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Natural Images of Death and Rebirth, and Pastoral Longing, in Milton and Herbert

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This article is the sixth entry in a debate on "George Herbert and Nature" (http://www.connotations.de/debate/george-herbert-and-nature). If you feel inspired to write a response, please send it to editors@connotations.de.

Abstract
This essay discusses how various poems of Milton and Herbert use natural images of death and rebirth to reflect the spiritual condition of humanity. The depiction of nature in Milton's epic *Paradise Lost* ultimately foregrounds the spiritual condition of humanity as a whole, while Milton's elegy *Lycidas* uses nature to illustrate the spiritual rebirth of the poem's subject. By contrast, Herbert's lyric poems "Easter Wings," "Vertue," "Life," and "The Flower" portray nature in ways that draw attention to the spiritual state of each poem's autobiographical speaker. Both authors' poetry suggests that, in a fallen world, the ideal pastoral is lost in this life, leaving fallen humanity with a longing for that lost Paradise; through Christ's redemption, however, readers can know a spiritual redemption that looks forward to an eternal state greater than Eden.

Introduction

Themes traditionally associated with pastoral—loss of innocence and the longing to return to a state of innocence[1]—are integrated into images of nature at various places in John Milton's and George Herbert's poetry. For these authors, writing from an explicitly Christian perspective, nature, with its continual process of death and rebirth, another theme that can be associated with the pastoral,[2] reflects the spiritual

consequences of humanity's sin—consequences involving both humanity's original banishment from Eden and each individual's estrangement from God—and the subsequent redemption obtained by Christ's atoning death on the cross. Recalling Richard Hooker's assertion that "Nature […] is nothing else but God's instrument" (15), Milton and Herbert utilize humanity's relation to nature not as an end in itself but to reflect God's design for the salvation of the fallen race. Their uses of nature demonstrate that an earthly return to innocence can be effective only spiritually and morally, and only by virtue of belief in Christ's sacrificial redemption of humanity. The ideal pastoral as a literal place, like innocence itself, is lost in this life, but this loss is tempered by a spiritual reconciliation marking a yet-incomplete recovery of unfallen Eden that ultimately looks ahead to a Paradise greater than the Garden, a Paradise that fulfills and transcends the longing for the loss of humanity's first innocence and happiness in Eden. Milton's and Herbert's poems address spiritual death and rebirth on three levels: that of humanity as a whole, seen primarily in Milton's *Paradise Lost*; that of the individual's salvation, seen especially in Milton's *Lycidas* and Herbert's "Easter Wings" and "Vertue"; and that of the continuing spiritual progression of the individual believer, seen especially in Herbert's "Life" and "The Flower." In each of these poems, the authors portray nature in ways that parallel humanity's spiritual condition.[3]

Prelapsarian Humanity and Nature in *Paradise Lost*

In *Paradise Lost*, the sinless conditions of prelapsarian Adam and Eve are mirrored by unfallen vegetation, particularly the flowers that surround them. This image of nature's untainted beauty corresponds to the unflawed spiritual state of the first humans, and together Adam and Eve and their idyllic surroundings proclaim the perfection of God's handiwork, exemplifying "the Edenic imagery of the Christian pastoral tradition" (Potts 24).[4] The sense of oneness among creation's different

elements is evident in a scene from the couple's flowered bower, where Adam and Eve

> Lull'd by Nightengales imbracing slept,
> And on thir naked limbs the flow'ry roof
> Show'r'd Roses, which the Morn repair'd. (4.771-73)

The soft roses that cover their bodies accentuate the couple's innocence. Just as the couple's pure lovemaking is devoid of the lust that later results from their transgression, so too do the flowers exist without the sharp thorns that accompany their postlapsarian condition.[5] Indeed not long before Milton's text celebrates the couple's unfallen lovemaking, the narrator celebrates Eden's "Flow'rs of all hue, and without Thorn the Rose" (4.256).[6] The unblemished loveliness of the roses represents the natural innocence that flourishes before the Fall. The couple's sinlessness affords them the privilege to live in an uncorrupted world. In their prelapsarian state, Adam and Eve's loving sexual intimacy is accompanied by the roses' striking, harmless beauty.[7]

Flowers are later shown as instruments of praise that offer fragrant worship to their Maker in unison with the untarnished couple, shown during creation's morning hymn:

> Now whereas sacred Light began to dawn
> In *Eden* on the humid Flow'rs, that breath'd
> Thir morning incense, when all things that breath'd,
> From th' Earth's great Altar send up silent praise
> To the Creator, and his Nostrils fill
> With grateful Smell, forth came the human pair
> And join'd thir vocal Worship to the Choir
> Of Creatures wanting voice. (9.192-99)

Here, the flowers' pleasing odor and the humans' accompanying voices combine in a natural symphony to God.[8] The scene depicts a ritual that can be seen as a prelapsarian sacrifice. Absent, of course, are the elements of death and fiery consumption that surround later rituals which were prescribed in the Mosaic Law to atone for the sins of the people.[9]

Because the world is yet sinless, it is not necessary to destroy the flowers for their offering to be acceptable before God. In a sinful world, their scent does attempt to appease a God whose just wrath toward his people's transgressions must be propitiated by a blood sacrifice. Instead, the flowers are received as nature's pure thanksgiving to its benevolent Creator. Similarly, Adam and Eve's song, which complements the flowers' aroma, also demonstrates joyful praise, unencumbered by the sorrowful burden of repentance which attends postlapsarian burnt offerings. This simultaneously spoken and unspoken hymn exemplifies the harmonious relation between humanity and nature in a world untainted by death.[10]

Nature's Response to Human Sin

Even as Milton's epic portrays the exuberant and undefiled life of sinless humanity in relation to nature's gentle and magnificent beauty, so too does the poem portray human sinfulness as eliciting nature's newly blighted condition. A noteworthy early instance of nature's reaction to humanity's disobedience occurs when Eve returns to Adam just after she has eaten from the Tree of Knowledge.[11] As she describes her act, the wreath of flowers Adam carries undergoes a previously unknown transformation: "From his slack hand the Garland wreath'd for *Eve* / Down dropp'd, and all the faded Roses shed" (9.892-93). The decayed flowers' tragic relation to Eve is revealed by Adam, who sadly proclaims, "How art thou lost, how on a sudden lost, / Defac't, deflow'r'd, and now to Death devote?" (900-01). Here, the parallel conditions of humanity and nature are made explicit within the particular example of Eve and the flowers, an element of creation specifically associated with her throughout the poem.[12] The decay of the roses symbolizes death's entrance into the garden, with the faded flowers foreshadowing Eve's own inevitable demise. The scene thus reveals another result of Eve's transgression: the consequent disharmony between humanity

and nature. Just as Eve's disobedience to God's single prohibition corrupts both herself and nature, so too does it thwart the oneness she had enjoyed with her idyllic surroundings and with Adam, so recently celebrated in the above passages.

Redemptive Seed Imagery

Despite the tragic penalty of Adam and Eve's transgression, the condition of death to which fallen humanity and fallen nature are subjected is tempered by the hope of future redemption through the promised redemptive seed, Jesus Christ. The couple first hears of this seed in God's curse that the woman's "Seed shall bruise [the serpent's] head" (10.181). There is a certain dramatic irony in this situation, for Adam and Eve are unaware that the divine person who speaks to them is the Son, whose words anticipate his own eventual incarnation as the salvific seed of the woman. Significantly, the Son's role as humanity's savior is introduced to Adam and Eve as *seed,* a designation that is continually echoed throughout the poem's final three books.[13] And in Book 12, the archangel Michael explains to Adam that "by that Seed / Is meant thy great deliverer" (148-49), proceeding to tell him of the Son's great works, which will culminate when "the Earth / Shall all be paradise, far happier place / Than this of *Eden*, and far happier days" (463-65). When readers consider the intense metaphorical character of Milton's epic, the pastoral significance of the incarnate Son's being continually referred to as *seed* becomes evident. A seed can bring forth new life only by virtue of its own death and subsequent fruition in the earth.[14] The incarnate Son, specifically called "[t]he seed of Woman" (379; cf. Genesis 3:15), will, in his resurrection's victory over sin and death, ultimately rejuvenate humanity and nature alike, thus fulfilling and indeed transcending all pastoral longings for lost "innocence and happiness" (Poggioli 1) and a lost "golden age" (Alpers 437), but this rebirth will be preceded by his own death and burial. The Son's death is a prerequisite for the glories of the new earth which will transcend

the beauty of Eden. Moreover, it is humanity's death-initiating disobedience that elicits the incarnate Son's saving work, something that situates the natural images related to humanity's collective death and rebirth within a larger cosmic framework.

The full redemptive importance of *Paradise Lost*'s seed imagery is displayed when Michael informs Adam that the paradoxical quality of death allows the Son's triumph to also extend to all humanity. The angel says, "temporal death shall bruise the Victor's heel, / Or theirs whom he redeems, a death like sleep, / A gentle wafting to immortal Life" (12.433-35). As with Christ's resurrection and ascension, death must now precede humanity's ascent into Heaven. In humanity's present life, physical Paradise is lost. Through the Son's victory, however, death is the entry into a new, purer Paradise where sin may never enter. Through the image of *seed,* humanity is again granted unity with nature, for humanity shares the promise of rebirth and greater glory after inevitable decay. In employing the *seed* image, Milton displays the cyclical imagery that ties together the entire poem. The manifold regenerative qualities of Christ's seed are demonstrated in various ways as it redeems the various aspects of humanity tainted by the first couple's disobedience. Throughout this process of redemption, we see several manifestations of the paradoxical image of death's giving birth to life. Sinful and thus dead humanity ultimately brings forth the new life of Christ, the race's savior.

The Promised Seed and Redemptive Sexuality

The complete salvation achieved through Christ is accentuated by the specific rejuvenation of sexuality, and of womankind, through Eve. Milton depicts the necessary role that the fallen couple plays in humanity's redemption when, after the Fall's effects begin to manifest themselves, Eve suggests either suicide or perpetual sexual abstinence in order to spare her offspring the penalty of sin and death (see 10.974-1006). Adam, however, convinces his despairing wife that their lives and their

procreation are actually the means by which God will save them and their race. Adam reminds Eve of God's promise that her "Seed shall bruise / The Serpent's head" (1031-32), and that, without their reproductive efforts, Satan "Shall 'scape his punishment ordain'd, and wee / Instead shall double ours upon our heads" (1039-40). The couple's decision to live and multiply represents a kind of resurrection, for it signifies the coming of a new life, amid their new condition of death, that will ultimately conquer death itself.[15] The importance of this resolution is heightened when one considers the severity of Adam's statement: that, apart from this seed of Eve, Satan's full damnation would fall upon the couple themselves while Satan would escape with a lesser punishment. Upon their decision to procreate, however, their fallen condition gains a hopeful perspective. Indeed, even the Son of God's pronouncement upon Adam, "For dust thou art, and shalt to dust return" (10.208) may be seen in a positive light, for it is in this very dust that the seed of Christ finds its first planting.

The fact that God uses procreation as the means by which fallen humanity participates in redemption constitutes a justification of the sexual act itself. It is significant that the first positive command given to mankind in Scripture, "Be fruitful, and multiply" (Genesis 1:28), ultimately overcomes the consequence of humanity's disobedience to Scripture's first negative command: "But of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, thou shalt not eat of it: for in the day that thou eatest thereof thou shalt surely die" (Genesis 2:17). The sexual act thus allows mankind to participate in God's creative and regenerative process. Milton's view of sexuality in Eden thus stands in stark contrast to that espoused by Church fathers such as Gregory of Nyssa, Ambrose, and Jerome, who held that the sexual act itself was a result of Original Sin (see Brown 399). Milton's depiction of the lustful indulgences of the disobedient couple (see 9.1011-45) makes manifest the carnality that now accompanies their sexual expression. Nonetheless, the purity of their once-innocent lovemaking (see 4.720-74) shows Milton's conviction regarding the ultimate goodness of sexual intimacy.

These two scenes display Milton's clear distinction between humanity's initial transgression and its consequences. Milton portrays sexual

expression as a divinely given gift of great beauty, which, along with all other aspects of creation, is perverted by the Fall. Indeed, Adam and Eve's selfish and violent first post-transgression intercourse is disturbingly reminiscent of Death's rape of Sin (see 2.790-94). But despite the first couple's overtly fallen sexuality, God's choosing to use the couple's offspring for the eventual salvation of the race grants sexual intercourse a place of honor that ultimately surpasses its prelapsarian dignity. The complete regeneration of the sexual act is seen through the necessarily pure conception by the Holy Spirit within the Virgin, the ultimate place of fruition for Eve's redemptive seed. The fact that her seed brings about salvation for all of humanity carries with it a special redemption for Eve, and with her, womankind as a whole.

Satan's Perverse Nature Rhetoric and Eve's Seduction

While the final responsibility for humanity's fall rests on Adam, Eve's seduction by Satan, her subsequent instigation of her husband's transgression, and the heavy curse she must bear indicate Eve's own weighty culpability. It is through the weaker Eve that Satan concentrates his attack on God's newly created race. Satan begins this assault during his first visit to Eden when, spying the couple peacefully asleep, he works on the psyche of the unsuspecting woman. Milton shows him

> Squat like a Toad, close at the ear of *Eve*;
> Assaying her by his Devilish art to reach
> The Organs of her Fancy, and with them forge
> Illusions as he list, Phantasms and Dreams. (4.800-03)

In this obviously sexual image, Satan's deceit achieves entry into Eve's psyche through her ear. Edward Le Comte writes that the "venom" of Satan's words is "like semen, the seed of illicit thoughts" (78)—a demonic "seed" whose evil effects are ultimately reversed by the redemptive seed who is Christ, but will soon wreak destruction upon Eve and her offspring for millennia to come. Satan's words here impregnate her

with illusions of divine grandeur, which bring about vanity, rebellion, and finally death.

The adulterously perverse essence of this temptation is soon revealed by the divided loyalties it inspires in Eve toward both God and her husband. The first evidence of Satan's perverse rhetoric appears when Eve tells Adam the message of her nocturnal invader, who flatters her with idolatrous words:

> Heav'n wakes with all his eyes,
> Whom to behold but thee, Nature's desire
> In whose sights all things joy, with ravishment
> Attracted by thy beauty still to gaze. (5.44-47)

These words, by which Satan "woos [Eve] like a Cavalier and husband substitute" (Le Comte 78),[16] aim to turn Eve's attention from the creator God to herself, setting her beauty above all things, depicting nature in a perverse manner by suggesting that nature actually worships Eve as its greatest "joy" and "desire."

Satan's flattery of Eve aims to displace God as nature's subject of worship and thus inspires Eve to question his authority over nature, over her, and over relationship to nature. If nature's very being and value depend on Eve, why should any part of it be withheld from her? This usurpation of God's authority and perverse use of nature quickly translates into hints of infidelity when Eve in her dream beholds the Tree of Knowledge. Her previously undaunted submission to God's statutes is now challenged by the Satanic dream angel who, standing before Eve, again perversely depicts nature by addressing the tree like a lover: "O fair plant, said he, with fruit surcharg'd, / Deigns none to ease thy load and taste thy sweet, / Nor God, Nor Man; is Knowledge so despis'd?" (5.58-60). The temptation here is sexual, for "[t]he tree becomes an object of libidinous temptation" (Lieb 189).The tree, laden with "fruit surcharg'd," is an image of a pregnancy that awaits the act of birth that would "ease [its] load."[17] The idea that Eve could instigate this birth places her in an active role that differs sharply from the comparatively passive one she has been assigned by her Creator. The dream angel's

comment that God himself would despise knowledge by preventing humans from tasting the fruit slyly questions God's role as perfect Creator, for the suggestion that God lacks wisdom casts doubt upon his ability to properly oversee the fruit that holds all knowledge. God's apparent moral and intellectual shortcomings, combined with nature's alleged worship of Eve, makes plausible the notion that she merits the fruit over and above any of this deficient God's dubious prohibitions. From this perspective, Eve logically should pursue nature's wisdom through the fruit before her and eat it in imitation of her deceptive host (see 5.65-66), thus completing the illegitimate process of birth that Satan initiates in her dream.

Although Eve, both in her dream and in her retelling of the story to Adam, expresses repugnance for the angel's tasting, the deception that Satan has placed in her manifests itself when she suggests that Adam and she "divide [their] labors" (9.214) and separate from each other as they perform their respective duties in caring for the garden. This inclination to separate, which necessarily precedes her explicit disobedience, denies the interdependency that she and Adam share as two halves of a whole.[18] Adam's pleas that she "leave not the faithful side / That gave thee being" (9.265-66) and thus make herself vulnerable to transgression are countered by Eve's insistence that they may exist quite safely apart from each other. She says: "Let us not then suspect our happy State / Left so imperfect by the Maker wise, / As not secure to single or combin'd" (9.337-39). This dubious statement exhibits the maturation of Satan's adulterous seed, for it goes against God's plan for Adam and Eve's unity and mutual dependence, the notion that they should "enjoy" each other "[i]nseparably" (4.472, 473). Instead, she implies that such a lack of individual self-sufficiency would constitute God's creative imperfection. In saying this, she implicitly and unconsciously claims the preeminent position over nature to which the Satanic voice in her dream ascribed her, perhaps subtly questioning God's absolute authority. I do not argue that Eve before the Fall actively rebels against God; indeed, her continuing prelapsarian condition is sug-

gested when she declares to Adam that she separates from her acquiescent husband "With [his] permission," words the narrator says Eve speaks "yet submiss" (378, 377).[19] Nonetheless, Eve's "specious argument" (Cirillo 382) and her persistent agitation to separate indicates the dream's seductive influence, and her eventual eating from the interdicted tree marks the tragic consummation of the adulterous suggestions Satan offers in her dream.[20]

The Promised Redemptive Seed, Eve's Redemption, and the Fulfillment of Pastoral Longing

While the adulterous "seed" of Satan's dream-shaping words is instrumental to Eve's sin and humanity's fall, we see in the epic's later books how Milton's portrayal of the promised redemptive seed that is Christ is instrumental to the poem's depiction of humanity's and especially Eve's salvation. We may note that, even as humanity's general redemption is brought about by Christ, the "second Adam," so too does the special justification of Eve, the bearer of this divine "seed," depend upon her relation to Christ's earthly mother, the Virgin Mary, the ultimate bearer of the "seed of woman" whom Milton's narrator calls the "second *Eve*" (10.183).[21] This connection is established through Milton's use of the word "hail," Gabriel's salutation to Mary at the annunciation (Luke 1:28).[22] The poem's narrator uses this greeting while celebrating Adam and Eve's pure prelapsarian lovemaking, saying, "Hail wedded Love, mysterious Law, true source / Of human offspring, sole propriety / In Paradise of all things common else" (4.750-52). And the next morning, the angel Raphael greets Eve by saying, "Hail, Mother of Mankind," promising that her "fruitful Womb / Shall fill the World more numerous with [her] Sons" (5.388-89). By means of this recurrent salutation, a continuity is established between unfallen sexuality, the prophecy of Eve's offspring, and the divine impregnation of the Virgin Mary with the seed of redemption. Mary represents a recovery of Eve's former state as the sinless mother of mankind. She symbolizes the renewed purity of womankind, a purity that has been lost in Eve but

whose promise remains in the redemptive seed, passed down from Eve, through her descendants, arriving finally in Mary.

The Holy Spirit's miraculous impregnation of the Virgin does more than recapture Eden's guiltless love; it restores the promise of Eve's glorious motherhood, achieving a special cleansing for the first woman, whose purity was forfeited by her transgression. The notion that Eve's spiritual adultery is atoned for by Mary's impregnation is displayed symbolically in *Paradise Lost* with reference to Milton's portrayal of Satan's deception as entering through the ear of Eve. This image plays off "the medieval notion that Mary was impregnated by the Holy Ghost through her ear" (Svendsen 265). The Spirit's conception in Mary thus foils the deceit to which Eve has succumbed. Because of this, the Virgin is portrayed in a very real sense as redeeming Eve, for by submitting to the special favor that God shows her, she precipitates atonement for Eve's transgression.

This image of Eve's redemption through Mary is foregrounded further in Adam's conversation with Michael: After the archangel informs him of the "Anointed King *Messiah*" who has "A Virgin [as] his Mother" (12.359, 368), Adam experiences an epiphany regarding the promise God has made to the couple concerning the eventual defeat of Satan. Adam exclaims:

> now clear I understand
> What oft my steadiest thoughts have searcht in vain,
> Why our great expectation should be call'd
> The seed of Woman: Virgin Mother, Hail,
> High in the love of Heav'n, yet from my Loins
> Thou shalt proceed, and from thy Womb the Son
> Of God most High; So God with man unites. (12.376-82)

Perhaps Adam's exuberance over this realization, as well as his imperfect understanding of it, biases his perspective regarding the respective roles of the sexes in the eventual generation of the messiah. His emphasis on his own part in Christ's descent, which offers no specific mention of Eve as the first carrier of the "seed of Woman," fails to recognize the

transmission of the seed that exists from Eve through Mary. Nonetheless, Adam's proclamation implicitly asserts the fulfillment in Mary of God's promise to Eve that her seed would crush Satan. Both Eve's character and the female sex as a whole experience further rejuvenation in that, by way of her seed, womankind plays a special creative role in the Incarnation. The original promise, made directly to Eve, is finally realized in the second Eve, Mary. The male sex does play a constant part in this act of rebirth; he cannot, however, have a direct role in the virgin birth, the final and most important stage in this process of redemption. Because of this, his contribution to this redemptive process is ultimately secondary.[23] As Diane McColley perceptively notes, Eve "has the last [spoken] word in the poem" (217) when she tells Adam, "By mee the Promis'd Seed shall all restore" (12.623). These words embody Eve's proleptic identity with Christ's virgin mother and her redemptive seed.

Michael goes on to tell of the triumphs of "The Woman's seed" (12.543) who will, after his final glorification and victory over Satan, raise "New Heav'ns, new Earth, Ages of endless date / Founded in righteousness and peace and love, / To bring forth fruits of Joy and eternal Bliss" (12.547-51).[24] But these are the fruits of a paradise to come, fruits planted by the seed of Christ, which humanity will not fully experience again until the lost paradise of Eden is replaced by a literal paradise of much greater blessedness,[25] a promised future state that fulfills and indeed transcends pastoral longings for a lost golden age. In the meantime, however, believers who walk in faithful obedience may experience what the archangel calls the "paradise within" that is "happier far" (12.587) than Eden.[26]

Natural Pastoral Imagery and Life after Death in *Lycidas*

This notion of the "paradise within," and the individual salvation which is the portal to it, is expressed through the pastoral convention in Milton's elegy *Lycidas*—which commemorates the drowning of Milton's Cambridge classmate Edward King—and Herbert's lyric poem "Easter Wings." Within these works, the authors transition from the

broader vision of humanity's atonement to focus on the spiritual rebirth of their particular subjects. Published thirty years before *Paradise Lost*, *Lycidas* illustrates through natural pastoral convention the notion of individual life after death. In the poem's closing lines, the speaker compares the new life of the drowned youth to that of the sun. Like Lycidas, the sun "sinks [...] in the Ocean bed" but returns in splendor when it "anon repairs [its] drooping head, / And tricks [its] beams, and with new-spangled Ore, / Flames in the forehead of the morning sky" (168-71). In the same way, Lycidas, though "sunk low," is also "mounted high" (172); his spirit has risen from his grave to eternal life in heaven with "all the saints above" (178), and this is accomplished "Through the dear might of him that walk'd the waves" (173). By employing the complementary images of the rising morning star and that of Christ's divine authority over the very element which brought about the youth's death, Milton offers a tightly structured picture, on both the natural and supernatural levels, of the Christian pastoral theme of rebirth and regeneration.[27] The ascending brightness of the early-day sun coincides with the divine resurrection of the risen Jesus, serving as humanity's glimpse of God's pattern for spiritual redemption over death. The glimpse is an imperfect one, for the sun must descend again each evening, leaving the world in darkness.[28] Despite this natural event, the magnificent radiance of each sunrise is a convincing reminder of the "glory" (180) that awaits the faithful,[29] a glory which Lycidas, by means of and in imitation of his Savior, has come to attain.

Natural Images of Death and Rebirth for Humanity and the Individual in "Easter Wings"

While his approach to both *Lycidas* and *Paradise Lost* arguably limits the degree to which Milton makes truly personal the matters of rebirth and redemption, Herbert's lyric poems and their autobiographical speakers lend themselves readily to these matters of spiritual devotion. In "Easter Wings," Herbert depicts, through the parallel representations

of the poem's shaped stanzas, the relation between the salvation of humanity as a whole and that of the individual, as "the contracting and expanding lines mirror the rising of fallen humanity" (Hillier, "Send" 649). Each of the poem's two stanzas begins by addressing the respective fallen state of humanity and the speaker himself. The speaker's wretched condition awakens in him the desire to benefit from the salvation that Christ won for mankind by the act commemorated on Easter Sunday. The poem concludes with the speaker's glorious plea:

> With thee
> Let me combine,
> And feel this day thy victorie:
> For, if I imp my wing on thine,
> Affliction shall advance the flight in me. (16-20)

Here the speaker has made a specific decision to begin a new life in Christ. The words "this day" signify far more than an annual acknowledgment of Jesus's resurrection. They also refer to the actual day of the speaker's rebirth. Just as humanity's salvation was consummated with Christ's victory over death, so does the speaker's begin when he grafts himself to the risen savior—an action that demonstrates, as Chauncey Wood has observed, both the speaker's great "need" for Christ and his "salvation" (140).[30] In this sense, the date of conversion for any individual becomes a kind of Easter of its own, and an event as necessary to the salvation of the person in question as Christ's own resurrection.

The pastoral characteristics of "Easter Wings" involve the corresponding relationship between the spiritually decayed speaker-sinner and the natural world in which he resides.[31] Man's fall from innocence simultaneously corrupted his own moral perfection as well as the paradise God gave him to inhabit. Herbert foregrounds this notion of spoilage through the words and the configuration of the poem's opening lines:

> Lord, who createdst man in wealth and store,
> Though foolishly he lost the same,
> Decaying more and more
> Till he became
> Most poore: (1-5)

This steady disintegration of the human condition, which Herbert embodies in his shrinking stanza and which Herbert's speaker laments as he considers the loss of Eden, is countered by the upward soaring of the larks (8), whose songs celebrate the risen Christ's triumph over the consequences of humanity's sin and failure, allowing the speaker, if he becomes "duly imped with Christ's wing" (Rienstra 159), to spiritually identify with Christ's victory, over and against the decay of fallen man.[32] In this way, the concept of *felix culpa* becomes a theme of the poem, with the larks "singing a song of praise of and from a fortunate fall" (Poch 479). The paradoxical notion that humanity's original fall from innocence ultimately benefits humanity, for it brings about the majesty of Christ's sacrifice, gives this religious use of the pastoral an optimism not found in other forms of the genre. The Fall does, in fact, "further the flight" (10) for the speaker, for humanity's and nature's imperfections increase the power of God's grace for all mankind.

The second stanza, which specifically tells of the narrator's personal afflictions, emphasizes the Christian doctrine of the individual's need for redemption within the inclusive context of Christ's sacrifice for all humanity. Just as each person dwells apart from God's glory through his respective transgressions, so too must each person "combine" (17) with Christ's victory to experience reconciliation and the promise of a paradise to come. The individualization of "Easter Wings" is extended a step further because the concept of *felix culpa* is narrowed down into the context of the speaker's own transgressions. Even as the world's moral failings ultimately benefit humanity through Christ, so also do the speaker's sins result in a positive end, for they awaken in him his need for restoration.[33]

Herbert's above use of nature to illustrate the conversion process exemplifies his use of the earthly to reflect spiritual truths. Nonetheless, Herbert elsewhere clearly distinguishes between the temporal and the eternal, a distinction particularly important regarding nature, a creation so magnificent that many seventeenth-century English philosophers were accused of honoring it above or in place of God himself.[34] Herbert addresses this concern in "Vertue," a poem that endeavors to

place nature in the proper perspective amid the supernatural realities it is so often used to convey.

Natural Images of Death and Hope in "Vertue"

"Vertue," in its most fundamental sense, speaks of the temporary condition of all nature and contrasts this condition with the eternal life God grants the redeemed soul. The poem's repeated emphasis that all of nature eventually "must die" even as "a sweet and vertuous soul" (13), surrounded by such widespread expiration, "Then chiefly lives" (16), confronts this distinction in such a straightforward manner that on a first reading, "Vertue" appears deceptively simplistic. On a more intricate level, however, the poem explores the speaker's complex relation to and outlook on both humanity's earthly condition and its eternal destiny.

One aspect of "Vertue" that invites more thorough investigation is how each of the three natural subjects about which Herbert writes—and indeed regards as "source[s] of joy and wonder" (Crover 174)—engages in its own process of death and rebirth: the "Sweet day" (1) gives way to the night, but the night, having run its course, returns to day; the "Sweet rose" (5) inevitably decays into the "grave" that its "root" does "ever" inhabit (7), but the rose bush, in due time, brings forth new life from its own decay; and each year, "Sweet spring" "closes" (9, 11), giving way to less temperate climes, but each year the spring also returns at its proper time. Despite these processes of seemingly continual renewal, the assertion "all must die" (12) and the poem's suggestion that "the whole world" will "turn to coal" (15) indicate that nature itself will suffer death once and for all at the final conflagration,[35] a notion that reinforces both the implicit hopelessness of the pastoral longing for the happiness of a lost Eden and the important distinction between nature's temporal processes of regeneration and God's eternal plan of salvation.[36]

A different kind of distinction concerns how the poem's respective deaths occur. The deaths of the day and of spring are not caused by

corruption but are intrinsic within their very essence. Granted, nature's "fall" (3) instigates the destruction of all its aspects, but even apart from sin's contamination, both the day and the spring intrinsically go through periodic deaths. In stark contrast to this is the death of the rose, a process that continually consumes the flower throughout its life. This disparity is enhanced by the portrayals of the subjects themselves. The day is described as "cool," "calm," and "bright" (1); spring is compared to a box of sweets (10). The rose, however, exhibits an "angrie" (5) disposition that renders the rose "physically harmful" (Vendler 12), something demonstrated in the flower's violence against "the rash gazer" who must "wipe his eye" (6).[37] This surprising malice indicates not merely the fallen state of nature but also the destruction that accompanies it. We recall that, as a result of Eve's disobedience, Adam's garland of roses "faded" and "shed" (*Paradise Lost* 9.893) and also that, as a result of Adam's sin, the Earth brings forth "Thorns" (10.203)—a dimension of fallen nature that memorably accompanies the beautiful roses that are thus no longer fit to adorn a bower for naked lovers but which can easily scratch any "rash gazer" who comes too close to the rose, however "Sweet" its smell and appearance.

These varied depictions of nature, their final outcomes so different from that of the redeemed soul, ultimately refer back to humanity itself, for they reflect the equally complex nature of humankind. Herbert uses the subject of nature as a vehicle to investigate whether or not the soul, in its very essence, can in fact be "sweet and vertuous" (13). Eventually, the speaker reaches two conclusions on this matter—one temporal and one eternal. Obviously, his deep Christian faith prevents him from believing that humanity can, by means of its own virtue, somehow achieve salvation. Despite this, the speaker recognizes a certain "sweetness" even within fallen humanity that cannot be thoughtlessly discounted. Herbert's solution to this problem lies in his analogy to nature. Because humanity is God's most precious creation, the poet recognizes that mankind, even in an unredeemed state, does like the day possess an inherent and magnificent beauty. There is, however, humanity's

problem of sin. This condition resembles the rose's violent temperament, for both manifest themselves amid even the loveliest of appearances. This sinful condition makes problematic any good done by humanity, for it calls into question the purity of motivation for even the most virtuous act. And while this dilemma is evident in "Vertue," it does not, within the context of the poem, need to be fully explained. In the end, the magnitude of human sin in relation to humanity's natural beauty is unimportant, for truly "all must die." Like nature itself, each person has been marked by the fall and, upon death, his transcendental qualities or properties will perish also.

This being the case, the final stanza's "sweet and vertuous soul" (13), which, "Like season'd timber, never gives" (14), may be attained only by faith in Christ. Indeed, the "season'd timber" is "an unmistakable reference [...] to the cross as a synecdoche for the crucifixion and its consequences, a mercy which never fails or 'gives'" (McDonald 67). Such divinely bestowed virtue, unlike that of the natural man, will not perish when "the whole world turn[s] to coal" (15), but instead "Then chiefly lives" (16). The virtue given by Christ through his salvation is unique because it is free from sin and therefore eternal. Thus, in man, the distinction between the things of fallen nature—including the fallen nature of humanity—and those of God is made clear, for they are separated by their respective temporal and everlasting essences.

The attainment of eternal virtue in the redeemed soul does, in addition to the joys of heaven, impart to the faithful a fresh and new perspective regarding nature itself. We may note that, although the speaker maintains nature's eventual destruction as well as its inability to effect salvation, he chooses to focus on the splendid glory it does possess. The heavenly-minded speaker sees and loves earthly things for what they are, without ascribing to them an idolatrous supernatural glory. This perception allows him to enjoy nature in its appropriate context, free from any heretical delusions of its ultimate value that would, in the end, rob him of the joy of savoring nature for what it truly is: God's brilliant handiwork. In this way nature, by being placed in its proper position, is itself exalted as it could not be if it were blasphemously credited with divine attributes. The speaker's purified attitude

is contrasted with that of "the rash gazer," whose thorn-pricked eye represents the inevitable pain that humanity suffers when it chooses to impute to nature (or art, which the rose may also represent) a worth in and of itself that discounts its Creator. The flower's perpetual state of decay symbolizes the folly and the tragic consequence of such a view. Ironically, the rash gazer, who desires from nature such lofty spiritual enrichment, loses even the aesthetic delight the speaker receives in viewing the admittedly temporal day and spring.

Nature, Art, and Pastoral Longing Fulfilled in "Life"

The notion that a proper distinction between the temporal and the eternal will, in the end, give both greater value, is further investigated in Herbert's "Life."[38] The poem explores humanity's relation to nature and the supernatural by creating an analogy between the respective frailties of an artist's life and poetry, and a garland of flowers, depicting, writes Helen Vendler, "a series of dying falls" (130).[39] The poem begins, "I made a posie, while the day ran by" (1). Significantly, as the *Oxford English Dictionary* outlines, "posie" can mean either poetry—including "A collection of pleasant poetry"—or a "A small bunch of flowers,"[40] and both are clearly in view here. The speaker's initial pride, as well as his desire to achieve literary immortality, is disclosed within his claim "'Here [in his 'posie'] will I smell my remnant out, and tie / My life within this band'" (2-3). In these lines, the speaker also elevates his art to a place of almost dogmatic authority, for his words suggest that his poetry not only describes but is in fact the essence of life itself. The speaker-poet's ambition, however, is promptly thwarted, for his words, like the flowers he figuratively weaves, "wither in [his] hand" (6). Here, humanity's relationship with nature is shown to be one of mutual temporality. A flower, despite its great beauty, is quickly reduced to lifeless decay. So too is the life of an artist or any person, as well as any memorial he might create somehow to delay the arrival of the day when he will be utterly forgotten. That the poet's dream of some sort of self-

made eternal importance will be defeated by the hands of "time" (4) is hinted at even within the opening line, for his poem is written "while the day ran by." This is significant because, just as the flowers to which his poetry is compared are affected by the inevitable decay time brings about, so too will his poetry—his ostensible vehicle for immortality—begin to be forgotten as the day passes. Time is, in fact, unraveling the posie even as it is being formed, and the speaker's pastoral longing for the lost beauty of decayed nature is paralleled by his similar longing for permanence through an artistic creation that inevitably falls short of achieving such immortality.

Significantly, the force of time is not portrayed as an ominous reaper to be feared; rather, it is shown as gently reminding the poet of his inevitable mortality while simultaneously hinting at the joys of the afterlife. This notion is conveyed when the speaker tells how time made "my minde to smell my fatall day; / Yet sugring the suspicion" (11-12). It is by time's thoughtful rebuke that the speaker acquires a more realistic and ultimately triumphant view concerning his own life, both upon the fallen Earth and beyond. He likens himself to the "deare flowers"—which he now bids "Farewell"—which offered a sweet "smell or ornament" while they lived (13-14), and, upon their death, become a rejuvenating ingredient "for cures" (15). The poet no longer strives for the immortality of earthly fame. Rather, he desires that his life, however brief, be one of good fragrance, that his "sent be good" (17), presumably to God and humanity. This accomplished, a far greater eternal life than that brought about by literary achievement is ensured.[41] Thus, within "Life," "Herbert takes a lesson in faithfulness from below" (Dyck 280), for nature provides the poet with a model of glorious humility by which to pattern his short time on Earth. Here, however, the final reward for the speaker's or any faithful person's "good" scent far transcends nature's splendid example.

Amid this distinction between the temporal and the eternal, the speaker's new view of his art as a thank offering to God gives his poetry a value it did not possess while he presumed its everlasting greatness. It is blessed with a sweet scent indicative of the very real virtue that such writing offers to those who read it. Such an aroma is lacking in the

prideful verse of the opening stanza which, in its ill-fated aim for immortality, decays before even earthly merit can be achieved. By teaching this lesson, "Life" honors art in the same manner "Vertue" does nature; for, in being shown as an instrument that points to God instead of replacing him, it participates in the "master trope of redemption" (Toliver 76) and is exalted far higher than any idolatrous usage could possibly raise it, fulfilling pastoral longing through submission to the God of eternal renewal.

Natural Images of Ongoing Death and Rebirth in "The Flower"

The humble resolution arrived at by the speaker of "Life" comes deceptively quickly within the context of that poem. In "The Flower," by contrast, Herbert describes the very difficult process of attaining holiness and the correct perspective that accompanies such growth. In this poem, Herbert uses the image of the seasonal mutability of the flower to reflect the varying condition of the speaker's relationship with God. Herbert thereby reflects on the intricacy of a life of godly devotion. To "imp" oneself to Christ, as the speaker does in "Easter Wings," does not equal human perfection. Instead, while the Christian lives in this fallen world, he is made painfully aware of his many shortcomings, as well as his constant need to rely on the same Lord who redeemed him and breathed new life into his all too easily decayed self. This spiritual dynamic forms the basis for the "whole series of conflicts and triumphs" (Moreland 39) that Herbert presents in this poem.

The first stanza of "The Flower" reveals the spiritual maturity and experience of Herbert's self-referential speaker. The opening words, "How fresh, O Lord, how sweet and clean / Are thy returns!" (1-2) are those of a believer who has tasted the futility of his own efforts to accomplish anything apart from grace. His observance of the cyclical manner in which the freshness of spring flowers replaces the grief of the now-melted snow (see 2-7) suggests his familiarity with this pattern of spiritual death and rebirth. He then asks: "Who would have thought

my shrivel'd heart / Could have recovered greennesse?" (8-9). Such a question does not come from a naive new convert but rather from one who had previously hardened himself to the "returns" of God which he now again regards as precious. The speaker explains this process of spiritual development, proclaiming:

> These are thy wonders, Lord of power,
> Killing and quickning, bringing down to hell
> And up to heaven in an houre;
> Making a chiming of a passing-bell.[42] (15-18)

Indeed, it is God's plan to create life out of what was dead. The natural order reflects the spiritual in the same way that the lifeless winter prepares the earth for the glorious spring, for so too does God initiate and use the times of the believer's lowest piety to cultivate greater sanctity.

The fourth stanza expresses the speaker's frustration at how his own human frailty brings about his erratic life.[43] He tells God, "O that I once past changing were, / Fast in thy Paradise, where no flower can wither!" (22-23). Here, his diction suggests a pastoral longing for a lost Eden even as it expresses the intense disparity between the states of earthly redemption and heavenly glorification. In his present condition, the speaker can both experience the smallest portion of the promise of perfection that awaits him and long after it completely. But to attain it now is impossible, and his mortal weakness necessitates that any attempts to do so amount to nothing more than vain ambition. This is shown when, after likening his quest for Paradise to a flower that aims to grow up to heaven (see 23-28), he acknowledges, "But while I grow in a straight line, / Still upwards bent, as if heaven were mine own, / Thy anger comes, and I decline" (29-31). This passage reveals the pride to which the narrator repeatedly succumbs throughout his spiritual journey,[44] "trusting in self-achieved righteousness rather than God's free gift" (Brunner 22), and mirroring fallen nature while displaying his own fallen nature in his self-willed spiritual presumption.[45] Heaven most certainly is not yet "his own," and his tendency to regard it as such allows the reader to comprehend why the seemingly cruel cycle

of spiritual seasons continues as it does. But the speaker, living in a fallen world and compared throughout the poem "to a flower rooted in the earth," is necessarily "subject to cyclic change and death" (Moreland 41).[46]

The final two stanzas tell of these multiple chastisements' ultimately rejuvenating effects. Herbert writes: "And now in age I bud again, / After so many deaths I live and write" (36-37). He has come to reverently understand the value of the discipline he has received. It has provided him with a new life in his maturity, a safeguard against the stagnation and apathy that renders so many spiritually dull. The triumph that results from such struggle suggests that, for Herbert, the notion of *felix culpa* extends even to the spiritual shortcomings of individual believers. Just as the original fall "further[s] the flight" for the speaker of "Easter Wings," so too do the "many deaths" of the speaker of "The Flower" bring about a new life greater than that which was lost. His reference to God as his "onely light" (39) indicates a content resignation to submit himself fully to God's grace, the result of which will be far greater than his previous futile attempts to consider Paradise fully attained. He states:

> These are thy wonders, Lord of love,
> To make us see that we are but flowers that glide;
> Which when we once can find and prove,
> Thou hast a garden for us where to bide. (43-46)

Here, Herbert displays a wonderful paradox as he uses nature to reflect God's plan for human redemption. The flower, which the Bible uses as an image to portray vain humanity's fleeting temporality,[47] having been humbled and cared for by the divine Gardener, now anticipates a God-given glorious place in eternity, the "Paradise" in which the believer lives in "a state of humility and acceptance" (Rienstra 161). This acceptance of "graceful relief" enables the speaker to recognize that the "Lord of Power" is also the "Lord of Love" (Hillier, "Herbert's Pepper Corn" 130), further allowing the speaker to inhabit "a world of gratefulness" (Post, "Airy Invigilating" 83), a state of gratitude that serves in

this life to fulfill in part the pastoral longing for a lost Eden that will be transcended by the eternal Paradise that awaits the faithful.

Concluding Reflections on Milton's and Herbert's Portrayals of Nature

The respective ways that Milton and Herbert employ the Christian pastoral theme of nature's continuing process of death and rebirth to reflect different aspects of humanity's spiritual condition are largely distinguished by each author's dominant form of poetic expression. Between the two, the gamut of human Christian spirituality is portrayed. Milton's epic presentation in *Paradise Lost* is primarily concerned with the collective spiritual state of mankind, its history and destiny. For Milton, nature is an ideal means to foreground humanity's momentous shifts of spiritual status. Just as humanity's spiritual condition may be classified as perfect, fallen, or redeemed (or perhaps more accurately, in terms of *Paradise Lost*, pursuing and awaiting redemption), so too are these states accompanied by parallel images of unfallen nature, corrupted and/or dying nature, and the *seed* which brings forth new life, a life to be realized completely only after death. This encompassing picture of humankind's rejuvenation, using as its main players the first man and woman, who serve as the representatives of all human experience, does not attempt to expose fully the particular complexities of individual feelings that this profound unfolding of the human spiritual condition must yield. Even Milton's elegy *Lycidas*, while commemorating a specific Christian's salvation, depicts this as a model of God's great moral and natural scheme; the emotion of the deceased subject is never revealed, and the speaker's sentiment regarding salvation does not go beyond the ultimately impersonal confines of humanity as a whole.

In contrast to the universalized depiction of Milton's epic, Herbert's lyric poems make use of natural images to explore the subtleties of individual spiritual progress. The varied aspects of rebirth that Herbert addresses throughout "Easter Wings," "Vertue," "Life," and "The

Flower" demonstrate his complex perception and portrayal of unfolding spiritual development. The convert's initial "imping" of himself to the victorious wings with which Christ soared on the first Easter is only the beginning of a new life of continual death to himself and rejuvenation in God. The triumph over sin achieved in "Easter Wings" and "Vertue" paves the way for the maturing process depicted in "Life" and "The Flower." As he portrays this process, Herbert intricately utilizes the pastoral conventions of nature's continual cycle of death and rebirth and humanity's desired return to innocence. He recognizes that, on this present earth, humanity cannot yet fully share in the Paradise that Christ has won. Thus, for now, seasonal decay and blooming accurately portray the still-flawed life of the redeemed believer. To dwell in the greater Eden of the New Earth is a promise, but any attempts to reach it prematurely are acts of pride. For the believer, Paradise shall be attained at its proper time, but only after experiencing the series of deaths and rebirths that must take place while living in a fallen world.[48]

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NOTES

[1]See, for example, Poggioli's assertion that the "psychological root of the pastoral is a double longing after innocence and happiness" (1), a longing that looks back to a lost "Golden Age" (Alpers 437). It is this motif of longing for a lost paradise that will largely characterize my discussion of the pastoral throughout this essay, a discussion tempered, in my analysis of Milton's and Herbert's Christian poems and their various natural images, by the notion of how such longing is ultimately fulfilled by Christ's redemption and the hope of an eternal paradise hereafter.

[2]Potts writes: "Classical pastoral elegies parallel the death and anticipated rebirth of the deceased with that of the land's vegetation" (55), and she notes that the pattern of natural "death and rebirth imagery" (184) that characterizes *Lycidas* is appropriate for Milton's Christian pastoral elegy. Twiddy asserts that, in the pastoral elegy, "the poet accepts death as natural, and achieves a renewal of the life-instinct, in line with the seasonal pattern of death and rebirth" (4). A broader association between pastoral and natural images of death and rebirth is offered by Weinstein.

[3]In a recent article, Nauman touches on how, in Henry Vaughan's "Regeneration," pastoral elements are used to depict both salvation history and the particular spiritual development of the poem's speaker; see Nauman, "From Rivers" 50, 55-

59; see also Dickson 62-65. More broadly, my approach in this essay offers some parallel to Balla's notion that, for Herbert, non-human nature offers a kind of "moral testimony" that can "inspire and correct human nature" (296). My approach also sympathizes with Dyck's pushback against Strier's statement that Herbert's "deepest religious impulses require an empty rather than a 'full' cosmos" (168), and agrees with Dyck that "Herbert's intimacy with God happens as he recognizes his own creatureliness, becoming open in body and spirit to the ministrations of fellow creatures" (262). More specifically, I suggest that the salvific and sanctifying process evident in the four Herbert poems I discuss is substantially achieved for Herbert's autobiographical speakers through the spiritual instruction offered them by the ministrations of various aspects of nature.

[4]Tonkin observes that early modern Christian pastoral works depict "the Garden of Eden as a pastoral paradise" (286).

[5]God's curse upon Adam specifically mentions the "thorns" and "thistles" that will now wreak havoc upon his postlapsarian relationship to nature (*Paradise Lost* 10.203; cf. Genesis 3:18).

[6]Whiting addresses the theological background for Milton's depiction: "The commentaries of St. Basil and St. Ambrose provide a firm theological basis for Milton's statement" (62). Whiting concludes: "The thornless rose is a symbol of the sinless state of man before the Fall. The rose with thorns is a symbol of the troubles, the anxieties, the pains that inevitably and justly afflict man in his fallen condition" (62).

[7]Lieb asserts: "The sexual union of Nature's elements is reflected in human sexual union, which is reflected again in the natural world" (71).

[8]Swaim states: "Man's prelapsarian relationship to deity is rendered florally as praise" (156).

[9]See especially Numbers 28.

[10]As Stallard notes (317n22), this scene can be compared to Genesis 8:20-21, which describes Noah's sacrifice of "burnt offerings" upon the altar he built after the flood. Significantly, Noah's sacrifice celebrates God's gracious sparing of Noah and his family from his wrath upon sinful humanity and even creation, while Adam and Eve's offering here exemplifies the first couple's prelapsarian harmony with both God and nature.

[11]*Paradise Lost* 10.585-612 and 651-714 portray the tragic and far-reaching consequences of Adam and Eve's sin upon nature as a whole.

[12]Swaim emphasizes this concept throughout "Flower, Fruit, and Seed," laying out "the poetic equations of Eve=Eden=Flowers" (155). Eve's connection with flowers is summed up well in Sturrock (96), which notes that Eve embroiders and decorates with Eden's flowers (9.437-39), nurtures Eden's flowers (8.46-47), has named Eden's flowers (11.277), and mourns her departing from these flowers, lamenting that there will be no one to care for them (11.273-79).

[13]Swaim notes: "Of the thirty mentions of *seed* in the poem, twenty-six occur in the final three books" (171).

[14]Jesus's words are germane to this matter: "Except a corn of wheat fall into the ground and die, it abideth alone: but if it die, it bringeth forth much fruit" (John 12:24).

[15]Elsewhere, I argue that Adam's heeding of God's prophecy regarding the woman's seed crushing Satan's head marks Adam's "incipient faith in Christ," a faith that is brought about by "Adam's recognition of the word of God and its implications," something that "begins to reverse the effects of his earlier disobedience of God's word" and that "propels him to initiate his and Eve's prayer of repentance that concludes book 10" (*Milton* 170).

[16]Gray asserts that Satan's wooing of Eve is a "perversion" of the invitation poem "genre," a genre exemplified by the Song of Songs (380).

[17]See Lieb 188-89 for a discussion of this notion of the tree's being "pregnant" with fruit.

[18]Dreher here critiques Eve's "excessive zeal" for efficiency (28), something that puts her relationship with God and others in jeopardy.

[19]Adam's letting Eve go is particularly problematic because, "[a]s many critics have noted, had Eve not left Adam's presence, she would almost certainly have not succumbed to Satan's rhetoric" (Urban, "Falls" 98).

[20]I discuss elsewhere the power of Eve's dream upon her imagination and its effect in weakening her resistance to actual sin (*Milton* 143-47; "John Milton's Eve" 129-30). Chambers accurately asserts that, although Eve in her dream does not actually sin, "Eve's fancy receives a suggestion of sin, it delights, and it consents" (192).

[21]For extended discussions of these topics in Milton, see Pecheux.

[22]This allusion is noted by Stallard 187n53.

[23]Williams affirms Adam's role in this redemptive process, arguing that Adam can be considered the "'grandfather' to 'the Woman's Seed,' or, more daringly, as 'father-in-law' to 'The Power of the most High'" (338). Williams's assertions notwithstanding, we may recognize Eve as "both the original human conduit of humankind's fall and the original progenitor of humanity's redemption" (Urban, "John Milton's Eve" 140).

[24]See also *Paradise Lost* 10, in which the Father proclaims that "Heav'n and Earth" shall be "renewed" by the Son (638), and the angels subsequently praise the Son, "by whom / New Heav'n and Earth shall to the Ages rise, / Or down from Heav'n descend" (646-48).

[25]See Revelation 21:1-22:9. Quoting from the Son's dialogue in Heaven with the Father, Montori intriguingly asserts: "For the vitalist Milton, Eden can be restored through Christ's sacrifice, a sacrifice figured in vegetal terms as a 'transplanted' root to give man 'new life' (PL 3.293-4)" (249).

[26]Lewalski observes that "[t]his cultivation" of the "paradise within" will "be the work of a lifetime never fully attained but yet productive of a paradisial happiness beyond which Adam and Eve enjoyed in Eden" (24).

[27]In her commentary on the latter parts of *Lycidas*, MacCaffrey writes: "Pastoral as the dream of an actual earthly paradise is about to be finally abandoned, but pastoral as a holy function foreshadowing a heavenly meed is about to be confirmed" (85). Although a discussion of the plants mentioned in *Lycidas* is beyond the scope of this present study, we may note Otten's moving discussion of how the poem's early lines' laurels, myrtles, and ivy (lines 1-2) are "ancient funerary plants whose berries are unripe," a "funerary garland" that ultimately "function[s] eschatologically, symbolizing the victory over death by the laureled Christ and the hope of heaven through his death and resurrection" ("Garlanding" 149).

[28]Savoie, employing the terminology of the grieving process, suggests that "[t]he example of the setting and rising sun clarifies and confers Acceptance" (133), although Savoie is silent regarding the eternal hope conveyed by subsequent lines.

[29]Observing the spiritual importance of Milton's image of the daily sunrise, Post effectively notes that "Milton recasts the image of Christ's miraculous 'feat' into the finer motions of the day's setting forth as part of the normal order of things" ("Helpful Contraries" 88).

[30]Wood points out that, in lines 19-20, Herbert "inverts the usage of imping in falconry. There, a good feather from a healthy bird is imped on the wing of a bird with a broken feather. In this stanza, however, Herbert clearly imagines his imperfect 'wing' imped upon Christ's metaphorical and perfect wing" (140). Poch notes that Herbert's "picture of grafting as a metaphor for salvation and new life" is connected with the scriptural nature imagery of John 15:5 and Romans 11:17 (485).

[31]Writing from an ecocritical perspective, Crover concludes that "Herbert's vision of our place in the world can be most accurately described as one of complex kinship networks, with hierarchal but deeply compassionate and symbiotic relationship" (175).

[32]Poch observes that "[t]he extended syntax" brought about by the opening stanza's "one long sentence" "creates a unity between the Lord and the speaker" (478). Fish notes this larger phenomenon in Herbert's poetry. While discussing "The Flower," Fish describes the "self-diminishing action in the course of which the individual lets go, one by one, of all the ways of thinking and seeing and saying that sustain the illusion of his independence, until finally he is absorbed into the deity whose omnipresence he has acknowledged" ("Letting Go" 478).

[33]Thus, both stanzas of "Easter Wings" demonstrate what Nauman describes in Herbert's poetry as the theme of "fracture and restructure" that are "necessary components in [Herbert's] speaker's efforts to enter God's service" ("God's Mending" 115).

[34]Kargon notes that "many of the new philosophers of the seventeenth century turn[ed] to atomism, and in particular the atomism of Epicurus and Lucretius" (3).

[35]As Wilcox notes in her edition of Herbert's *English Poems* (319), Herbert's notion of "the whole world" turning "to coal" is drawn from 2 Peter 3:10: "But the day of the Lord will come as a thief in the night; in the which the heavens shall pass away

with a great noise, and the elements shall melt with fervent heat, the earth also and the works that are therein shall be burned up."

[36]Herbert's seeming emphasis on the finality of death in nature in "Vertue" inspires Vendler to assert that "[t]he poem is occupied chiefly not with the *corruption* of nature by time, but rather with the eventual (and philosophically necessary) *cessation* of nature" (14). At the very least, Herbert's diction in "Vertue" suggests a certain inattention to the Christian doctrine of the New Heaven and New Earth that Milton observes in *Paradise Lost* 10.638-48 and 12.547-51. Along these lines, Calloway contends that, in "Vertue," Herbert "entertains the Epicurean notion that this world is eventually destined for total dissolution" (139).

[37]Vendler writes, "the rose pricks the eye of the one so rash as to approach him" (12).

[38]Toliver states that both "the sweet days and springs of 'Vertue'" and "[t]he usual flowers of rhetoric" in "Life" "are fit to be emblems only of time" (180).

[39]Summers suggests that the flowers in "Life" function as "the symbol for the Christian life" (152).

[40]See *OED* online, "posy," def. 1. and 2.

[41]Stewart rightly states that in "Life," "the flower is a figure of death. [...] But even here the title gives the irony away; by reminding the speaker of death, the 'posie' summons him to renewed spiritual vigor" (101). Otten writes, "in the death of flowers lies the consolation for the Christian poet: those sweet deaths, 'sugring the suspicion' of his own death, tell him that if the 'sent' of his life 'be good,' his death can be as fragrantly curative and salvific as theirs" (*Environ'd with Eternity* 124).

[42]The bell mentioned here is one that announces death.

[43]Swanner aptly states that Herbert's speaker "envisions himself with all of the frailty of a flower" (557), while Dyck notes the speaker's "more fully developed sense of creaturely fellow feeling" (279).

[44]Whereas I suggest—in keeping with the speaker's concluding admonition (and self-admonition) against those that "Forfeit their Paradise by their pride" (49)—that pride is the speaker's primary spiritual stumbling block, Kuzner argues that the speaker's "own memory stands in the way, making him question God's goodness" (28). Curiously, Kuzner asserts that "[f]orgetting offers him a way out of doubt and into praise," while "remembrance of God's punishment makes him waver" (28).

[45]Fish observes how humanity in its fallen nature fails to submit to God in favor of self-exaltation: "Naturally (the word is double edged) we resist" (*Self-Consuming Artifacts* 157).

[46]This basic reality of humanity's existing within a fallen natural world in which humanity and nature are all subject to decay reveals the extreme inadequacy of Borlik's statement that Herbert's devotional poetry "radiates a sense of being miraculously at home in a bespoke world where everything has been designed for human comfort and delight" (70). Rather, as Veith rightly observes, in Herbert's

poetry, "God's overriding grace to the believer," while "constant," is nonetheless "not always experienced" (48).

[47]See 1 Peter 1:24: "all flesh is as grass, and all the glory of man as the flower of grass. The grass withereth, and the flower thereof falleth away."

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