain "at least / Divided Empire with Heav'ns King" in "this new World" (109-13).

As Satan's soliloquy frames his alienation from Heaven in terms of a pair of economies –

Heaven's "debt immense of endless gratitude" and his own imperial ambitions – it would be well here to return to the other problematic aspect of Hawkes's reading of Milton's scorn for commerce that would alienate religion. To Hawkes, "Milton is appalled by the idea that religion can be conceived of as a thing, an alienable commodity. He is angered by the prospect of a properly subjective experience being given objective form" (68). But the greatest subject of *Paradise Lost* is Satan, literally "thrown under"<sup>31</sup> – and thrown under because he is "self-tempted, self-depraved" (II, 130), alienated because he quits the heavenly economy and turns instead to the mind as "its own place." The greatest object, on the other hand is the Son, whose flesh pays for the debts of the whole human race. The problem here is a consequence of Hawkes's identification of commodities with things, in what Jones and Stallybrass consider a misreading of Marx:

Marx's critique of capitalism is not a critique of "materialism." Marx, of course, famously developed a theory of fetishism, but it was a theory of fetishism of the *commodity*, not of the *object*. For Marx, the commodity comes to life through the death of the object. What defines a commodity always lies outside any specific object, and depends upon the equating of a specific quantity of paper cups with a specific quantity of coal or diamonds or academic books.<sup>32</sup>

By understanding Milton's reservations about commerce as the result of a concern with things, Hawkes elides the distinction that is at the center of *Paradise Lost*: the conflict between a heavenly economy that properly values things and a hellish commercial economy bent on

---

<sup>31</sup> The word's etymological meaning, as Stallybrass reminds us ("Value of Culture," 175), citing Althusser. Indeed, the last instance of the word in *Paradise Lost*, "the subjected plain" (XII, 640) requires a literal translation of the Latin. The OED's first instance of the modern sense (def. 9) dates from 1796, with transitional instances starting in 1682. My thinking about subjects and objects is heavily indebted to the Stallybrass essay and to the collection *Subject and Object in Renaissance Culture*, ed., de Grazia, Quilligan, and Stallybrass. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995. However the only prior attempts that I am aware of to understand subjects and objects and commodities and things in the terms outlined in that volume are Maureen Quilligan's contribution therein ("Freedom, Service, and the Trade in Slaves: The Problem of Labor in *Paradise Lost*," pp. 213-29), which relates the work's treatment of labor to contemporary discourses of slavery, and Jones and Stallybrass's brief discussion of the passage in Book X in which The Son clothes Adam and Eve (209-23), which they read as a form of livery (20-21).

<sup>32</sup> *Renaissance Clothing*, p. 8. See also Stallybrass's "Value of Culture" essay, *passim*, Parker, esp pp. 21-51, and the introduction to *Subject and Object in Renaissance Culture*.

overpricing things – apples, for instance – and selling them as commodities to people who don't need them.

Let's go back to the economy of debt in Book III. From our sense of religion, it is odd to think of the Incarnation as economic, but the converse is also true: from the standpoint of modern capitalism, it's odd to think of an economy based on flesh. Man's debt is redeemed by the Son's body, "Made flesh" (284), and it is only by being a part of an economy of living things – an economy in which value is inherent rather than representational – that the Son manages what sounds to us like an impossible deal, in which he pays the debt and yet reascends, bringing mankind with him. God redeems man's debt by "joyn[ing]" mankind's "Nature" to the Son's (282), without "less'n[ing] or degrad[ing] [his] own" (304), and the language here turns horticultural: the Son, born by "Virgin *seed*" (284), restores man "As from a second *root*" (288) to "live in [the Son] *transplanted*, and from [him] / Receive new life" (293-4). From our perspective, to pay a debt means losing that which you pay, but a debt based on living things can be productive in its own right. What Satan has failed to understand is that Heaven's debt is a productive debt of "endless gratitude," in which "a grateful mind / By owing owes not, but still pays, at once / Indebted and discharg'd" (IV, 52, 55-7). Satan has conceived of debt as we conceive of it – as something to be paid off. But Heaven's debt is one of mutual benefit to all who partake, so that in paying, one "still receiv[es]" (IV, 53).

Whereas Heaven's economy places value in living things without an intermediate symbol of currency, Hell's economy takes inanimate things and ascribes to them a value beyond what inheres in them. The first thing the fallen angels do in Book I to build a home in Hell is to seek out gold, not for its physical properties but because of its apparently inherent value:

Mammon led them on,  
Mammon, the least erected spirit that fell

From heav'n, for ev'n in heav'n his looks and thoughts  
Were always downward bent, admiring more  
The riches of Heavn's pavement, trod'n Gold  
Then aught divine or holy else enjoy'd  
In vision beatific: by him first  
Men also, and by his suggestion taught  
Ransack'd the Center, and with impious hands  
Rifl'd the bowels of thir mother Earth  
For Treasures better hid. Soon had his crew  
Op'nd into the Hill a spacious wound  
And dig'd out ribs of Gold. Let none admire  
That riches grow in Hell; that soyl may best  
Deserve the precious bane. (I, 678-92)

What this passage makes clear is gold is not a “bane” in and of itself; if it were, it could hardly pave the floor of Heaven. It only becomes a bane socially by being understood as “riches.” The problem with gold for the rebel angels is that Mammon (literally, “wealth”<sup>33</sup>) imputes a value to it beyond its use as a floor, and by gazing only downward alienates himself from a heavenly economy that uses gold not as a symbolic form of value, but as something to tread upon. In doing so, he encourages men to destroy the organic earth that might fertilize crops in favor of a metal that, when they treat it as precious, poisons rather than sustains them. The problem of sustenance reappears in Mammon’s speech in Book II, in which, having left Heaven’s economy of “worship paid” (248), he calls on the rebel angels to “rather seek / Our own good from our selves, and from our own / Live to our selves, though in this vast recess, / Free, and to none accountable” (252-5). The problem is that in *Paradise Lost*, to turn within the self is insufficient for sustenance. Value comes from flesh shared socially; one only attains it by being “accountable.” Thus Mammon inevitably turns outside himself, and not to community, but rather to “hidden lustre, Gemms and Gold ... from whence to raise / Magnificence” (271-3). In the economy of Hell, the inward turn is insufficient to provide sustenance, and so the rebel angels turn outward to seek value elsewhere.

---

<sup>33</sup> See OED etymology. It comes through post-classical Latin from Greek and ultimately from Aramaic.

For Satan, the outward turn is a turn to colonize. Many critics have noted that Satan's voyage is represented as a colonial voyage to a "new world" (I, 650; II, 403, 867; IV, 34, 113, 391; X, 257, 377). David Quint has called attention to the commercial aspect of Satan's voyage, particularly in Book II. Quint cites the comparison of Satan to a merchant bringing spices from the Indies (636-43), and argues that "the passage retrospectively lends a mercantile note to Beelzebub's earlier talk of 'enterprise' (345) and 'some advantageous act' (363), and it colors the exchange between Satan and Chaos about 'recompense' (981), 'advantage' (987), and 'gain' (1009)."<sup>34</sup> I would go further to argue that the roots of Satan's mission in "covert guile" rather than "open Warr" (II, 41) necessarily emphasizes the commercial aspects of empire. His object is to lure Adam and Eve away from God, which he accomplishes by convincing them to misprize an apple.

Yet for all Satan's success in colonizing a new world, his economy of inwardness ultimately proves reductive. In Book IX, Satan had decided that he needed a subjective form other than himself to win his prize, and so he sought to take the form of the serpent, declaring,

O foul descent! that I who erst contended  
With Gods to sit the highest, am now constrained  
Into a Beast, and mixt with bestial slime  
This essence to incarnate and imbrute,  
That to the hight of Deity aspir'd;  
But what will not Ambition and Revenge  
Descend to? who aspires must down as low

---

<sup>34</sup> David Quint, *Epic and Empire: Politics and Generic Form from Virgil to Milton*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1993, pp. 265. Quint argues that Milton deflates Satan by turning what ought to be heroic adventures into mercantile adventures, with the result that the work "cannot be accommodated to epic terms, for epic does not celebrate bourgeois heroes, however heroic they may be" (266). Quint approaches the work from a generic perspective, arguing that as an epic written by a loser, *Paradise Lost* turns away from the imperial implications of epic toward romance. Paul Stevens has attempted to complicate Quint's view by suggesting that "Satan's journey ... is not so much a satire on colonialism as on the abuses of colonialism" (6) in contrast to an authorized empire that God allows to human dominion. (See "*Paradise Lost* and the Colonial Imperative," *Milton Studies*, vol. 34, 1996, pp. 3-21. Hoxby's chapter on *Paradise Lost* argues that *Paradise Lost* is a conservative reaction to the Royalist rhetoric of commerce, but Hoxby nonetheless manages to find a way to value the market through the work by arguing that Adam and Eve's descent into the world moves them into the historical realm of economics and out of the Edenic "logic of loss and redemption" (176). Hoxby apparently does not notice that *Paradise Lost*'s "logic of loss and redemption" is economic.

As high he soard, obnoxious first or last  
To basest things. (163-71)

Satan's own self-exchangability is a means of advancement in an economy in which "spite ... with spite is best repaid" (177). In returning to Hell in Book X, he celebrates his new "enmity" (486) with mankind, and boasts of what he deems a triumphant exchange he has gained by it:

I am to bruise his heel;  
His seed, when is not set, shall bruise my head:  
A World who would not purchase with a bruise,  
Or much more grievous pain? Ye have th'account  
Of my performance: What remains, ye Gods,  
But up and enter now into full bliss. (X, 498-503)

But for Satan to have "purchased" something in an economy of spite means the opposite of being able to participate in it: to purchase a world is to reduce it to an item of exchange. Moreover, he has purchased it by exchanging himself for the serpent. At the time, Satan had judged the exchange a profitable investment, but in Hell, he discovers the reciprocity inherent in an economy of competitive exchange. Now, at the instant he proclaims his success, he is greeted not with a "universal shout" (505), but with "a dismal universal hiss" (508). The act of purchasing mankind in an economy of animosity has reduced the rebel angels to the basest level of their own exchangability: they *become* serpents. Even the narrative "account" in which Satan takes so much pride signals the end of articulate speech. "Th' account / of [his] performance" becomes not a narrative account but an economic account that, because it is based on competitive exchange can only spiral downward. By repaying "spite ... with spite," Satan finds himself in an economy that returns only "hiss for hiss" (518) – the opposite of Heaven's economy of "life for life" (III, 236).

#### iv: The Solitary Plural

Twice in *Paradise Lost*, Adam and Eve are described in terms that modern editions usually render “the only two of mankind” (III, 65; IX, 415). A third time, they are “two only” (V, 366). In modern spelling, the epithet reduces them to a definite and insignificant number. But Milton’s spelling - “onely” makes visible the word’s derivation: one-ly. To be two one-ly is not reductive but paradoxical.<sup>35</sup> In book IX, Adam and Eve are “The onely two of Mankind, but in them / The whole included Race” (415-6). They are two-in-one in the sense that the trinity is three-in-one, and they share an “individual” soul like Heaven’s. When Adam first sees Eve and she flees, he calls after her,

Whom fli’st thou? whom thou fli’st, of him thou art,  
His flesh, his bone; to give thee being I lent  
Out of my side to thee, nearest my heart  
Substantial Life, to have thee by my side  
Henceforth an individual solace dear;  
Part of my Soul I seek thee, and thee claim  
My other half. (IV, 482-8)

For all the problems of the work’s treatment of gender roles, even in Eve’s genesis from Adam, the work’s rhetoric, at first and at the end is the rhetoric of mutual and equal society between Adam and Eve.

One of the more problematic aspects of the work’s treatment of gender difference is that Book IX makes the fall consequent to a discussion some two hundred lines long in which Eve persuades Adam to divide their labor. On Satan, “Occasion ... smiles” when he “behold[s] alone / The Woman, opportune to all attempts” (480-01). The narrative of Book IX is from union to division to a brief but crucial reunion that produces Adam’s fall and then back to “variance and accusation of one another” (IX, Argument). Book X, on the other hand, moves from soliloquy back to union. Soliloquy, I have suggested, is Satan’s mode. Its subjective sublimity in book IV

---

<sup>35</sup> I owe this observation to Dan Traister.

moves Satan to the point of despair – the word appears four times in that passage – and it entails a reductive economy. For Adam, it takes an altered version of the latter characteristic: though its economy does not collapse as far as Satan’s, it is nevertheless haunted by the horror of existing finite. Whereas Eve will despair and suggest she and Adam “seek Death, or he not found, supply / With our own hands his Office on our selves” (1001-2), Adam rather bewails that death has not come and that he must produce infinite unhappy progeny from himself:

yet well, if I would here end  
The miserie, I deserv’d it, and would bear  
My own deservings; but this will not serve;  
All that I eat or drink, or shall beget,  
Is propegated curse. O voice once heard  
Delightfully, *Encrease and multipliy*,  
Now death to hear! for what can I encrease  
Or multiplie, but curses on my head? (725-32, italics *sic*)

Adam no longer enjoys Heaven’s All nor is he become death’s None. He may not “resigne, and render back / All [he] receav’d, unable to perform / [God’s] terms too hard” (749-51). His curse is to exist materially and be forced to spend of himself to pay back a God who might

draw out  
For angers sake, finite to infinite  
In punisht man to satisfie his rigour  
Satisfi’d never. (801-4)

In soliloquy, Adam’s economy becomes as limited as Satan’s was: “in [him] all / Posteritie stands curst,” (817-8), and posterity “Shall with a fierce relux on [him] redound” (738), just as Satan, in soliloquy “like a devillish Engine back recoils / Upon himself” (IV, 17-18).

And yet, Adam’s mortality brings with it the possibility of redemption, for to “satisfie [God’s] rigour / Satisfi’d never” is to enter into Heaven’s economy of a “debt immense of endless gratitude, / ... still paying, still to ow” (III, 52-3). Whereas in soliloquy, Satan could only recognize this, Adam can, in union with Eve, effect it. Whereas Satan had turned from

soliloquy to others only in enmity, the human two now turn to each other in “Commiseration” (940) to seek “reconcilement” (443) of Eve’s suicidal despair and Adam’s existential anguish. Eve, through “love sincere” (914) teaches Adam to “strive / in offices of Love, how we may light’n / Each others burden in our share of woe” (959-61), and Adam teaches Eve to shun the “self-destruction” that “refutes” the “excellence” she possesses (1016-7). Although their roles are differentiated by gender (Adam surely takes more of the initiative in determining their plans at the book’s end), there is, I think, a very real suggestion that their survival depends upon mutual responsiveness to each other’s concerns. In cooperation, they learn to embrace their curse of labor, and by it to earn things that possess real value. By reconciliation with Eve, Adam reconsiders what is left to them:

to thee  
Pains onely in Child-bearing were foretold  
And bringing forth, soon recompenc’t with joy,  
Fruit of thy womb: On me the Curse aslope  
Glanc’d on the ground, with labour I must earn  
My bread; what harm? Idleness had bin worse;  
My labour will sustain me. (1050-6)

The opening of Book IX had suggested the ideas both that without labor, “th’ hour of Supper” might come “unearn’d” (225) and that “younger hands” might “assist” them (246-7), but in Paradise, both ideas lacked urgency; there, they sound more like problems devised for the sake of having something to solve. But in union after their lapse, Adam and Eve learn sincerity, and can offer to God “sorrow unfeign’d and humiliation meek” (X, 1004).

Book XI begins by complicating but not reversing Book X’s story of human reconcilement. In the opening lines, we learn that their agency was enabled by “Prevenient Grace” – the Son’s atonement already implicit<sup>36</sup> – which “descending had remov’d / The stonie

---

<sup>36</sup> See OED s.v. “prevenient,” def. 2: “prevenient grace, in Theol., the grace of God which precedes repentance and conversion, predisposing the heart to seek God, previously to any desire or motion on the part of the recipient.”

from thir hearts and made new flesh / Regenerat grow instead” (3-5). The notion of “Prevenient Grace” does not negate choice but rather gives choice meaning. With stony hearts, Adam and Eve stood no better chance of choosing repentance than Satan with “fixt mind” (I, 97). On the other hand, they must be left to make their choice. As God asks in Book III,

Not free, what proof could they have givn sincere  
Of true allegiance, constant Faith or Love,  
Where onely what they needs must do, appeared,  
Not what they would? what praise could they receive?  
What pleasure I from such obedience paid  
When Will and Reason (Reason also is choice)  
Useless and vain, of freedom both despoild,  
Made passive both, had serv'd necessitie,  
Not mee. (103-12)

It is in flesh – the flesh both of the Son’s atonement and of their own hearts – that Adam and Eve can learn to value rightly and make the right choices. In the same way that choosing rightly only matters when one can choose wrongly, one can only learn to value things rightly by being flesh, having to labor, and being susceptible to scarcity. There are political implications as well: “freedom” becomes a prerequisite for correctly determining value; “necessitie” – “The Tyrants plea” in Book IV (394) – voids choices of their worth.

*Paradise Lost* ends with choice: “The world was all before them where to choose / Thir place of rest” (XII, 646-7). If the last three books offered a course of training in how to choose, they have not made particular choices easy. Book XII offers a litany of answers that it subsequently complicates. First, Adam mistakenly assumes that the Son will descend and win the world in decisive battle (375ff). Then there is the suggestion of the fortunate fall (469ff) – perhaps ultimately true, but in the meanwhile there are the “enemies of truth” (482) to be dealt

---

One tends to forget that Book III transpires before the fall because of its dizzying negotiation of tenses by which it “comprises the entire history of mankind in an enormous abridgment” (as another materialist has theorized messianic time that can “blast open the continuum of history.” See Walter Benjamin, “Theses on the Philosophy of History,” *Illuminations*, ed., Hannah Arendt, trans., Harry Zohn. New York: Schocken Books, 1968, pp. 262-3.)

with. Finally, at the moment the work seems to be suggesting a turn toward “inward consolations” (495) and to a solitary walk with God (561ff), Michael declares that Adam has “attaind the sum / Of wisdom” (575-6) and, in parting tells Adam to

onely add  
Deeds to thy knowledge answerable, add Faith  
Add Vertue, Patience, Temperance, add Love  
By name to come call'd Charitie, the soul  
Of all the rest: then wilt thou not be loath  
To leave this Paradise, but shalt possess  
A Paradise within thee, happier farr. (581-7)

It is an extraordinarily ambitious litany of things to “onely add,” but Adam and Eve are denied the specious ease sought by their tempter. Whereas Satan, by consuming the inward, has to turn destructively outward, Adam and Eve may only attain inward happiness through difficult, productive outward works.

Unlike Heaven and Hell, Earth does not enter *Paradise Lost* with a ready-made economy; the point of the work is to create one, first under Heaven’s influence, then by Hell’s meddling, and finally by the human effort of learning how to negotiate the world while separate from Heaven but guided by it. But the creation of the earth in Book VII offers a clue for how a worldly economy might work. There,

First crept  
The Parsimonious Emmet, provident  
Of future, in small room large heart enclos'd,  
Pattern of just equalitie perhaps  
Hereafter, join'd in her popular Tribes  
Of Commonaltie. (484-9)

The republican rhetoric of commonwealth is clear enough, but the passage does not only celebrate “just equalitie” of rank; equality is also a matter of material needs. Heaven seems to produce ample bounty and those in Hell pretend to have a limitless bounty within themselves, but Earth faces the possibility of scarcity. The ant’s sense of “Commonaltie” is predicated on its

sense of parsimony (frugality, thrift<sup>37</sup>) and providence for the future. Equality then is not just a matter of doing away with kings; it requires shared work and shared enjoyment of the fruits of that work, just as the Son's redemption saves "the whole Race lost" (III, 280) and Heaven's bounty is the result of being "one individual Soul." If in Eden, Adam and Eve were "two one-ly," the final gesture of the poem is to restore the paradox of the singular plural. As Michael leads them out of Eden, he rejoins the hands that had parted before the fall (IX, 385), and it is "hand in hand" (648) that they take, in the poem's paradoxical last three words, "*thir* solitarie way."

#### v: Religion and Politics

To Marx's comment about a Protestant, and particularly Scottish, theology of credit, with which I began, I would like to add one point that perhaps complicates the history that Marx suggested and that Parker has elaborated. Unlike the Church of England, Presbyterianism rendered the Lord's Prayer's fifth petition accurately as "forgive us our debts as we forgive our debtors." Although in theory more radical than Anglicanism in its critique of materialist religion, the Presbyterian Church left in one of its central texts an economy of belief unfamiliar to the majority of English-speaking Protestants. As a child from a long-time Methodist family, I dutifully learned the Lord's prayer in the Anglican rendering of "tresspasses" that Methodism had retained. But when I was eleven, my family moved to Longview, Texas, where, dissatisfied with the conservatism of the local Methodist Churches, we joined the city's two or three dozen other liberal Protestants at a Presbyterian Church. We only stayed in Longview for a year, but it was the year when I was the age for Presbyterian confirmation classes with the minister, an aging Southerner of Scottish descent, who my father was particularly happy to discover was an old

---

<sup>37</sup> The word could be used without negative connotations at the time – see OED def. 1a for "parsimonious."

New Dealer in a city turning rapidly Republican. As a new Presbyterian, my most pressing question for him was why everybody said “forgive us our debts” during the service. He replied that the standing joke in seminary was that the Presbyterians version was the legacy of impoverished Scots who preferred to have their debts forgiven.

If my anecdote sounds incidental to a history of Christianity in which Luther and Calvin represent a turn away from economic theology and socially valued works, and toward salvation in faith alone through the individual’s unmediated access to God, then consider Milton’s position in that history. Milton’s economy of redemption, his celebration of flesh, his insistence on Christianity as a social bond that requires works: all these smack not of Puritanism but of Catholicism. Although the condemnation of idolatry was usually a Protestant concern, Milton’s condemnation fits more comfortably within the self-criticism that Catholicism traditionally allowed (one thinks, for instance, of Chaucer’s “Pardoner’s Tale”) than in a Protestant ideology that denies real value to anything material. My point, of course, is not to argue that Milton was *really* a Catholic - some of these points make at least as much sense if one thinks of him as an Arminian. Rather I am attempting to complicate a narrative of Early Modern theology often told as a history of two or three party lines, proliferating, perhaps into a dozens or so more in the seventeenth century. Such a narrative is useful in telling a history of theological debate that very often did, I think, depend upon building official theologies and differentiating one’s own party from the heresies that rivals exposed when they differentiated *their* theology from that of *their* rivals. Official constructions of the sort surely do become powerful in a Christian society that, at least in theory, requires everyone to take sides. But I wonder how strongly these rigidly differentiated theologies determined ideology, particularly in the wake of the radical political upheaval of the English Revolution. Milton’s own idiosyncratic theology, I would suggest, was

grounded as much in a radical political critique as it was in traditional theological arguments – indeed that for Milton, to do otherwise would have been to treat religion as a “dividual movable.” For Milton, a materialist theology entailed a concern for the social relationships present in the world. From the perspective of a modern atheist (my own, as it happens), to posit a god is to mystify material conditions, but, taken on its own assumption of a material Christ, *Paradise Lost* exposes earthly hierarchies and insists instead both on equality both of rank and of material means.