

## Crucifixion Imagery in *Paradise Lost*

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Milton in *Paradise Lost* has appeared to avoid the subject of the Crucifixion because he includes only a brief, orthodox account of the “cursed death . . . shameful and accurst” of Jesus (12.406, 413).<sup>1</sup> Michael even metaphorically reassigns this crucifixion to Adam’s—and God’s—enemies: “But to the Cross he nails thy Enemies . . . and the sins / Of all mankind” (12.415-18). This, however, is much more than terse restatement of Christian dogma. It points to Milton’s use of Crucifixion imagery to characterize the devils’ punishment in Books 1 and 10. I will comment on this imagery in the following fourteen sections.

### I.

Him the Almighty Power  
Hurl’d headlong flaming from th’Ethereal Sky  
With hideous ruin and combustion down  
To bottomless perdition, there to dwell  
In Adamantine Chains and penal Fire,  
Who durst defy th’ Omnipotent to Arms.  
Nine times the Space that measures Day and Night  
To mortal men, hee with his horrid crew  
Lay vanquisht . . . (1.44-52)

Jesus was crucified at Golgotha, which according to tradition was where the Tree of Knowledge grew, where Eve was tempted and Adam was buried.<sup>2</sup> Milton suggests all of these traditions by describing Satan as bound with “Adamantine Chains” (1.47). The devils’ violent pitching from Heaven suggests another Crucifixion event, often represented in mystery plays, such as *The Wakefield Crucifixion*: Jesus cast down onto his cross and nailed,

like the devils, “prone” (*PL* 1.192).<sup>3</sup> This amplification also is evident in the statement that the devils are being tormented for “nine times the space that measures Day and Night” (1.50), which compares with the death of Jesus in the ninth hour (Matthew 27:45; Mark 15:33-34; Luke 23:44). In accord with Mosaic law, Jesus is not permitted to “remain all night upon the tree” (Deut. 21:23). Neither is Satan allowed to remain on the fiery lake, as the same dull twilight extends through “the space” that would have measured night and day.

## II.

No light, but rather darkness visible  
 Serv'd only to discover sights of woe,  
 Regions of sorrow, doleful shades, where peace  
 And rest can never dwell, hope never comes  
 That comes to all; but torture without end  
 Still urges, and a fiery Deluge, fed  
 With ever-burning Sulphur unconsum'd:  
 Such place Eternal Justice had prepar'd  
 For those rebellious . . . . (1.63-71)

“Darkness visible,” rather than darkened visibility, continues the parody of light. It emulates the “darkness over all the earth until the ninth hour” during Jesus’ crucifixion (Luke 23:44-45). Yet Satan does not merely perish under an obscured sun—he is an eclipsed, punned sun (1.594-99). Golgotha (“a place of a Skull” [Matt. 27:33]) supposedly resembled a skull and was the burial place of skulls (including Adam’s). Hell’s “regions of sorrow” are similarly dismal, “a universe of death” (2.622). The “torture” that the devils receive here is the punishment for their “rebelliousness,” for provoking Heaven’s king, which recalls that Jesus was crucified for challenging the princes of this world. Satan is the instigator of “fraud” under the guise of “revolt” in Heaven (*PL* 7.143-44, 1.33). Satan will repeat this pattern on earth as the “first Grand Thief” (*PL* 4.188) and as the “Thief of Paradise” (*PR* 4.604). Appropriately, Milton characterizes his punishment in terms of crucifixion, which was “the death penalty for ‘robbers’ . . . and for martyrs.”<sup>4</sup>

## III.

If thou beest hee; But O how fall'n! how chang'd

. . .

Thus Satan talking to his nearest Mate  
 With Head up-lift above the wave, and Eyes  
 That sparkling blaz'd, his other Parts besides  
 Prone on the Flood, extended long and large  
 Lay floating many a rood . . . (1.84, 192-96)

Satan's first words suggest that the devils have undergone a "torture" similar to that which leaves the crucified Jesus unrecognizable (John 20:14-15). Milton, in his most obvious use of crucifixion imagery, uses "rood" to characterize the devils' suffering. A crucial detail of this description reiterates that Satan is immobilized "With Head up-lift above the wave" (1.193). This painful position was omnipresent in Medieval and Renaissance representations of the Crucifixion. These representations, such as in *The York Mystery Plays*, were based on Matthew 8:20, often cited as Jesus' prophecy of the crucifixion:

For foxes their dens have they,  
 Birds have their nests to pay,  
 But the son of man this day  
 Has nought his head on for to rest. (192-95)<sup>5</sup>

Psalm 110:7 is often cited as a prophecy of this torture: "He shall drink of the brook in the way; therefore shall he lift up the head." This Psalm often was paired with Psalm 69:1-3: "Save me, O God; for the waters are come in unto my soul. I sink in deep mire, where there is no standing, where the floods overflow me. I am weary of my crying; my throat is dried: mine eyes fail while I wait for my God." These psalms were read as a prophecy of Jesus being cast into the "foul pool" of Cedron (or Kidron) on his way to the cross.<sup>6</sup> *Cedron* literally translates as "the 'turbid' stream" or the "shady" and "black brook."<sup>7</sup> Milton's Hell is more fire than dirt ("stench and smoke" [1.237]), but the "dismal Situation waste and wild, / A Dungeon horrible" (1.60-61) clearly retains the tradition of Hell's polluted waters: As Edward Taylor writes in his "78. Meditation. Zech. 9.11. By the Blood of thy Covenant I have sent forth thy Prisoners out of the Pit

wherein is no water": "This Pit indeed's Sins Filthy Dungeon State, / No water's in't, but filth, and mire, Sins juyce" (13-14).<sup>8</sup>

Finally in relation to this passage, this self-proclaimed "Son of God," like Jesus, is seemingly abandoned by his Father. Satan, however, succumbs to the temptation with which Jesus was taunted: to prove that he is Messiah-King-Son of God by saving himself from the cross (Matt. 27:38-44, Mark 15:29-32, Luke 23:35-38). He will decide to substantiate his royal claims by escaping his cross and renewing the conflict. His first step in this direction is to encourage his first auditor in a parody of Jesus' encouragement of the sympathetic thief (Milton's focusing on two figures in this scene implies two thieves and no Messiah). Satan tells his fellow sufferer to flee the ignominy of his "crucifixion." He promises him not a paradise attained by faithful endurance but a "dreary Plain" gained by escape (1.180). Later, of course, he adds promises of paradise (re)-gained.

#### IV.

. . . or that Sea-beast

*Leviathan*, which God of all his works  
Created hugest that swim in th' Ocean stream:  
Him haply slumb'ring on the *Norway* foam  
The Pilot of some small night-founder'd Skiff,  
Deeming some Island, oft, as Seamen tell,  
With fixed Anchor in his scaly rind  
Moors by his side under the Lee . . . (1.200-207)

The cross often was identified with an anchor, as in Donne's "To Mr. George Herbert, with my Seal, of the Anchor and Christ," a Latin poem published with his *Workes* (1650). Donne writes that the "Crosse grows an Anchor too. / But he that makes our Crosses Anchors thus, / Is Christ, who there is crucifi'd for us" (8-10).<sup>9</sup> Milton suggests hope, as represented by Crucifixion, imperiously stuck onto Satan—by a Pilot/Pilate no less. The suggestion of crucifixion is enhanced by Milton's scriptural sources for this description: "In that day the Lord with his sore and great and strong sword shall punish leviathan the piercing serpent" (Isa. 27:1); "Canst thou draw out leviathan with an hook? or his tongue with a cord which

thou lettest down? Canst thou put an hook into his nose? or bore his jaw through with a thorn?" (Job 41:1-2). In the first scripture, leviathan-Satan is a serpent, the implications of which will be discussed below. In regard to the second scripture, Milton's transformation of the crocodile/sea-monster into a whale invites a comparison of Satan's predicament to the swallowing of Jonah, which was read as a type of the death and resurrection of Jesus (Matt. 12:38-41).<sup>10</sup>

## V.

His spear, to equal which the tallest Pine  
Hewn on *Norwegian* hills, to be the Mast  
Of some great Ammiral, were but a wand;  
. . . (1.292-94)

Masts were commonly compared to crosses: "Swimme, and at every stroake, thou art thy Crosse; / The Mast and yard make one, where seas do toss" (Donne, "The Crosse" 19-20). Spurning his tortuous chains, Satan's wielding his spear/mast/cross suggests a comparison to the obedient, passive Jesus, "King of the Jews," being mocked with a sceptre (Matt. 27:29, Mark 15:17-19). Flourishing his spear/mast/cross, Satan perverts the Christian tradition of the cross as a trophy: "Cross was a triumph; it was a trophy of distinction."<sup>11</sup>

## VI.

They heard, and were abasht, and up they sprung  
Upon the wing; as when men wont to watch  
On duty, sleeping found by whom they dread,  
Rouse and bestir themselves ere well awake. (1.331-34)

Milton's metaphor echoes biblical warnings to watch for the coming of Christ. It similarly suggests that Satan uses his cross/sceptre/spear (when not using it as crutch [1.295-97]) to conduct his own version of sleepers awake. The deathlike angels who once slept on "th' oblivious Pool" (1.266),

"the sleepy drench / Of that forgetful Lake" (2.73-74), hectically respond to the alarm of Satan's call and the direction of his "uplifted Spear" (1.347). This massive re-animation mimics Jesus' death cry raising the sleeping dead: ". . . now by a voice He raised them, His body continuing up there, on the cross."<sup>12</sup> It also parodies the circumstances set forth in Calvin's commentary on John 18:5:

We may infer from this how dreadful and alarming to the wicked the voice of Christ will be, when he shall ascend his throne to judge the world . . . his majesty, so far as outward appearance was concerned, was utterly gone; and yet when he utters but a single word, his armed and courageous enemies fall down.<sup>13</sup>

Significantly, it is Satan's followers (adorers [PL 2.477-99]) who fear the sound of his voice. This contrast is evident in other ways. When Jesus' disciples are "drowned in despondency, as not to have any sense even of His presence," he "doth not awake and rebuke them again, lest He should smite them that were already smitten."<sup>14</sup> Satan actively involves his followers in his further ruin and agony; and he actually calls the "legions" (PL 1.299-301) of angels that Jesus refused to call (Matthew 26:53). The uplifting of banners and "A Forest huge of Spears" (PL 1.547) indicates that these devils too, in rejecting their punishments, have transformed their crosses into satanic "Trophies" (1.539). Not only does each devil carry a spear/tree/cross, but Milton actually compares the devils to trees, "As when Heaven's Fire / Hath scath'd the Forest Oaks, or Mountain Pines" (1.612-13); and, in the famous simile, Milton compares them to fallen leaves (1.301-05).<sup>15</sup> This suggests that these charred tree-devils have rejected "ingrafting in Christ," effected by baptism and often represented by tree metaphor (Romans 11:17).<sup>16</sup> The military imagery suggests that the devils have become their own Roman guard, which has become legion.

## VII.

As when the potent Rod  
Of Amram's Son in Egypt's evil day  
Wav'd round the Coast, up call'd a pitchy cloud  
Of Locusts, . . . (1.338-41)

Developing the analogy between the devils on Hell's lake and Pharaoh's army in the Red Sea (1.304-11), Milton compares Satan's "uplifted Spear" (1.347) to "the potent Rod / Of Amram's Son" (338-39). This highlights another connection between the devils' punishments and the Crucifixion. The Crossing of the Red Sea often was linked with the Passion, and the emphasis on "rod" tends to interlace the stripes of the Passion, the punishment of the devils, and the "scourging" of Pharaoh.<sup>17</sup> The Son's driving of the devils out of Heaven repeatedly is characterized as scourging—or "custody severe, / And stripes" (2.333-34), as Beëlzebub, relying on previous experience, forecasts the devils' "arbitrary punishment" in Hell. Abdiel had warned Satan that God had turned his "Golden Sceptre" into "an Iron Rod to bruise and break" him (5.886-87). The scourging implications of "Rod" are developed more fully when the Son "full of wrath" (6.826) drives the devils from Heaven. The Son is described as "in his right hand / Grasping ten thousand Thunders, which he sent / Before him" (6.835-37), working as an electric whip, "Among th' accurst, that wither'd all thir strength, / And of their wonted vigor left them drain'd, / Exhausted, spiritless, afflicted, fall'n" (6.850-58). This vividly resembles the Son's own exhausting march to Golgotha. Gabriel later threatens Satan—apprehended in another paradise—with scourging for escaping Hell (providing an appropriate retort to Beëlzebub's admonition that the devils will receive "stripes" for remaining in Hell): "So judge thou still, presumptuous, till the wrath, / Which thou incurr'st by flying, meet thy flight / Sevenfold, and scourge that wisdom back to Hell" (4.912-14).<sup>18</sup>

Scourging also is apparent in the only other threat of returning Satan to Hell. Death, insisting that he is Hell's "King . . . / King and Lord," menaces Satan, "Back to thy punishment, / False fugitive, and to thy speed add wings, / Lest with a whip of Scorpions I pursue / Thy ling'ring" (2.698-702). Milton here alludes to Jesus being beaten with a whip called a scorpion.<sup>19</sup> His source is Rheoboam's threat in I Kings 12:11: "My father hath chastised you with whips, but I will chastise you with scorpions"<sup>20</sup>: "This saying is explained by the Targum and Syriac as meaning 'scourges,' probably correctly. The Romans used a scourge made of a long bag of leather filled tightly with sand and studded with spikes and called this 'the scorpion.'"<sup>21</sup> Within the context of the Crucifixion, this definition of

“scorpion” is more aptly read in context with Pilate rather than with Rheoboam.

The comparison of Satan’s directing “uplifted Spear” to the rod of Moses, together with the comparison of the devils in the flood to Pharaoh’s “*Memphian Chivalry*,” whom the “waves o’erthrew” (1.306-07), evokes baptism and its connection with the Passion:

The safe passage of the chyldren of Israel thorow the red sea, and all the power of Pharao drowned in the same, sygnifieth mankynd passyng oute of the dyuels daunger, thorowe the water of baptism, the sacrament takyng his force of the red bloud of Christ that he shed upon hys bytter passion, and all the diuels power vsurped vppon vs before, and laboryng to keepe vs styll, drowned and destroyed in the water of baptisme, and the red bloode of Christes passion.<sup>22</sup>

As suggested here, the baptismal blood of Jesus sometimes was represented as a flood flowing from his pierced side.<sup>23</sup> This second flood, instead of extinguishing mankind, redeemed it and extinguished the devils. The blood’s healing properties were celebrated in the Grail narratives, and it was seen as the source for the sacraments of baptism and the Eucharist.<sup>24</sup>

Milton himself writes in *De Doctrina Christiana* that “the type of Baptism, before the Mosaic law, was Noah’s Ark.”<sup>25</sup> The floating Satan echoes this patristic identification of the cross as a ship, and this ship as Noah’s Ark (Old Testament) or the Church (New Testament) in which alone the faithful could withstand the “tempests of temptation.”<sup>26</sup> As Donne writes in “A Hymne to Christ, at the Authors last going into Germany”:

In what torne ship soever I embarke,  
That ship shall be my embleme of thy Arke;  
What sea soever swallow mee, that flood  
Shall be to mee an embleme of thy blood. (1-4)

The baptismal blood that flowed from the side of Jesus revived the Church that awaited Jesus as his bride—as Eve awaited Adam—at his opened side. At Satan’s opened side are “the universal [and punned] Host” (1.541), “welt’ring” (1.78) on the burning lake. In addition to “toss about on waves,” this verb means, “to wither,” which recalls the scourging that “wither’d all their strength.” “Welter” also can denote “to roll or lie prostrate (*in*

one's blood); hence (hyperbolically) to be soaked with blood and gore."<sup>27</sup> The lake of hell, in contrast with the healing, cleansing blood of Jesus, is the tainted, tainting blood of Satan. The devils are described as death-like in this "flood" (1.239, 312, 324). Satan himself withers in this lake, soaked and mocked in his purple robe (his blood), as Jesus was often represented.<sup>28</sup>

Though primarily focusing on the negative aspects of Hell's liquid, Milton also suggests an identification of the fiery lake with the holy waters of baptism (a baptism of fire, no less). As Taylor declares, the "Covenantall blood. / Which when it touches, oh! the happy Cry! / The doores fly ope. Now jayle's Deliverir" ("*78 Meditation*" 22-24). This connection between the burning lake and the waters of baptism suggests that stiff-necked Satan begins his mission to destroy mankind with a perversion of the event that begins the ministry of Jesus to save it. Milton develops this point in a number of ways that evoke baptism "as a symbol for Christ's painful life, his death and his burial, in which he was, so to speak, immersed for a time."<sup>29</sup> Jesus himself characterized his crucifixion as a baptism: "But I have a baptism to be baptized with; and how am I straitened til it be accomplished" (Luke 12:50; also Mark 11:38). Milton cites these verses, and 1 Cor. 12:13, Gal. 3:27, Rom. 6:3, Col. 2:12, to support his belief that those who are baptized must be completely immersed in water:

AT BAPTISM THE BODIES OF BELIEVERS WHO PLEDGE THEMSELVES TO PURITY OF LIFE ARE IMMERSSED IN RUNNING WATER. THIS IS TO SIGNIFY OUR REGENERATION THROUGH THE HOLY SPIRIT AND ALSO OUR UNION WITH CHRIST THROUGH HIS DEATH, BURIAL AND RESURRECTION.<sup>30</sup>

Satan founders in a perverse baptism or refusal of baptism. Chrysostom had written that "as we easily dip and lift our heads again, so He [Jesus] also easily died and rose again when He willed, or rather much more easily, though He tarried the three days for the dispensation of a certain mystery."<sup>31</sup> Satan scorns to dip his head. He is one of those who has "counted the blood of the covenant, by which he was sanctified, an unholy thing, and has scorned the spirit of grace; II Pet. ii. 1; even denying the Lord who bought them, and bringing swift destruction upon themselves."<sup>32</sup>

## VIII.

Rous'd from the slumber on that fiery Couch  
At thir great Emperor's call . . . (1.377-78)

Satan had taunted the devils that continued to endure their "torture" (1.67) with the possibility that the Son's angels would "with linked Thunderbolts / Transfix" these docile devils to the "bottom" of their "Gulf" (1.328-29)—such as in the manner of Caiaphas in Canto 23 of *Inferno*. The devils are then "Rous'd from the slumber on that fiery Couch" (1.377). This description ironically alludes to Ambrose's words on those who refuse Jesus as the Messiah. These creatures pollute, rather than rest on, the "paternal couch" of the cross:

Rather, let them do penance for their offenses, for it was a hard people that went up to its father's bed and polluted a holy couch. That is, it fastened the flesh of our Lord Jesus, our Creator, to the gibbet of the cross, on which His saints rest with the refreshment of salvation as if on a kind of bed and paternal couch.<sup>33</sup>

Prompted by Satan's taunts as well as his "miracle" of escape, the devils similarly spurn the baptism of the Lord and the "resting place" of their crosses. Instead, the devils are "baptized" in Satan's "blood," becoming his "church."<sup>34</sup>

## IX.

Then straight commands that at the warlike sound  
Of Trumpets loud and Clarions be uprear'd  
His mighty Standard; that proud honor claim'd  
Azazel at his right, a Cherub tall:  
. . . (1.531-34)

The reasons for this puzzling choice for standard-bearer become clearer within the context of the Crucifixion.<sup>35</sup> Jesus often was identified with the scapegoat of the Day of Atonement: "And the goat shall bear upon him all their iniquities unto a land not inhabited; and he shall let go the goat in the wilderness" (Lev. 16:22); and "in Lev. xvi, 20, Azazel is the word

signifying the scapegoat which annually carried the sins of Israel into the wilderness."<sup>36</sup> Milton explicitly compares the devils to "a Herd / Of Goats" (6.856-57), scourged from Heaven to their crucifixion in the "land not inhabited" of Hell. This identification also suggests the second of the two goats used to expiate sin, the sacrificial goat of the Day of Atonement, which was distinguished from Azazel by casting lots. This goat's blood was sprinkled "within the veil" of the Ark (Lev. 16:14-15). Echoing Hebrews 10.4, Michael later comments on this as a type of the Crucifixion when he discusses "those shadowy expiations weak, / The blood of Bulls and Goats" (12.291-92).

### X.

At which the universal Host upsent  
 A shout that tore Hell's Concave, and beyond  
 Frighted the Reign of *Chaos* and old Night.  
 All in a moment through the gloom were seen  
 Ten thousand Banners rise into the Air. (1.541-45)

The revived beast-devils' first noise after their release from their crosses parodies the last shout of Jesus on his cross (which, again, was often interpreted as raising the dead):

The rest said, Let be, let us see whether Elias will come to save him. Jesus, when he had cried again with a loud voice, yielded the ghost. And, behold, the veil of the temple was rent in twain from the top to the bottom; and the earth did quake, and the rocks rent. And the graves were opened; and many bodies of the saints which slept arose. (Matthew 27:49-52)

Milton comments on this episode: "During the earthquake (which was on the same day, not three days after, as is commonly believed) the graves were opened and the dead arose and came out . . . they eventually entered the holy city, after the resurrection of Christ."<sup>37</sup> These events convince the bystanders that "truly this was the Son of God" (Matt. 27:54). The epic events, marking the revival of the devils, support the claims that the devils are still "Sons of God." To support this point, Milton alludes ironically

to Ezekiel 11:22-23, verses that were interpreted by Church Fathers as prophecies of the tearing of the temple veil: "Then did the cherubims lift up their wings, and the wheels beside them; and the glory of the God of Israel was over them above. And the glory of the Lord went up from the midst of the city, and stood upon the mountain which is on the east side of the city": "Eusebius, St. Jerome, and others report, that with this earthquake at the Passion, the doors of the Temple flew open, and that the tutelar angels were heard to cry, 'Let us remove from this place.'"<sup>38</sup>

The earthquake and the opening of the graves often were linked with the Harrowing of Hell. Though incorporated into the Apostles' Creed, this event has scant New Testament support. Milton, who believed that Jesus was completely dead for three days, calls this episode the source of "that peevish controversy about Christ's descent into hell."<sup>39</sup> However, Milton's belief in the spurious nature of this episode—as perhaps with the other patristic traditions concerning crucifixion—would have rendered it more appropriate for characterizing Satan in his role as a false messiah.

In 1 Peter 3:19-21, the evangelist describes the Harrowing of Hell:

By which also he [Jesus] went and preached unto the spirits in prison. Which sometime were disobedient, when once the long-suffering of God waited in the days of Noah, while the ark was a preparing, wherein few, that is, eight souls were saved by water. The like figure whereunto even baptism doth also now save us . . . .

In addition to highlighting the connection between baptism, crucifixion, and Noah's Ark, this verse suggests that Jesus baptized those whom he freed from Hell. Satan had conducted his own "baptism" of the devils with his spear-mast-cross in "thir Prison ordained / In utter darkness" (1.71-72), and then preached his own gospel of escape to the "captive multitude" of "This place our dungeon" (2.323, 317) as Beëlzebub says in expositing Satan's plan "to open the blind eyes, to bring out the prisoners from the prison, and them that sit in darkness out of the prison house" (Isaiah 42.7).

Satan's predicament appears similarly parodic in relation to Isaiah 45.2-3, another scriptural source for the Harrowing of Hell:

I will go before thee, and make the crooked places straight: I will break in pieces the gates of brass, and cut in sunder the bars of iron: And I will give thee the treasures of darkness, and hidden riches of secret places, that thou mayst know that I, the Lord, which call thee by thy name, am the God of Israel.

This scripture stresses that salvation comes only through the Lord, and it provides an ironic context for Satan's rescue of the devils. He, not God, offers Eve a different treasure of darkness. That they may know that he is a messiah, Satan will ensure a straight way across chaos. The causeway is built by Sin and Death (as Satan dutifully reports to the faithful [10.472-74]), who guard the gates of Hell. Jesus' breaking these gates was a standard facet of accounts of his Harrowing of Hell. Of course, Jesus breaks into Hell, while Satan breaks out of it. Satan effects his escape by using the same means with which Christians were accused of "resurrecting" Jesus: the guards are bribed. To cap this parody, the bribe itself is the satanic equivalent of one of Jesus' miracles. Where Jesus feeds the five thousand with a few loaves and fishes, Satan will feed Death with two humans who will produce an entire race on which to feast.<sup>40</sup>

## XI.

At last as from a Cloud his fulgent head  
 And shape Star-bright appear'd, or brighter, clad  
 With what permissive glory since his fall  
 Was left him, or false glitter . . . (10.449-52)

After ten books of epic effort, Satan returns to complete the resurrection of his believers out of their grave/prison. Satan replicates his own resurrection by becoming invisible and then "Star-bright appear'd, or brighter" as he "Ascended his high Throne" of "regal lustre" (10.445-50). This parodies the Ascension of the Son as well as the invisibility of the Father that is caused by his excessive brightness (3.375-82).

## XII.

His Visage drawn he felt to sharp and spare,  
 His arms clung to his Ribs, his Legs entwining  
 Each other, till supplanted down he fell  
 A monstrous Serpent on his Belly prone,  
 Reluctant, but in vain: a greater power  
 Now rul'd him, punisht in the shape he sinn'd,  
 According to his doom: he would have spoke,  
 But hiss for hiss return'd with forked tongue  
 To forked tongue, for now were all transform'd  
 Alike, to Serpents . . . (10.511-20)

Believe, Satan says, and follow him into an everlasting life of "full bliss" (10.503), just as according to Christian tradition the spirits of the dead entered the "holy city" after the resurrection of Jesus.<sup>41</sup> The "Universe of death" (2.622) then is filled with a "universal hiss" (10.508). It then becomes clear that Satan has succeeded in making himself, and his faithful, a kind of "worm's meat": "One has Christ for his King; the other, sin and the devil; the food of one is Christ, of the other, that meat which decays and perishes; one has worms' meat for raiment, the other the Lord of angels."<sup>42</sup> In Book 9, Satan had willingly entangled himself with this form of death in his "foul descent" into "bestial slime" (9.163-65), a transformation that is not so much a parody of Jesus' incarnation as it is a parody of his death. Satan that "to the highth of Deity aspir'd (9.167) becomes a worm—another form of "bestial slime"—before he and his followers escape hell. In Book 10, Satan verges on permanent death. He has incurred the very thing that Jesus avoided: having a "waste of time / Resolve this Heavenly Figure into slime" (Sandys, *Christ's Passion* 5.107-08).

Satan's transformation into a snake fulfills only one part of his "doom" (10.175-81), as announced by the Son: "Upon thy belly grovelling thou shalt go," eating dust. The primary punishment of Satan is absent, the bruising of his head by the woman's seed; nor is there anything in the scene that represents enmity between man and Satan. Instead, the devils' "doom" also refers to their initial punishment (and the "fated" futility of attempting to avert it).

The serpent-encrusted tree and the hissing snake-pit of Hell also point to another frequently cited prophecy of the Crucifixion, Lam. 2:16: "All

thine enemies have opened their mouth against thee: they hiss and gnash the teeth: they say, We have swallowed her up: certainly this is the day that we looked for; we have found, we have seen it." The devils had "opened their mouth against" the Lord. Now, like Jesus before Pilate, they do not answer to the charges against them—though the devils "would have spoke" (10.517). Instead, they are forced wordlessly to mock themselves.

## XIII.

There stood  
 A Grove hard by, sprung up with this thir change,  
 His will who reigns above, to aggravate  
 Thir penance, laden with fair Fruit, like that  
 Which grew in Paradise, the bait of *Eve*  
 Us'd by the Tempter: on that prospect strange  
 Thir earnest eyes they fix'd, imagining  
 For one forbidden Tree a multitude  
 Now ris'n, to work them funder woe or shame;  
 Yet parcht with scalding thirst and hunger fierce,  
 Though to delude them sent, could not abstain,  
 But on they roll'd in heaps, and up the Trees  
 Climbing, sat thicker than the snaky locks  
 That curl'd *Megara*: greedily they pluck'd  
 The Fruitage fair to sight, like that which grew  
 Near the bituminous Lake where *Sodom* flam'd;  
 This more delusive, not the touch, but taste  
 Deceiv'd; they fondly thinking to allay  
 Thir appetite with gust, instead of Fruit  
 Chew'd bitter Ashes, which th' offended taste  
 With spattering noise rejected: oft they assay'd,  
 Hunger and thirst constraining, drugg'd as oft,  
 With hatefullest disrelish writh'd thir jaws  
 With soot and cinders fill'd . . . . (10.547-570)

"Ye serpents, ye generation of vipers, how can ye escape the damnation of hell?" (Matt. 23:33). Clearly, this generation cannot. To support this point, Milton develops the serpent imagery that was evident in his initial description of the crucified devils.<sup>43</sup> Stripped not merely of their clothes

but of their forms, the devils, once more hurled onto the hellish turf, are again forced to endure a punishment characterized with Crucifixion imagery. Milton describes the snakes as "up the Trees / Climbing" (10.558-59), which points to the representation—present in English literature from *Dream of the Rood* through Herbert ("The Sacrifice" 201-04)—of Jesus climbing onto the cross. This ascent suggests that the devils' transformation not only seconds Satan's entering into the serpent (*PL* 9.188) but his entering into Judas (Luke 22:3).

This mass of snake-dripping trees recalls Vida's description of Golgotha: ("Everywhere around it, bodies hung from tree trunks, the oozing gore blackening on them"; 5.479-80). Milton more explicitly connects these trees with the Crucifixion by identifying them with the Tree of Knowledge (10.550-55), often identified with the cross on which Jesus was crucified. Milton also compares these trees to those "which grew / Near the bituminous Lake where *Sodom* flam'd" (10.561-62). This links them again with their initial floating crosses on the "burning Lake" (1.210), their own dead sea. As George Sandys describes the Dead Sea in *Christ's Passion*, "In her profound / None are receiv'd, but float undrown'd" (1.239-40). Satan also again echoes the flood of blood from the side of Jesus as a source for the Eucharist. The blood of Satan, functioning as a literally dead sea, has borne its own dead sea fruit fed by the stagnant waters of that sea.

This scene also recalls Chrysostom's commentary on the power of the cross to compel serpents:

For we have, we surely have, spiritual charms, even the name of our Lord Jesus Christ and the might of the Cross. This charm will not only bring the serpent out of his lurking places, and cast him into the fire (Acts xxviii 5), but even wounds it healeth.<sup>44</sup>

Chrysostom's connection of serpents with healing points to another episode that informs the devils' plight. Jesus had prophesied his crucifixion: "And as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so must the son of man be lifted up" (John 3.14). According to Richard Hooker,

the serpent spoken of was first erected for the extraordinary and *miraculous cure* of the Israelites in the desert. This use having presently an end when the cause for which God ordained it was once removed, the thing itself they notwith-

standing kept for a monument of God's mercy, as in like consideration they did the pot of manna, the rod of Aaron, and the sword which David took from Goliath. In process of time they made of a monument of divine power a plain idol, they burnt incense before it contrary to the law of God, and did it the services of honour due unto God only. Which gross and grievous abuse continued until Ezechias restoring the purity of sound religion, destroyed utterly that which had been so long and so generally a snare unto them.<sup>45</sup>

Seeing the serpent had healed the Israelites who because of their "idolatry . . . were suffering extermination by serpents, except that in this case he [Moses] was exhibiting the Lord's cross on which the 'serpent' the devil was 'made a show of.'"<sup>46</sup> Satan, emerging from invisibility to be seen by, heal, and deliver the devils, is "'made a show of.'" The devils are "Sublime with expectation when to see / In Triumph issuing forth thir glorious Chief" (10.536-37), *sublime* indicating "uplifted."<sup>47</sup> When the uplifted Satan is seen, he does not heal the devils. Instead, they themselves are turned into snakes, "uplifted" as crucified and suffering serpents.

The devils' plight is rendered more dire since they are "parcht with scalding thirst" (10.556). In a stern reminder that Jewish law forbade drinking on the Day of Atonement, they are mocked with refreshment. Constrained to spit upon themselves, they enact a variation of the mocking of Jesus. Their becoming "drugg'd" by their partial ingestion (568), though it can mean "nauseated," also is based on the account in Mark 15:23 that the drink offered to, and refused by, Jesus contained a sedative.<sup>48</sup> This reference to the drugged drink again recalls the devils' initial suffering in Hell. Cast from Heaven, they "weltered" in the Cedronic mire of Hell. They withered on that "oblivious pool" (1.266), "benumb[ed]" in "the sleepy drench / Of that forgetful Lake" (2.73-74). "Drench"—in addition to representing a blood-soaked Satan—denotes a "soporific drink."<sup>49</sup>

The devils' hapless attempts to eat the fruit and drink the narcotic also evoke the response of Jesus to Peter, when he attempted to avert the Crucifixion: "the cup which my Father hath given me, shall I not drink it?" (John 18:11). It also alludes to Mark 10:38 (which Milton cites as identifying baptism with crucifixion). Denying James and John the right to sit beside him in glory, Jesus asks, "Ye know not what you ask: can ye drink of the cup that I drink of? and be baptized with the baptism that I am baptized with?"

The parodic aspect of the devils' plight is enhanced by Milton's allusions to Psalm 69 and Psalm 22, prophecies of the crucifixion. According to Matt. 27:46 and Mark 15:34, Jesus on the cross quotes the first line of Psalm 22. Psalm 22 portends the mocking of Jesus (Matt. 27:39, Mark 15:31), and the division of Jesus' clothes (Mark 15:24, Luke 23:34, John 19:24).<sup>50</sup> Psalm 22 is compellingly ironic within Milton's account of Satan's crucifixion: "But I am a worm, and no man" (6); "But thou art he who took me out of the womb [of Hell]" (9); "I am poured out like water" (14); "My strength is dried up like a potsherd; and my tongue cleaveth to my jaws; and thou hast brought me into the dust of death" (15); and "All they that be fat upon the earth shall eat and worship: all they that go down to the dust shall bow before him" (29).

These psalms also serve as a two-handed engine. Their description of the Crucifixion applies to Satan's torment, but the psalmist's imprecations upon enemies would seem to light more readily on the crucified devils of *Paradise Lost* rather than on the actual crucifiers of Jesus, whom he forgave. The characterization of the crucifiers of Jesus as bulls, lions, dogs, and unicorns (Psalm 22) backgrounds the beast imagery in the catalogue of devils in Book 1 of *Paradise Lost*. These devil-beasts are to be "blotted out of the book of the living," "darkened, that they see not," overtaken by God's "wrathful anger," and set to dwell in desolation (Psalm 69.23-28).

#### XIV.

Thus were they plagu'd  
 And worn with Famine long, and ceaseless hiss,  
 Till thir lost shape, permitted, they resum'd,  
 Yearly enjoin'd, some say, to undergo  
 This annual humbling . . . (10.572-76)

God, then, resurrects the "worm's meat" (unlike the Son, who resurrects himself with the Father's help).<sup>51</sup> God's effort seems as scornful as it is graceful: Satan's resurrection is quietly "permitted."<sup>52</sup> God in a single off-hand moment attains and demeans Satan's epic adventure at nothing less

than existence. It is reduced to an "annual humbling," an infernal Easter—or so "some say" (10.574-76).

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## NOTES

<sup>1</sup>In *De Doctrina Christiana*, Milton calls crucifixion "a supreme disgrace." Quoting Deut. 21:23, Milton writes that Jesus as "the hanged man is accursed in the sight of God, and the curse due to us was transferred to him, Gal. iii. 13, along with the horrifying awareness of divine anger being poured upon him, an awareness that led to that dying cry, Matt. xxvii. 46: *my God, my God, why have you forsaken me?*" (*The Complete Prose Works of John Milton*, gen. ed. Don Wolfe, vol. 6, *De Doctrina Christiana* [New Haven: Yale UP, 1973] 439). Crucifixion imagery would readily characterize the punishment of Satan since Satan is "accurst / Above all" (*PL* 10.175-76). Citations to Milton's prose will refer to this volume (*CPW*). Citations to Milton's poetry refer to *John Milton: Complete Poems and Major Prose*, ed. Merritt Y. Hughes (New York: Odyssey Press, 1957). References to scripture are to the King James Version of the Bible *The Holy Bible* (Oxford: OUP, n.d.). These citations, as well as other multiple citations to poems, will be included in the essay.

<sup>2</sup>Golgotha is "where the head of Adam was found, which gave the name to that mount; buried in that place where his bones might be sprinkled with the real Blood of our Saviour" (George Sandys, *The Poetical Works*, ed. Rev. Richard Hooper, vol. 2, *Christ's Passion* [1872; rpt. Darmstadt: Georg Olms, 1968] 481n). Also see *Calvin's Commentaries*, transl. Rev. William Pringle, vol. 18, *Commentary on the Gospel According to John* (1848; rpt. Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1979) 227n.

<sup>3</sup>"The Wakefield Crucifixion," *Medieval and Tudor Drama*, ed. John Gassner (New York: Bantam, 1963) 158.

<sup>4</sup>*Oxford Companion to the Bible*, 1993 ed., s.v. "Crucifixion."

<sup>5</sup>"The Death of Christ," *The York Mystery Plays*, ed. Richard Beadle and Pamela King (New York: Oxford UP, 1995).

<sup>6</sup>James H. Marrow, *Passion Iconography in Northern European Art of the Late Middle Ages and Early Renaissance: A Study of the Transformation of Sacred Metaphor into Descriptive Narrative* (Kortrijk: Van Ghemert Publishing Co., 1979) 104-09. For evidence of this tradition in England, Marrow cites Anna Jameson, who in turn cites Jeremy Taylor (*A History of Our Lord as Exemplified in Works of Art*, vol 2. [London: Longmans, 1890] 44).

<sup>7</sup>*Encyclopedic Dictionary of the Bible*, 1963 ed., s.v. "Cedron"; Calvin 190, 190n.

<sup>8</sup>*The Poems of Edward Taylor*, ed. Donald Stanford (New Haven: Yale UP, 1960).

<sup>9</sup>*The Poems of John Donne*, ed. H. J. C. Grierson (London: Oxford UP, 1933).

<sup>10</sup>The tempest that precipitated Jonah being thrown overboard also was compared to the Crucifixion, such as in Edward Taylor's "Meditation" on these verses.

<sup>11</sup>*Rufinus: A Commentary on the Apostles' Creed*, trans. and annotated by J. N. D. Kelly (London: Longmans, 1955) 48. Origen's commentary on the Book of John and St. Cyril's *The Catechetical Lectures* are listed as Rufinus' precedents (118n).

<sup>12</sup>Chrysostom, *A Select Library of the Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers of the Christian Church*, ed. Philip Schaff, American Edition, First Series, vol. 10, *Saint Chrysostom: Homilies on the Gospel of Matthew* (1888; rpt. Grand Rapids, MI: W. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1975) 521.

<sup>13</sup>*Calvin's Commentaries* 192.

<sup>14</sup>Chrysostom, *Homilies on the Gospel of Matthew* 498.

<sup>15</sup>The oak often was identified, as in Vida's *Christiad* 5.406-08, as the tree of the Cross (Marco Vida, *The Christiad*, ed. and transl. Gertrude Drake and Clarence Forbes [Carbondale: Southern Illinois Press, 1978]). In "The Passion" (26), Milton had praised Vida's epic.

<sup>16</sup>CPW 256; Timothy O'Keefe, *Milton and the Pauline Tradition: A Study of Theme and Symbol* (New York: Oxford UP, 1982) 226-27.

<sup>17</sup>Thomas More, for example, writes of "the rodde of God laying the lashes upon him [Pharaoh], yet after the rodde scant remoued, ever more his stubborn pride sprang into his hard hart" (*The Complete Works of Thomas More*, ed. Garry E. Haupt, vol. 13, *A Treatise Upon the Passion* [New Haven: Yale UP, 1976] 59).

<sup>18</sup>Satan's contemptuous "Know ye not mee? . . . Not to know me argues yourselves unknown" (4.828-30) also parodies the response of Jesus to Philip: "If ye had known me, ye should have known my Father also . . . Have I been so long time with you, and yet hast thou not known me, Philip?" (John 14:7-9).

<sup>19</sup>Marrow 136-37.

<sup>20</sup>*Paradise Lost*, 2nd ed., ed. Scott Elledge (New York: Norton, 1993) 52n.

<sup>21</sup>*The Interpreter's Bible*, vol. 3 (New York: Abingdon Press, 1952-57) 115.

<sup>22</sup>More 58.

<sup>23</sup>See for example Herbert, "Christ on the Cross" in his *Passio Discerpta (The Works of George Herbert)*, ed. F. E. Hutchinson [Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1941]; and Henry Vaughan's "Admission" 29-32 (Henry Vaughan, *The Complete Poems*, ed. Alan Rudrum [New Haven: Yale UP, 1976]).

<sup>24</sup>Augustine, *Works of Aurelius Augustine, Bishop of Hippo*, ed. Rev. Marcus Dods, vol. 11, *Lectures or Tractates on the Gospel According to John* (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1884) 517-18. Calvin comments, "I do not object to what Augustine says, that our sacraments have flowed from Christ's side" (*Calvin's Commentaries* 241).

<sup>25</sup>CPW 552.

<sup>26</sup>Augustine, *A Select Library of the Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers of the Christian Church*, ed. Philip Schaff, American Edition, First series, vol. 1, *St. Augustin: The Confessions and Letters of St. Augustin* (1886; rpt. Grand Rapids, MI: W. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1979) 52; *A Select Library of the Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers of the Christian Church*, ed. Philip Schaff, American Edition, First series, vol. 7, *St. Augustin: Homilies on the Gospel of John, Homilies on the First Epistle of John, Soliloquies* (1888; rpt. Grand Rapids, MI: W. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1974) 14; and *A Select Library of*

the *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers of the Christian Church*, ed. Philip Schaff, American Edition, First series, vol. 6, *St. Augustin: Sermon on the Mount, Harmony on the Gospels, Homilies on the Gospels* (1888; rpt. Grand Rapids, MI: W. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1979) 337.

<sup>27</sup>OED, s.v. "Welter."

<sup>28</sup>Isaiah 63:1-3; Herbert, "The Agonie" 7-12; Vaughan, "The Passion" 15-28.

<sup>29</sup>CPW 550.

<sup>30</sup>CPW 544, 550.

<sup>31</sup>Chrysostom comments while identifying baptism with the Crucifixion (*A Select Library of the Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers of the Christian Church*, ed. Philip Schaff, American Edition, First Series, vol. 14, *Saint Chrysostom: Homilies on the Gospel of St. John* [1889; rpt. Grand Rapids, MI: W. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1975] 89).

<sup>32</sup>CPW 447.

<sup>33</sup>Ambrose, *The Fathers of the Church*, trans. Michael McHugh, vol. 65, *St. Ambrose: Seven Exegetical Works* (Washington, D.C.: The Catholic U of America P, 1972) 246.

<sup>34</sup>A. C. Labriola discusses the saving power of Jesus' blood in relation to the Church and Adam ("The Aesthetics of Self-Diminution: Christian Iconography and *Paradise Lost*," *Milton Studies* 7 [1975]: 279-80).

<sup>35</sup>Harris Fletcher discusses the many questions presented by Milton's use of Azazel in *Milton's Rabbinical Reading* (Urbana: U of Illinois P, 1930) 279-300.

<sup>36</sup>Hughes 225n. John Crossan discusses the connection between the Crucifixion and the scapegoat in *The Cross That Spoke: The Origins of the Passion Narrative* (San Francisco: Harper and Row, 1988) 117-33.

<sup>37</sup>CPW 412.

<sup>38</sup>Sandys, *Christ's Passion* 484n.

<sup>39</sup>CPW 439.

<sup>40</sup>There are other aspects of the Crucifixion that characterize the devils' plight in the epic's first two books. The elaborate, mocking salutes to the devils recalls the "short summary," in three languages, placed on the cross of Jesus, an aspect included in nearly all accounts of the Crucifixion (*Calvin's Commentaries* 229). The militant activity of the devils echoes the response of the angels to the crucifixion of Jesus in *Vida's Christiad*, who arm and prepare to storm out the gates of Heaven to assist the Son (5.510-644). Where *Vida's* angels are constrained to remain within the gates by the Father, the devils insist on exiting the gates of Hell. Even Satan's defiant "Let it" (*PL* 9.173) is derived from traditions pertaining to Jesus. Nathanael Eaton, addressing "infernal powers," writes of the execution of Jesus, "He being ruined by you ruin'd you" ("On Good Friday" 10, *Sacred Poetry of the Seventeenth Century*, ed. Rev. R. Cattermole [1836; rpt. New York: Burt Franklin, 1969]).

<sup>41</sup>CPW 412.

<sup>42</sup>Chrysostom, *Homilies on the Gospel of John* 89.

<sup>43</sup>*The Poems of John Milton*, ed. John Carey and Alastair Fowler (London: Longman, 1968) 473n, 474n.

<sup>44</sup>*A Select Library of the Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers of the Christian Church*, ed. Phillip Schaff, American Edition, First Series, vol. 11, *Saint Chrysostom: Homilies on the Acts*

of the Apostles and the Epistle to the Romans (1889; rpt. Grand Rapids, MI: W. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1979) 392.

<sup>45</sup>The Works of Richard Hooker, ed. Rev. R. W. Church and F. Paget, 7th ed., vol. 2, *Laws of Ecclesiastical Polity* (Oxford: Clarendon P, 1888) 330. Hooker notes that this act of Ezechias (or Hezekiah) was often cited by Puritans in their attack on the "idolatry" of the crown.

<sup>46</sup>Tertullian, *The Ante-Nicene Fathers*, ed. Revs. Alexander Roberts and James Donaldson, American Edition, Revised edition, vol. 3, *An Answer to the Jews* (1888; rpt. Grand Rapids, MI: W. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1978) 166.

<sup>47</sup>Carey and Fowler, *The Poems of John Milton* 953n.

<sup>48</sup>Hughes notes "drugg'd" as "nauseated" (420n). The editors of *The Oxford Authors* similarly note, "Nauseated, a usage apparently originating with Milton" (*The Oxford Authors: John Milton*), ed. Stephen Orgel and Jonathan Goldberg [New York: Oxford UP, 1991] 911n).

<sup>49</sup>*The Oxford Authors: John Milton* 863n.

<sup>50</sup>See the commentary in *The New Oxford Annotated Bible with the Apocrypha*, expanded Revised Standard Edition (New York: Oxford UP, 1977) 1211n, 1237n, 1282n, 1314-15n.

<sup>51</sup>Milton's Arianism leads him at least partially to assign the Resurrection to the Father (*PL* 3.247-51; *CPW* 440-41). For an argument of the Son's self-resurrection, see Donne's sermon on Easter 1630 in *The Sermons of John Donne*, ed. Evelyn Simpson and George Potter, vol. 9 (Los Angeles: U of California P, 1958) 202-03.

<sup>52</sup>A similar line appears in *Paradise Regained* 1.494-96. Jesus tells Satan, "Thy coming hither, though I know thy scope, / I bid not or forbid; do as thou find'st / Permission from above; thou canst not more." Jon Lawry comments, "This speech allusively gives assent to the coming 'permitted' crucifixion" (*The Shadow of Heaven: Matter and Stance in Milton's Poetry* [Ithaca: Cornell UP, 1968] 316).