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Declaration

I hereby certify that this material, which I now submit for assessment on the programme of study leading to the award of Masters is entirely my own work, and that I have exercised reasonable care to ensure that the work is original, and does not to the best of my knowledge breach any law of copyright, and has not been taken from the work of others save and to the extent that such work has been cited and acknowledged within the text of my work.

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Abstract

This thesis begins by exploring the Fall of Adam and Eve, from Milton's portrayal in *Paradise Lost*, in order to judge when comedy become a possibility for the human race. The three major theories of comedy are then traced: superiority theory, incongruity theory, and relief theory. It also discusses some complexities within comedy theory such as black comedy, as well as giving examples of some modern theories of comedy and which show comedy to be fundamental to human life and how it may serve a role in sustaining life. Slavoj Žižek's belief that comedy is the best means of representing atrocities is described and used to support the appropriateness of comedy in discussing the Fall. Milton's own awareness of comic conventions is then explored to see to what degree he intentionally included comedy in *Paradise Lost*. Biographical references, as well as stylistic choices by Milton, are used as evidence for the existence of his use of comedy. It will show that Milton's characterisation, as well as narrative choices, suggest that he has adopted an intentional comic mode, which extends beyond his accepted use of satire, the mock-heroic, or the grotesque, which are ideas already widely represented in criticism. The challenges of identifying the true hero of *Paradise Lost* are explored with reference to Northrop Frye's theory of heroes and genre. Finally through the comparison of Milton with Beckett generally, and specifically through comparing *Paradise Lost* to *All That Fall*, many similarities between the philosophy of Beckett and Milton are exposed. A detailed exploration is made between the similar topics in both texts such as isolation, companionship, sex, temptation, death, hopelessness, fallenness, original sin, reproduction, knowledge, and cowardice. In conclusion, Miltonic comedy is shown to be dark and further areas of research are suggested.

Chapter 1: Existing theories of Comedy

1.1 The Comedy of Milton's Fall

The single most absurd and consequentially comic action ever possible was the inaugural transgression, Eve and Adam's eating of the Fruit of Knowledge. Humanity's mythological foreparents violated the sole restraint on their otherwise limitless freedom. This one rule had been given to them as a test of their submission and love of their creator. Yet in their eating, they managed to fail in the only way they could. Had they but followed that one commandment, they could have retained dominion over all of creation and lived eternally in paradise; yet by sharing in the same ambitious pride as Satan, by desiring to equal if not surpass God, Adam and Eve became fools. The story of the Fall has traditionally been understood as a serious, sombre, and tragic moment for humanity. However this thesis will argue that it is better understood as a comic moment, especially as this story is presented within John Milton's *Paradise Lost* (Fowler, Milton 1998). Unfallen humanity had no sense of shame only innocence. Laughing, joking, and playfully teasing were therefore also innocent. The negativity attached to comedy would only have come into being after the Fall; once humankind had itself become ridiculous and defensive.

The modern fallacy that the success of a comedy is to be measured solely in the frequency and intensity of laughs is embarrassingly incomplete as it fails to recognise the comedic element in many situations. Very rarely will Milton's work cause palpable laughter yet it is comedic nonetheless. A simple comparison between satire and slapstick clearly shows the limitations of thinking of comedy as synonymous with laughter. One simply needs to broaden the definition and

expectations of comedy to find the comedic in *Paradise Lost*. Its comedy exists and remains a cavern to be explored in Miltonic criticism. This thesis will likewise argue that tragic representations of the Fall are inappropriate. Granting sinful humanity the honour of a tragic framing would inevitably lead to a lessening of the glory of the Son's sacrifice. Only He is worthy of true tragic status. Although treating Him tragically is problematic, as will be shown later.

Milton appears to have applied 'the Horatian formula that poetry should teach and delight, or should teach by delighting' (Lewalski 2010, p.26). Comic elements would help ensure the success of his reception; especially through the use of didactic comedy. The use of certain comic elements within *Paradise Lost* is well explored within criticism, such as Milton's use 'of deflation, parody, and irony and the destabilization of hierarchical structures through the ambivalent doubleness of laughter' (Wallace 2013, p.213). His expertise in using satire, mock-heroic, and the grotesque mode, all show the existence of comedy within *Paradise Lost*. Although these areas are not of primary interest in this thesis as they are already well established within Miltonic criticism. They will be referenced and explored but the focus will be on showing the existence of a darker comic mode within *Paradise Lost.* I will try to counter those that disagree with my argument such as below:

> In *Paradise Lost*, the destruction that Satan introduces into the world is, without a doubt, represented in tragic terms. There is nothing comic, or even darkly comic, about Adam and Eve's expulsion from Eden, or in the misery heaped on the post-lapsarian world. (Bičak 2015, p.117)

Comedy served a variety of purposes for Milton, primarily it acted as a buffer to God's wrath in his punishment of Adam and Eve after the Fall serving to lighten the mood in places. According to Milton, this story is of the utmost importance making it crucial that the reader be kept engaged. Another element of Miltonic

comedy which this thesis will argue for is how comoedy serves to humanise the characters in Milton's epic and give both them and Milton's readers a coping mechanism for despair. This idea of comedy as copying, while not represented within Miltonic criticism, is well argued in other writers, such as Samuel Beckett. Comparisons will be made between the philosophy of Beckett and Milton and their style of writing in the concluding chapters to prove the existence of this type of comedic temperament in *Paradise Lost.*

Weld defines the idea of folly for late medieval and Renaissances satirists as follows: 'Worldly folly is essentially an inversion or misdirection of love, toward the vain and fleeting delights of this earth instead of toward the only lasting and truly enjoyable object, God.' (Weld 1954, p.173). Therefore, Eve and Adam's self-serving hedonism and distancing from God is comic foolishness. Yet God chooses lasting punishment for Adam and Eve's folly, which was the generational punishments which will affect all of humanity. Where then is the comedy amid all this suffering?

It is clear that Milton believed in the reality of the Fall, as well as the religious and moral repercussions of it. Consequentially, the vividness of Milton's comedy suggests that its inclusion is not accidental, but intentional. Even if Milton had not intentionally included comedy within *Paradise Lost* the author of a text does not have autonomy on its meaning and interpretations.

> It is generally accepted that a critic is a better judge of the value of a poem than its creator, but there is still a lingering notion that it is somehow ridiculous to regard the critic as the final judge of its meaning, even though in practice it is clear that he must be. (Frye 1990, p.5)

So 'parasitic…intellectuals' (Frye 1990, p.4) are justified in imbuing an author's work with their own opinion. The original author can only give a limited perspective

on their work and so critics are required in order to more fully unpack the layers of meaning within a writer's work. If comedy is to be found through a more contemporary reading of older works, its existence can be argued even if the theory of comedy is newer than the text.

Even a short research into the theory of comedy will rapidly show that it is too elastic, too vast to conform exactly to any one theory. It 'baffle[s] definition and rewrite[s] the rules' (Wallace 2013, p.204). A balance of theories becomes necessary to offer the fullest, and most accurate explanation into the nature of comedy as possible. This chapter will analyse the theory of comedy under three major headings: firstly Superiority Theory, which hinges on our affective or emotional reactions, secondly Incongruity Theory which relies on our intellectual reactions, and finally Relief Theory which involves our physiological reactions (Hokenson 2006, p.128). The following quote shows the essential differences between these three categories of comedy:

> While the superiority theory focuses on emotions involved in laughter, and the incongruity theory on objects or ideas causing laughter, the relief theory addresses a question little discussed in the other two theories, viz. : Why does laughter take the physical form it does, and what is its biological function? (Morreall 1983, p.20)

These categories will be referred to throughout the remainder of the thesis in order to judge the degree to which Milton can be seen to use comedy within scenes of *Paradise Lost* and to try to understand to what end this comedy is employed. It is hoped that this comedic analysis might add new interpretations to this significant literary work. Before we can into these theories in detail, we must first sketch an overview of the difficulties of understanding and defining comedy.

1.2 Understanding and Defining Comedy

To discover where the comedy exists within *Paradise Lost*, an understanding of comedy must be derived in order to best evaluate Milton's own awareness of existing comic techniques and his use them, whether intentional or not. One needs to define their usage of the term comedy exactly, to ensure the correct meaning of it is applied. However, when one seeks a definitive explanation of comedy one finds that such a description has constantly eluded critics. The authoritative definitions of comedy which do exist are incomplete, divisive, or even contradictory when compared to each other. Indeed, any sustained theory outlining what characteristics constitute comedy is rare in comparison to the wealth of criticism which exists on the other genre types. Marcus Fabius Quintilian commented on the mysterious nature of comedy in ninety-five C.E., here it is translated by Joe Moshenska: 'Though many have tried, I do know think anyone gives a satisfactory account of the causes of laughter, which is stimulated not only by certain actions or word, but sometimes even by the touch of the body' (2014, p.181). At this point in humanity's history, many writers discussed comedy and laughter but they had ultimately failed to reach a consensus on it. In the two millennia which have passed since what constitutes the essential core of comedy theory remains unclear or contested by varying critics. What Marvin Herrick said fifty years ago remains relevant today:

> The theory of comedy in general is one of the most elusive and tenuous among all theories of polite learning, and certainly the theory of what makes people laugh is the most baffling element in comedy. (1949, p.1)

Deciphering all the triggers to laughter is impossible, as even the same person may respond to a particular joke in a different way if the environment or their

temperament varies. Explanations of what causes laughter remain subjective and so it is difficult for us to understand how laughter is granted the power to cause one to lose control of their nervous system, especially in unlikely situations such as extreme grief, sorrow, or shame. It is within these moments in *Paradise Lost* that much of the comedic energy and tension lies. As David John Palmer says 'Comic laughter therefore runs certain risks, and some of the greatest comedy is perilously close to tears, of bitterness, of anger, of despair.' (1984p.8). Another complexity with defining comic theory is that it is not confined to one field, but instead stretches into many. Comedy continually defies definitions, or even the ability to confine itself to one field of study: 'There is no shortage of works on humor, but they do not constitute an established discipline' (Watson 2012, p.223). According to Simon Critchley, books on the subject of comedy and laughter encompass a 'surprisingly vast field' (2011p.2) and it is only when the search is expanded that the scope of comic theory can be revealed.

> The further one looks, the more there is to see, not so much in philosophy, but more in the areas of history, literary history, theology and history of religion, sociology and anthropology. (Critchley 2011, p.2)

All of which makes comedy theory incredibly difficult to trace and synthesise. Stephen Halliwell offers insight into comedy theory through the lens of ancient Greek laughter 'both the *idea* and the *practice*' (2008, p.ix) through a variety of sources, both positive and negative and comments upon the 'rainbow of meaning' that laughter has (2008, p.11). Showing that historical insights into laughter and comedy can remain interesting and relevant.

Universally there exists an anxiety in explaining jokes and this tension extends even into the academic analysis of comedy. Perhaps this anxiety is the primary cause

of the historical belittling of comedy; if comedy was deemed insignificant then literary theorists need not concern themselves with defining it. Identifying a comedic moment is straightforward, however analysing and explaining why the humour exists remains much more elusive.

1.3 Superiority Theory

Superiority theory remains the best method to begin a discussion on comic theories as it remains the longest surviving theory of comedy: 'The oldest, and probably still the most widespread theory of laughter is that laughter is an expression of a person's feelings of superiority over other people.' (Morreall 2011, p.4). It has been the most prominent theory, established with Socrates in the fifth century B.C.E. and remaining prominent until Hobbes was challenged by Hutcheson in the sixteenth century C.E. Superiority theory maintains that laughter is triggered once the audience has observed someone behaving foolishly; they laugh from a perceived sense of superiority over this other person. This laughter serves as egocentric 'self-applause' (Ewin 2001, p.30) as the person laughs to show they understand the joke, and to indicate the distance between themselves and the person who committed the foolish action. Their laughter proves that they are superior to the foolish characters. A more modern superiority theorist sees laughter is 'a controlled form of aggression; for them, the baring of the teeth in laughing is a way of asserting one's prowess.' (Watson 2012, p.224). This same hostility is seen in some primates bearing of their teeth to intimidate their challengers, although this has also been argued to have different evolutionary roots to human laughter or smiling (Preuschoft 1992). So laughter or smiling channels this aggression into a socially acceptable norm.

1.4 Historical Superiority Theories – Plato

The conventional belief that comedy is second-rate when compared to the worthier genre of tragedy is an unfortunate legacy originating in its early beginnings. The subject of the genre of comedy was first pursued academically by Greek philosophers, most notably Plato and Aristotle although 'The brief remarks of Plato and Aristotle hardly amount to a fully-fledged critique of comedy, but they are seminal insights, initiating the theory of laughter as ridicule.' (Palmer 1984, p.9). Their discussion of comedy while limited, remains valuable, especially Aristotle's who influenced much later thought, including Plato.

Plato views comedy as the failure to live up to the expectations of the ideal inner self and the audience's recognition of this (Downey 2001, p.25ff). The ignorance of the character is held in contrast to the audience's own knowledge; the audience believes they live a better, more righteous life than the character: 'Comedy is thus a contest between ignorance and knowledge.' (Downey 2001, p.34). Plato believed that malice plays a major factor in comedy, and for this reason, laughter should be moderated, if not entirely discouraged. Laughter can cloud a person's judgement, and it is tempting to give into it. Thus laughter generates moral weakness and so it is to be avoided especially in leaders. 'It's proposed that the Guardians of Plato's Ideal state must avoid laughter lest they become prone to its destructive possibilities' (McDonald 2013, p.22). The role-models in Plato's ideal state should instead be sensible, rational, and remain composed and stoic. This would encourage a tradition of learning and leading by example to create the best possible mindset for the leaders. Ultimately Plato sees comedy as a cruel temptation with no redeeming qualities.

1.5 Historical Superiority Theories – Aristotle

Aristotle's *Poetics* was rediscovered and translated during the Medieval Ages. It remains the oldest surviving example of literary theory and genre awareness which is estimated to have been written in 335 B.C.E. (Dukore 1974, p.31). It is necessary to stress in any citation of the *Poetics,* and especially during an analysis focused on exploring its comedic theory, that the surviving text is believed to be incomplete. Only the first half of Aristotle's text has survived, which concerns itself with analysing tragedy; a second, lost section is supposed to have contained Aristotle's sustained exploration on comedy. Despite its obvious incompleteness, it has continued to influence comedy theory, even when it works as kindling to form an antithesis. All Aristotelian-based comedic theories are therefore based on the fleeting references he made to comedy, from a text whose primary aim was to categorise tragedy. The lost work has inspired several critics who have attempted to piece together Aristotle's work on comedy, such as Richard Janko (1984) and Walter Watson (2012). The allure of an Aristotelian book of comedy even inspired Umberto Eco to write the bestselling novel and later film: '*The Name of the Rose'* (2012). Here a series of monastic murders are motivated by the need to censor Aristotle's theory of comedy for fear of the consequence to humanity if it was discovered that anything can become subject to laughter. That Eco felt Aristotle's thoughts on comedy had the potential to be so provocative is a testimony to the radical power of comedy.

In his translation of Aristotle's *Poetics,* Heath justifiably supposes that one cannot assume Aristotle's literary theory is 'either faultless or uncontroversial' (1996, p.viii) and due to its target audience, the intellectual elite of Greece, its meaning can be 'cryptic, condensed and allusive' or 'obscure' (1996, p.vii) to modern readers, so

much so that he warns 'the obscurities of the text have left it open to a wide range of conflicting interpretations.' (1996, p.viii). The original, full thoughts of Aristotle are lost and therefore drawing conclusions from what has survived may be incorrect. Nevertheless, the *Poetics* maintains a significant legacy in comedic theory.

Unlike Aristotle's theory of tragedy, the decision to include some moral baseness or errors into a comic character is not intended to further the plot but is instead employed so as to fuel the audience's laughter. The audience is granted a level of superiority over the poorer conduct of these fools. It is important for comic characters to be inane and not malicious, as it is impossible to laugh at villainous cruelty or evil.

The beginning of Part V offers the densest definition of comedy. Here Aristotle says:

> Comedy is, (as we have said), an imitation of inferior people – not, however, with respect to every kind of defect: the laughable is a species of what is disgraceful. The laughable is an error or disgrace that does not involve pain or destruction; for example, a comic mask is ugly and distorted, but does not involve pain. (Heath 1996, p.9)

By *mimesis* or 'imitation' Aristotle suggests that the best comedies should be set in a real world, with a coherent and believable structure. The best art is also universal, in the sense that it is self-contained. While tragedies populate themselves with noble, moral, and superior people, comedies focus on those lowly, inferior people who tend to inhabit the peripheral roles in tragedies. Heath cements their outsider status by locating them in the outskirts of his sentence, by placing them within brackets: '(such as peasants and slaves)' (1996, p.xiii). They are inferior ewith regards to their moral or social standing, sometimes both (Heath 1996, p.lxiii). The motivation of their morality is highly important for determining the genre. The extent, degree, and

manner with which their baseness is portrayed will determine how the audience will react to them; they will either identify with them or distance themselves from them, due to revulsion. Aristotle also says that comedy requires innuendo and the exposure of a person's errors in their soul and body, otherwise it remains abuse rather than comedy (Janko 1987, p.45).

Their foolishness typically stems from a character failing or *Hamartia* is popularly translated as 'tragic flaw'; which means that a tragic hero must be the agent of his own downfall. Yet the audience must believe that, despite the hero's culpability in their demise, they are ultimately undeserving of their fate. In all other respects, this person is an admirable, likeable, and gallant hero who was momentarily fooled due to an error of judgement or an overly emotional response to a single situation. Zerba explains Aristotle's understanding that 'The best [tragic] play should have a complex plot, exciting pity and fear through the actions of a person who is good but who commits a great hamartia.' (2014, p.142) as pity belongs to the realm of tragedy. The greatest tragic plays incite pity, which overrides the impulse to laugh. The audience are the best placed to decide whether a work is tragic or comic: 'Aristotle located the definition of tragedy in the pity and fear felt by the audience witnessing the events onstage.' (Wallace 2013, p.203). In comedy a distance between the audience and the fool must be maintained, otherwise, the audience would be motivated to pity and not laugh at the fool. For this same reason, comic characters are not as well-developed as tragic characters; the comic fools lack the complexities and depths that tragic characters typically possess, which also prevents the audience's over-identification.

Aristotle's apparent belittling of comedy was limited to his views on Old Comedy (Ussher 1977). Aristotle places a huge variance of worth at the two ends of comedy, Old and New Comedy. The frequent fumbles of the characters of lesser, Old

Comedies did not propel the plot but existed solely to invoke laughter in the audience; their ludicrousness serves as an end to itself and was, therefore, false. These incoherent, obnoxious, lampoons were vulgar and repulsive to him. By lampoons 'Aristotle must mean a disjointed series of jokes or bongs routines with no necessary or probable connection between them; comedy is better if it limits its jokes and comic points into a connected sequence.'(Heath 1996, p.lxiii). Whereas the emerging New Comedy, which used situational based jokes, was in contrast to being praised. This idea will be discussed further during the explanation of Incongruity Theory. 'Meanwhile, what is known as New Comedy…had moved away from Aristophanic slapstick and political satire…thus blending tragic and comic traditions.' (Wallace 2013, p.203).

Within *Poetics* Aristotle traces back to the origins of comedy, which he estimated to have begun one hundred years before him, when 'Bands of young male revellers once had licence to taunt respectable seniors at the very doors of their houses with the most indecent and scurrilous language and songs.' (McFadden 2014, p.50). Aristotle 'points out that the Athenian Old Comedy was banned because it provoked laughter by ridiculing individuals, even using their real names; this throwback to its origins in village lampoons was false to the urbane institution of comedy as a public ritual.'(McFadden 2014, p.52). Therefore to equate Aristotle's views of lampoons as synonymous with his opinion on comedy as a whole is incorrect and might explain the prevalence of the belief that he finds comedy vulgar.

Comedy becomes worthy to Aristotle when it can be seen to serve a purpose; 'New Comedy has the blessing of Aristotle, who greatly preferred it to its predecessor, and it exhibits the general pattern of Aristotelian causation.'(Frye 2002, p.103). According to Frye, Aristotle values New Comedy as it fulfils all four

categories of causation, namely: material, formal, efficient, and final cause (Frye 2002). To return to Heath, he sees the relative value that Aristotle places on Comedy 'Indeed, in comedy the scope for legitimate departure from strict connection in accordance with necessity and probability is greater since discontinuities in the action may have comic effect.' (Heath 1996, p.lxiii). Yet 'where there is nothing but disjointed jokes or comic routines, discontinuity has no comic effect...' (Heath 1996, p.lxiii-lxiv). For Aristotle, comedy must serve a purpose otherwise, it is worthless.

1.6 Modern Superiority Theories – Hobbes

The superiority theory was revitalised and strengthened in the sixteenth century by Thomas Hobbes (Morreall 1983, p.5) who like Plato 'was concerned that laughter could be harmful to a person's character.' (Morreall 1983, p.6) and suggested 'that great minds refrain from it' (Ewin 2001, p.29). For Hobbes laughter can be triggered in two ways. Firstly a person's self-gratification in discovering a pleasant attribute of themselves, such as finally understanding something which had been unclear to them (Lippitt 1995). Secondly, the sudden sight of something or someone deformed, which when compared to themselves shows them to be superior (Lippitt 1995). The egocentric

> idea that laughter is self-applause can nevertheless be defended by pointing out that, even though somebody else's joke occasions my laughter, what I am laughing *at,* what produces my joy, might be that *I* can see the point and thus appreciate my superiority (Ewin 2001, p.30).

The mocking laughter of superior people was regarded with extreme negativity by Hobbes, who saw this as akin to bullying since comedy only exists when one grouping is in a more dominant position than the weaker target. As Morreall

summarises ‘For Hobbes the human race is a collection of individuals in constant struggle with one another…Laughter comes in when we are winning in the struggle.’ (Morreall 1983, p.5). The victims of these jokes are necessarily weak so as to ensure their mocker’s success. Wallace describes the communal mockery which brought groups who had been fighting back together: ‘This type of mockery involved a form of joyful social bonding made paradoxically possible by the victimization of the weak.’ (Wallace 2013, p.210).

Hobbes’ theory became challenged, most noticeably by Francis Hutcheson, who critiqued Hobbes’ theory on the grounds that it was too limiting. While Hutcheson acknowledges that superiority can be a factor in causing laughter, it is not necessary or essential to it and so ‘by producing examples of laughter that do not fit… [Hobbes’ thesis], and examples of sudden appearance of superiority that do not produce laughter.’ (Ewin 2001, p.31) Hutcheson believed himself to have disproven Hobbes. This critic was so damaging, that it led to the growth and popularity of another theory of comedy, Incongruity Theory.

1.7 Incongruity Theory

At the heart of this theory lies the importance humanity places on patterns and expectations. When something unexpected happens, the result often causes laughter.

> We live in an orderly world where we have come to expect certain patterns among things, properties, events etc. When we experience something that doesn’t fit these patterns, that violates our expectations, we laugh. (Watson 2012, p.224)

The humour is released in the moment of realisation. ‘In turning now to our second theory of laughter, the incongruity theory, we shift our focus from the emotional or

feeling side of laughter to the cognitive or thinking side.' (Morreall 1983, p.15). Superiority theory involved catharsis after laughter is triggered emotionally; incongruity relies upon our rationality.

The origins of Incongruity Theory lies with Aristotle, as was briefly mentioned which we discussed the elements of comedy which Aristotle was pleased with: some 'interpreted Aristotle's brief remarks on the ridiculous as pointing toward incongruity.' (Herrick 1949, p.15). Over time the incongruity theory came to be seen as the answer to the limitation of superiority theory. Other thinkers continued to advance this comedic theory, but Cicero and Madius are the oldest proprietors of Incongruity Theory as will be shown.

1.8 Historical Incongruity Theories – Cicero and Madius

Since Cicero was a Roman thinker, rather than Greek he gives us an alternative viewpoint into classical comic theory, although 'This Roman theory doubtless goes back ultimately to Aristotle and Plato.'(Herrick 1949, p.1). His main goal was to evaluate comedy's role in public speaking, and he concluded, in contrast to Plato, that 'a well-rounded speaker would be able to make his audience laugh as well as weep.' (McFadden 2014, p.50). Cicero was not interested in the mechanism or psychology of laughter, only whether it is beneficial for orators to be comic; he left the explanation of the physical expression of laughter to Democritus (Carus 1898, p.253). With the voice of Julius Caesar, Cicero outlines his theory of how the laughable is created in the presence of ugliness, deformity, juxtaposition and incongruity (Herrick 1949).

Vincenzo Maggi, more commonly known as Madius, brought together the theories of Plato, Aristotle, and Cicero, and used them to draw out his own comic theory in *De Ridiculis*. Madius divided the ridiculous into the body, soul, and external, and sub-divided these areas into the true (mistake by ignorance), the feigned (pretending not to know), and the accidental (error) (Herrick 1949). Madius also believed that some topics or targets should never be mocked 'Madius was careful to point out that three classes of people should not be laughed at: the poverty-stricken, the wicked, and the virtuous.' (Herrick 1949, p.7). These exclusions are at odds with the Superiority Theory which would see these weak humans are ideal candidates for ridicule.

1.9 Black Comedy: Divisive Incongruity

Within incongruity theory lies the sub-genre of black comedy which shows another complexity in defining the comic as it clearly divides popular opinion. I will be arguing in further chapters that much of the humour within *Paradise Lost* conforms to this genre, especially as it is used by Beckett. In black comedy or humour, the intended laughter comes from unreservedly vulgar language, relentless gore, grisly, and morbid subject matter; alternatively put '…black humor arises as the result of cool, unexpected responses to distressing situations.' (Bičak 2015, p.116).

> This laughter, however, is always a little green around the edges, for as Breton is quick to point out, black humor is the opposite of joviality, wit, or sarcasm. Rather, it is partly macabre, partly ironic, often absurd turn of sport that constitutes the "moral enemy of sentimentality," and beyond that a "superior revolt of the mind.(Breton, Polizzotti 1997, p.vi)

Black comedy can be best understood as encompassing the macabre side of Incongruity Theory. The shock of facing something truly depraved and unexpected

can cause involuntary laughter. '…black humor arises as the result of cool, unexpected responses to distressing situations.' (Bičak 2015, p.116). However a person's response to black comedy is invariably binary; some find it hilarious, even exhilarating, while others are overwhelmed, insulted, or horrified by its grave subject matter. Rarely is somebody indifferent towards black comedy.

The existence of the Darwin Awards, in which people are irreverently awarded for displaying horrendous misuse of judgement, illustrates this point perfectly. To quote from the official website:

> In the spirit of Charles Darwin, the Darwin Awards commemorate individuals who protect our gene pool by making the ultimate sacrifice of their own lives. Darwin Award winners eliminate themselves in an extraordinarily idiotic manner, thereby improving our species' chances of long-term survival. (Darwin Awards: History and Rules, 2015)

Certain cases of unintentional self-sterilisation can also be included for this award. This is a powerful community focused upon and celebratory over the failure of the other. One is encouraged to rejoice at their inferiority, demise and withdrawal from the human gene pool. Likewise the prevalence and popularity of the execution of people by the Islamic State (IS) shows the extent of this dark curiosity within humanity. Twitter and YouTube administrators fight to block or remove over one thousand of these gruesome propaganda videos, images, and cartoon every week (Malik et al. 2014). Likewise politically incorrect jokes rapidly spread in the aftermath of dreadful news stories. Black comedy is born from pain and preservation.

Comedy is fundamental to human life, with a comedic understanding of life being necessary to the survival of humanity. The significance of comedy can be proven by hypothesising its absence; as with hope, a life without comedy can cause despair to become overwhelming. Comedy is about enduring suffering; one's ability

to slog along, to survive. Comic experiences provide a basic means of overcoming personal depression; it can serve as a source of light in the otherwise intoxicating darkness of depression. This idea will be well presented during the discussion of Beckett's representation of despair and depression and here Beckett overlaps with Milton.

At a fundamental level, humans are motivated by a vibrant impulse to live which governs humankind's response to such atrocities; they feel a deep sense of relief that this did not happen to them. This enormous relief is easily channelled into laughter; black comedy stems from a basic self-preserving mentality. Jokes stemming from this sense of relief serve to remove some element of the dread over the apparent senselessness of the violence and suffering, additionally, the laughter itself serves as a remedy to the emotional pain and anxiety through the release of endorphins. Which leads us to our next theory of comedy.

1.10 Relief Theory

This theory is the most modern of the three theories of comedy and it concerns itself with the physical phenomenon of laughter, and how it relates to the nervous system, which is something left entirely unexplained by either Superiority Theory or Incongruity Theory (Morreall 2011). Francis Beckley divides Relief comedy into two categories '*triumphant laughter*, where we exult in our success against an adversary, and *carnival laughter*, where we mock constraining social norms and authorises.' (2005, p.34) . It is well explored by Freud (Freud 1989), although its origins can be traced earlier to Spencer. This theory is succinctly explained within the phrase 'comic relief'; meaning that there is a therapeutic relief one can gain emotionally from enjoying a comic moment. Freud also draws a connection between the amount of

tension and subsequent relief a person feels with their lived experience and knowledge of the scenario; the more a person identifies with the comic situation presented the greater their laughter and relief. The levels of relief which comedy affords can vary considerably. The quote below describes the limited relief of grotesque comedy:

> The grotesque simultaneously unsettles readers and makes them laugh. This is not the type of laughter that brings with itself a full comic relief, but rather a queasy, nervous laughter that helps alleviate some of the anxiety that has its source in the villain's appearance and actions. (Bičak 2015, p.115)

In this way grotesque comedy can be linked to incongruity and relief theory since recognising the deviation from the norm can trigger the laughter, although the relief is not satisfactory.

It was because of its link between the psychological and physiological that the creation of laughter became a topic of interest for Freud. Within a tense situation, a person can gain temporary relief from this tension through laughter.

> Though for Freud laughter was merely the dissipation of energy saved by efficient mental and communicative operations within a psychic economy, it is his libidinal model that has been popularly applied here. Humor, and especially the explosive physiological response of laughter, is typically imagined as a reaction against containment, against a monolithic and comparatively fixed structure by ideally irrepressible libidinal energies. (Weeks 2005, p.133)

Freud divided humour into three categories: joke, comic and mimetic. Joking allows a person's typically hidden, and forbidden thoughts and feelings to come to the surface. A person's sense of humour derived from the interplay between that person's id, ego, and super-ego.

1.11 16th Century Theory on humour

Herrick wrote about the theory of the laughable in the sixteenth century. He identified the increased popularity and publication of Aristotle' *Poetics* and Cicero's *De Oratore* as the basis of comic theory at this time, particularly as 'Both Aristotle and Cicero seemed to regard ugliness as the only proper basis for the ridiculous…'(Herrick 1949, p.6). The Renaissance commentators on comic drama were interested in how comedy can play a didactic role. They identified that 'one of the main sources of the ridiculous, namely, the belittling of the great and dignified, or the incongruous contrast between the serious and the trivial.' (Herrick 1949, p.2) served a didactic role. Herrick also discusses Madius, who extended Aristotle and Cicero's theory to include admiration in the sense of astonishment, novelty, or unexpectedness as an alternative basis for the ridiculous (1949, p.6).

1.12 Modern Theories of Comedy: Wood

James Wood's recent book has provided a paradigm for understanding comedy in terms of reader-response. In it, Wood categorises comedy 'if a little roughly' (2004, p.4) into two major types: the comedy of correction and the comedy of forgiveness. The comedy of correction is a way of laughing at something while the comedy of forgiveness is a way of laughing along with something. The comedy of correction is best understood as the intersection of satirical and religious comedy. The comedy of correction highlights what is lacking in an individual or a particular societal grouping, and ridicules their failing to shame them into improvement. It is traditionally referred to as didactic, due to its educational aim rather than entertaining. 'Indeed the comedy of correction,' writes Wood 'might be called religious comedy,

since the ambition of total transparency, the desire to put a window in the human heart, strikes one as essentially religious.' (2004, p.4). Corrective comedy is intentionally hurtful; it encourages the reader to laugh at the comedic victim in the way that satire demands it. Like superiority comedy, black comedy works to separate the amused person from the fool. Wood's categorisation of corrective comedy is not entirely novel, as it is typical of the Old Comedy of Greece or Comedy of Manners. Corrective comedy is similar to Aristotle's lampoons, except that Woods sees them as serving a didactic service, and therefore useful. Wood's corrective comedy is essentially satire and, therefore, it is an unoriginal although highly durable idea.

Wood's alternative categorisation is much more interesting: the comedy of forgiveness. This is compassionate and egalitarian, it recognises the commonality of all people since they must all suffer the same chaotic existence. The comedy of forgiveness 'is a kind of tragi-comic stoicism' (Wood 2004, p.4) which stems from the toils of day-to-day living; one is left so numb from life that the only option left is to laugh at the insignificance and petty-mindedness of human existence in general and particularly for oneself. It is a dark comedy, yet it can provide the only source of relief in certain situations; it is non-judgemental or didactic and instead involves a sympathetic and compassionate response. One can readily identify with a life-weary person and understand how agonising, erratic, and draining life can be. The final aspect of forgiving comedy for Wood is that the narration should be partially unreliable so that the reader cannot be entirely sure of anything, thereby causing a sustained, if mild, distrust of the entire textual universe. While not wholly convinced of the necessity of an unreliable narrator, this theory may be more broadly applied without this limitation.

Wood identifies Erasmus' *The Praise of Folly* as a work which is comprised of this comedy of forgiveness. A personification of folly narrates this essay and shrewdly notes that the happiest people live 'blissfully unaware of life's hardships' (Wood 2004, p.9) while the wisest suffer the most as they are fully aware of the complexities of life. What she says appears to be logically deducted and yet for her to speak the truth calls her folly into disrepute; she represents the clichéd, paradoxical wise fool. The troubled connection between intellectuals and awareness of humanity's suffering and depressing will be discussed further in direct relation to Milton and Beckett.

1.13 Modern Theories of Comedy: Slavoj Žižek

The philosopher and critic Slavoj Žižek argues for the appropriateness of comedy in situations where comedy would ordinarily be deemed improper. One of his beliefs is that comedy is the best method of representing horrors or atrocities, such as the Holocaust. Viktor Frankl was a Jewish psychiatrist who incorporated his experiences of surviving a concentration camp into his work and I see Žižek's work as a dramatic conclusion to Frankl's. The belief Frankl proposes in *Man's Search for Meaning* is that suffering ceases to be suffering the moment it is transformed into sacrifice (Frankl 1985). Yet when victims are represented in tragic drama there is always some attempt to reorder their suffering as a sacrifice, forcing some significance onto the pain which was otherwise pointless. By transforming suffering into sacrifice it results in a negation of the pain of the experience, which means its true horrors are glossed over. In reality, that pain served no purpose, it was not part of some divine plan nor did it promote the greater good. It was senseless suffering and any representation which attempts to morph pain into significance fails to

adequately represent that suffering at all. Representing a victim as a suffering, tragic hero creates an inauthencity as there was nothing noble about their pain.

Žižek's, admittedly coarsely titled, article 'Laugh Yourself to Death: the new wave of Holocaust comedies!' makes such a point (1999). Here he argues that tragic portrayals of the Holocaust fail to represent the true horror of it since they add a veneer of dignity to the victims. This counters the reality of the victim's demotion to sub-humans by their Nazi rulers. Žižek believes the prominence of Holocaust comedies relates directly to 'the obvious failure of its opposite, the holocaust tragedy.' (Žižek 1999, p.1). He calls out the falsities of critically acclaimed Holocaust tragedies, such as Steven Spielberg's *Schindler's List* (Spielberg 1993). Tragic drama cannot accurately represent the motivation for the horrors of Nazism, as most Nazis would themselves have been banal people, and Žižek uses Arendt's 'A Report on the Banality of Evil*'* to prove this point (1999, p.1).

In this book, Arendt traces the motivation behind Adolf Eichmann's diligent, punctual, and efficient management of the deportation and subsequent killing of Jewish people during the Holocaust. Upon trial Eichmann argued he was simply doing his job; zealously following a sense of duty motivated by Hitler's direct orders (Arendt 1971, p.62). His conscience did not weigh on him. Hitler's word was law and he was only acting as a law abiding citizen. 'He did his duty, as he told the police and the court over and over again; he not only obeyed orders, he also obeyed the law.' (Arendt 1971, p.65). Eichmann's testimony propelled the idea that many Nazis were not inherently cruel or sadistic people; they were simply cowardly, sheepish, or banal people who were following orders. He claimed 'there were no voices from the outside to arouse his conscience' and he was only guilty of having 'done his work with a zeal

far beyond the call of duty.' (Arendt 1971, p.62). Eichmann's 'extraordinary diligence' in his work was only motivated by his desire for 'personal advancement' and 'This diligence in itself was in no way criminal.' (Arendt 1971, p.134).

The other aspect of this book which remains relevant to a discussion on the history of comedy is how Eichmann is treated by Arendt. She belittles and ridicules him which serves a double function.

> First, it debunks Eichmann, thereby emphasizing from the outset that there is nothing great or heroic about his evil. Second, in exposing and mocking his butchering of the German language, Arendt demonstrates her own command of her mother tongue and thus her superiority both to Eichmann and to those Nazis who defied her and other German Jews as corruptors of the German Language and culture.(Lederhendler, Finder 2016, p.136)

So the manner in which Arendt described Eichmann was through a powerful comic mocking and belittling, which is Žižek's own argument for the best treatment of perpetrators of cruelty and suffering.

Žižek gives an insightful criticism of Ralph Fiennes' Oscar-winning performance of Amon Goeth, the Nazi captain, in *Schindler's List*. He especially finds fault with his 'long quasi-theatrical monologue' (Zizek 1999, p.1) which he believes to be artificial and purely for the benefit of the audience. Goeth wonders what would be wrong with raping his attractive Jewish prisoner; although he acknowledges her as subhuman, she looks nothing like the rats or lice that the media has been telling him she is like, but finally Goeth decides not to sexually assault her. Although she was soundless for his entire soliloquy he ends with saying 'You Jewish bitch, you nearly talked me into it, didn't you?' before assaulting her physically (Spielberg 1993). Žižek feels this dialogue should have been internal rather than externally spoken; it is too artificial. It also fails as a tragedy because all the power

remains with Goeth in this scene, his dominance is crystallised through his circling of Helen and his control of the situation. All that is presented is a powerful Nazi deciding between his erotic attraction and racist revulsion. His hypocrisy would have made him an easy target for ridicule, which would be a powerful method of undermining the power of the Nazis.

This chapter has provided a summary of the most essential conflicts within comedy theory and the complexities with defining it. The ideas explored will continue to be referenced throughout the remainder of this thesis. The next chapter will focus more on Milton's own awareness of comedy and genre, and how it is intentionally included within *Paradise Lost.*

Chapter 2 Variety of Comedy within *Paradise Lost*

2.1 The purpose of Comedy in 'Paradise Lost'

While the story of Eden originates in Genesis, this thesis argues that John Milton's treatment of this subject matter within his epic poem *Paradise Lost* contains an undeniable comedic atmosphere. The vividness and frequency of Milton's use of comedy suggests that its inclusion is not accidental but intentional. *Paradise Lost* tells the story about how the mistakes of a single parentage lead to the entire race of humankind to be forever tainted. The fallen readers can never experience the bliss that existed in Eden before the Fall. Neither can they even imagine it. Ironically when Adam and Eve ate the fruit of knowledge it placed blinkers on all future generation's imaginative ability, rather than further expanding their intellectual capabilities. This punishment from God seems unbalanced considering He, to punished billions for the mistakes of two. Despite his best efforts, and even with his own conviction of divine inspiration, Milton cannot describe the perfection of Eden for the same reason that his readers would not be able to imagine it; everything is tarnished since the Fall.

> Adam's eating of the forbidden fruit, many theologians had observed, contained in itself all other sins ; as the violation by a rational creature of a command imposed by infinite wisdom, and as the frustration of the divine purpose in the creation of the earth, its sinfulness was infinite ; and by it the entire race became corrupted and estranged from God. (Lovejoy 1937, p.162)

Due to their corruption of all of humanity, Eve and Adam exploded an array of comedic possibilities.

To attempt a rational explanation of the Fall is a difficult task, even for theologians or philosophers, but to choose to address this concern in the elevated and

formalised language of epic poetry, would seem to be extremely restrictive and trying of anyone's talent. This decision serves to show the extent of Milton's self-belief. When Milton evokes biblical aid in the opening of Book I, he is literally assuming a prophetic role. He attempts to mediate between God and humanity and so he requires divine tuition to be successful. As John Shawcross states:

> John Milton's much quoted line from *Paradise Lost*: "And justifie the ways of God to men" echoes here for us as evidence that Milton believed in his truly being inspired by God. (Shawcross 2010)

The central importance of Milton's justification is shown by its placement in the second sentence of the whole poem. Bush states that Milton's

> theme, in his own words, was the justification of God's way to men, though we might prefer to describe it as the conflict, in the world and in the soul of man, between Good and Evil, reason and passions, religious humility and irreligious pride. (1952, p.179)

Due to Milton's complex representations of these struggles, the reader may become distracted from Milton's central message of justification.

Yet, in the following lines Milton relentlessly demands that the Holy Spirit 'Instruct me', so he may be permitted to speak the will of God.

> . . . what in me is dark
> Illumine, what is low raise and support;
> That to the height of this great argument
> I may assert Eternal Providence,
> And justify the ways of God to men.
>
> *Paradise Lost* I.22-26

A crescendo builds in this short section due to the variance between short, punctuated phrases and run-on lines and it makes heavy use of binary language. Milton adds a

dramatic, dynamic energy to this passage, through his use of a staccato rhythm. The rhythm culminates in the universalising 'men' of line 26, as Milton assumes a prophetic role, ready to speak the word and will of God to the masses. He also wanted to defend God's actions in order to clarify God's motivations. In this endeavour, Milton truly believed himself to be a second Moses, renewing the Holy Scriptures. Milton's purpose was clearly about more than showcasing his talent as a poet deeply familiar with both pagan and Christian motifs. As these lines illustrate, Milton will strive to vindicate God's role in the Fall of Eve and Adam. Few tasks could be as arduous as this.

2.2 Milton: Epic Poet

Barbara Lewalski's exploration of Milton's all-encompassing genre use in *Paradise Lost* provides a useful starting point when accounting for the existence of comedy in Milton's work. She asserts that 'The Renaissance is a period of heightened genre consciousness in literary theory and poetic practice, and Milton is arguably the most genre-conscious of English poets.' (Lewalski 2012, p.113). While Lewalski identifies Milton's use of comedy, she does not analyse it:

> Milton employs specific literary modes in his epic to characterize the various orders of being: the heroic mode for Satan and his damned society; mixed for the celestial society of the angels; pastoral (opening out to georgic and comedic) for prelapsarian life in Eden; tragic (encompassing the length postlapsarian georgic, pastoral, and heroic) for human life in the fallen world…through appropriate subject matter, motifs, tone, and language… (2012, pp.117-118)

While I disagree with some of Lewalski's categories, as I would see Satan's portrayal as a combination of mock-heroic, as well as heroic and I would see postlapsarian

Eden as more comedic than before the Fall. Lewalski's article focuses on the coexistence of a variety of genre types in *Paradise Lost*; she does not explore Milton's use of comedy in isolation.

'Milton's ambition was boundless.' (Hill 1979, p.239) and in order to realise his aspiration to be the true epic voice of England, Milton must continually strive towards it. Milton's preface to *Samson Agonistes* shows us his admiration and understanding of tragedy as well as his disregard for 'the Poets error of intermixing Comic stuff with Tragic sadness and gravity; or introducing trivial and vulgar persons' without need (Wallace 2013, p.201). Milton was very conscious about style and would not introduce comedic elements into his Epic unless they served an important purpose for him. Biographical evidence from the life of Milton supports Lewalski and Christopher Hill's claim of Milton's conscious genre choices.

> If we ask why Milton incorporated so complete a spectrum of literary forms and genres in *Paradise Lost***,** a partial answer must be that much Renaissance critical theory supports the notion of epic as a heterocosm or compendium of subjects, forms, and styles. (Lewalski 2012, p.115)

An epic must have an encyclopaedic scope; 'as the source and origin of all arts and sciences – philosophy, mathematics, history, geography, military art, religion, hymnic praise, rhetoric – and of all literary forms' (Lewalski 2012, p.115).

In order to write the best possible epic, Milton painstakingly modelled his life on the example of the great epic poets such as Virgil, Homer, and Spencer. This conscious effort to copy the path of the previous epic poets resonates upon Virgil in particular, as he represents the classical role model whom Milton most aspired to emulate. When Riley discusses the relationship between Milton and Virgil, he claimed that

> They were ambitious, high-minded youths ; each was attracted by philosophy and science ; each was eager to secure fame for himself and his country by a great poem he felt divinely impelled to write. (Riley 1929, p.155)

Their similarities extend even to their nicknames: Virgil being called *Parthenias* or 'maiden' and Milton being known as the Lady of Christ's a name which he embraced as 'a slender, refined, defiantly chaste, highly intellectual and artistically inclined adolescent.' (Lewalski 2008, p.31). Milton intentionally mastered the pastoral elegy in youth as Virgil did, with Milton utilising the untimely death of a fellow student at Cambridge to write his first acclaimed poem *Lycidas.*

Murray claims Milton has more attention given to his moral character than many other writers and wonders why such biographical information should matter when judging the value of Milton's works (1967, p.70). Although he notes that Milton was seen as 'a pleasant, interesting, sociable and likeable individual' (Murray 1967, p.73). A point echoed by Hill:

> It is right to emphasize the jovial and sociable side of Milton because it has been overlooked, at least in popular legend. But he was more than a mere cheerful extrovert. Nobody any longer equates him with his own Il Penseroso…(Hill 1979, p.62)

Over eighty years ago Riley described the wit, sarcasm, and pleasant conversations which Milton had with his friends (1929), including his protégé Andrew Marvel who famously wrote the comic carpe diem poem 'To His Coy Mistress'. Hill states that: 'Milton was no shy recluse, no sexless scholar.' (1977, p.57) and he identifies several poems written with 'Milton's erotic imagery' (1977, p.58) and states that 'At Cambridge Milton had been invited to make bawdy speeches, and he accepted.' (1977, p.59). Upon close reading of *Paradise Lost* a reader can easily identify the

effervescent, playful, and witty Milton; whether he is releasing dramatic tension, parodying accepted literary styles, or beguiling his own characters or indeed his 'fit audience' (*Paradise Lost* VII.31).

2.3 Satire and Politics

It has also been noted that 'Milton took pleasure in conversation and repartee, at meals and at other times – sometimes, he hints, at others' expense' (Lewalski 2008, p.408). Milton's satire was not confined to his writings. Lewalski identifies the violence and potency of Milton's 'martial imagery' and points to his own defence of his 'sharp satire in the antiprelatical tracts as a militant godly zeal…' (Lewalski 2010, p.24) which was justified; elsewhere Milton's writing is shown as 'an epic single combat with pens as weapons.' (Lewalski 2010, p.24).

Milton's attempts at promoting Christianity as a loving religion seems contrary to the message revealed in Genesis, and elsewhere in the Old Testament, where God's judgement repeatedly lacks compassion and can be brutally harsh. As God is believed to be omniscient, He knew that Eve and Adam would eat the fruit, yet God also knew exactly how much He had to warn them to ensure they refrained from eating. There would have been a point at which Eve and Adam would have been susceptible to the temptation, but maintained the moral resolve to overcome this desire, in order to remain obedient to God. The biblical account showing Abraham's initial hesitance, to an eventual reluctant willingness to sacrifice his son Isaac shows that God can tell from your intention whether one would complete an action and can, therefore, stop an evil deed before it happens (Genesis 22). This biblical moment inspired Kierkegaard's *Fear and Trembling* (1983) which explores the sense of duty,

morality and anxiety. Why God chooses not to intervene in the moments prior to Eve and Adam's temptation when He could have, is debated but if God allowed Eve and Adam to complete their sin, He then had fuel to punish, and eventually absolve, all future generations of humankind.

Milton's God orchestrated the Fall, so His Son could prove his glory by allowing humanity to be restored to their former glory through his sacrifice. This was a calculated move where the leader arranges the means through which His son, as co-ruler, is shown to be a powerful yet compassionate leader. Here God is directly manipulating the human situation. This same manipulative tactic is used during the debate in Hell by Satan, when he schemes to strike against God. As Maja-Lisa Von Sneidern states God 'present himself as positively coy in asking who will volunteer to save "man," a moment contaminated by its similarity to Satan's rhetorical question already posed in Book 2 (492-4).' (Von Sneidern 2005, p.60).

Beelzebub proposes a covert mission to escape Hell and to corrupt God's latest creators, the humans. However, when Beelzebub 'Pleaded his devilish counsel,' to all the fallen angels, only the readers know that it was 'first devised / By Satan.' (*Paradise Lost* II.379,379-380). Beelzebub seems to offer the chance for any brave fallen angel to 'accept / Alone the dreadful voyage' (II.425-426) yet this had been Satan's plan from the start. In the moment that the host of fallen angels hesitate to respond, Satan in a show of staged heroism, volunteers to embark on this unholy crusade with the hope of angering God the Father. He describes at length his dangerous journey, from 'this huge convex of fire' into 'the void', through the 'abortive gulf" past 'unknown dangers' into an unknown world (II.434,438,441 and 444). This could be a moment within *Paradise Lost* where Milton is challenging his audience to read more carefully to discover this echoing of Satan's plan by God.

2.4 Similarity to the 'Divine Comedy'

Despite its serious subject matter the *Divine Comedy* is rightly considered as such, a comedy, although it may not be laughable.

> To justify Dante's neglect of the ridiculous, Mazzoni appealed from Aristotle's verdict on comedy to that of history. Even if the Commedia was not "funny' it nevertheless belonged to the category of true comedy. Theoretically, of course, the comic fable should inspire ridicule, the tragic plot pity and fear, and the heroic poem admiration or marvel. Nevertheless, the ridiculous was not essential to comedy. (Steadman 1960, p.114)

From an Aristotelian perspective, its happy ending and style of composition ensured it would be considered comedy, even if it is not funny in the sense of causing laughter. 'That Milton subscribed to Mazzoni's conception of Dante's poem as a "comedy" seems practically certain.' (Steadman 1960, p.108). The reason Dante gave for referring to his work as comedy was that he wrote it in the lower register of the Italian language, which was astonishing at the time (Steadman 1960, p.109). Although 'Dante's way of thinking about comedy is far from being an eccentric detour in the history of criticism.' (Palmer 1984, p.11); it was more shocking because of his use of vulgar language than in his comic tone. It was unexpected to talk about the most serious topic of Redemption in the vulgar tongue of Italian, instead of the more scholarly and internationally esteemed language of Latin. Alternatively, due to the depraved subject matter, Italian may have been considered a more suitable language.

> Although such representations of ugliness were written from a sense of presenting the reality of the depths of humanity's vices, rather than being added for comic effect. (Steadman 1960, p.113)

The tradition had always been that comedy was written in the language of the people and is characterised as having a happy, complete ending (Steadman 1960). While Tragedy usually dealt with more serious topics and was thus written in an elevated language to really emphasise its importance. Both Dante's *Divine Comedy* and Milton's *Paradise Lost* adopt the language of the common people while addressing a complicated theological theme. Although both wrote in their vernacular their well-defined use of register, meter, and allusion, ensure that their work retains complexity. Both works have withstood centuries of critical readings and there are many layers of meanings embedded into their frequent classical or biblical references. Frye would argue that a strong biblical knowledge is required to unpack the meaning of Christian writers, such as Milton or Dante (1982). Milton would have been offended if his prophetic work was divorced from its moral and theological implications. This may be why Milton was so aware of his limited audience. In his goal of creating a comedy:

> If Dante occasionally stooped too low, he did so in obedience to the laws of this genre. Comedy should imitate the ridiculous, and, since the ridiculous stemmed from ugliness, he was entirely justified in representing ugly acts and character. (Steadman 1960, p.113)

2.5 The Mock-Heroic

One element of Milton's comic use which has been widely recognised and analysed is his use of the mock-heroic style. Arnold Stein talks about the mocking tone that God employs. Milton's comic use is not limited to adding variety and relief, instead 'They are part of the complex structure of ridicule, the most external part of which consists in the frequent repetition of words denoting scorn, scoffing, laughter, deriding, contempt, disdain, vanity, and folly.' (Stein 1953, pp.21-22).

Satan is ridiculed throughout *Paradise Lost* for seeming heroic while, in reality, being powerless.

> However, Milton still endows aspects of Satan's behavior with an unmistakably comic note: Satan's self-delusion, and, no less importantly, his self- inflicted punishment. Readers, unlike Satan, always see the larger picture, and the narrator allows them to approach the omniscient God. From this position of insight, readers can laugh at Satan's convoluted attempts at justifying his own ways to himself, and at the same time be unsettled by the radical changes that Satan's mind and body undergo. (Bičak 2015, p.117)

Milton frequently presents a seemingly glorious description and only after the reader's feel awe does he reveal the ridiculous within. Examples of this will be explored shortly. Milton then mocks the readers for having been taken in by this show of heroism or beauty. We are rebuked and we resent Milton for calling us out on it (Fish 1998, p.9). Satan's glorious speeches, sophistication, and splendidness only appeal to Milton's readers because of their fallen nature and how sheepishly the irrational, fallen intellect follows Satan's sophistry. (Fish 1998, pp.5-6)

2.6 Mock Heroic

Milton's didactic comedy is not limited to his characters. Frequently his readers are lulled into admiring something only to have Milton correct their image and reveal the person or thing to be piteous (Fish 1998). This technique shall be henceforth referred to as the mock-heroic simile; Milton shifts the entire meaning of a simile retrospectively with one transformative, hinge word. The creation of comedy through enlightenment can be seen in the frequent mock-heroic similes that Milton employs. It is only at the conclusion of such a simile that the full, and often humorous, extent of the comparison is made known to his readers (Fish 1998).

One such simile equates the massiveness, splendour, and awesome power of Satan to Typhon and Leviathan (*Paradise Lost* I.192-210). Typhon was the greatest, most fearsome, and deadliest of all the mythical Greek monsters; he was known as the 'Father of all monsters' (Decker 2016, p.751). His torso reached the heavens and his arms stretched out to encompass the east and west, his eyes spat fire and his lower half comprised of massive snake coils which could stretch to equal the entire length of him. He is even reputed to have defeated the almighty; even if it was on only one occasion. Another comparison is made between Satan and Leviathan 'which God of all his works / Created hugest that swim th' Océan stream:' (*Paradise Lost* I.201-2). The most revealing reference to Leviathan from the bible is in Job 41, where the impossibility of capturing or wounding a creature of such a size and physique as Leviathan is reinforced throughout the chapter. Even the almighty greatly feared Leviathan: 'When it raises itself up the gods are afraid; at the crashing they are beside themselves.' (Job 41:25-6).

Milton's simile about Satan lying 'in bulk as huge / as' (*Paradise Lost* I.196) Typhon or Leviathan, gives the reader a vivid vision as to the magnificent size of Satan. The scope of Milton's descriptions, with his marine imagery, makes the readers momentarily forget that the current story is unfolding within the confines of the arid, torturous hell. As this terrifyingly majestic, and awe-inspiring image unfolds, the extent of Milton's cunning wordplay is revealed. The simple word 'lay' begins and ends this simile. The first 'lay' leads the readers to imagine the vast, impressive yet monstrous Satan stretched out leisurely in his full glory, and it is not until after the second 'lay' that we realise that Satan, despite his huge bulk, is, in fact, laying imprisoned:

So stretched out huge in length the Arch-Fiend lay
Chained on the burning lake, nor ever thence,
Had ris'n or heaved his head, but that the will
And high permission of all-ruling Heaven
Left him at large to his own dark designs,

Paradise Lost I.209-213

He is laying chained not lying in calm repose. Irrespective of his indubitable power and size, something much more impressive had to have encaged him and is, therefore, more worthy of awe than this imprisoned creature. The awe the reader felt from only a few lines ago is mocked by Milton's addition of the word 'Chained' and the implications of subjugation which it carries. While his size is not deflated, his worth is. Jennifer Wallace would argue that this exemplifies the 'comic reduction here of the monstrous to the mildly incompetent' and 'the humorous ordinariness of' Satan cursed life in Hell (2013, p.206).

With this technique, Milton has found a means to flex his linguistic and classical expertise while still ridiculing and paying homage to his epic ancestors. As Stanley Fish argues, Milton enjoys outsmarting his readers and catching them out; he refers to this misleading wordplay of Milton's as a 'programme of reader harassment' (1998, p.4). The reader moves from a position of awe because of Satan's bulk, to realising his size is irrelevant due to his imprisonment at the hands 'of all-ruling Heaven' (*Paradise Lost* I.212). No matter how vast his size or power, he remains caged and unable to exercise what strength he has. Also in both of these references the creatures are notorious for being doomed. Typhon was bound beneath Mt Etna by Zeus and Leviathan's heads are said to be crushed by God (Psalms 74:14). Leviathan is also strongly associated with Satan and his mouth was popularly portrayed as the Hellmouth in art, since the medieval ages. Satan likewise is doomed to fail. The only reason for Satan's temporary success is to prove…

> How all his malice served to bring forth:
> Infinite goodness, grace and mercy shown
> On man by him seduced, but on himself
> Treble confusion, wrath and vengeance poured.
>
> *Paradise Lost* I.217-220

If *Paradise Lost* was a tragedy 'There is no room for repentance. Sin issues in death and death ends all.' (Ziegelmaier 1965, p.517); thankfully God is merciful, even if He is deceitful with Satan, his ignorance will be short lived.

Another example of a Miltonic deflated simile can be seen towards the end of Book One when the fallen angels meet to discuss how they may remain rebellious to God within the confines of their anguishing hell. Interestingly at the time of writing *Paradise Lost* this parliament of hell genre was a popular source of royalist imagery, as 'parliamentary figures were lampooned as devils meeting in the underworld' so it seems odd that 'Milton's Satan in *Paradise Lost* most closely resembles the Royalists' post-Restoration view of Cromwell.' (Achinstein 2014, pp.179-180) considering Milton's republican sympathies. *Paradise Lost* can be read as an elaborate anti-monarchical satire, with the republicans and, therefore, Milton himself, cast as the fallen angels against the tyrannical and untested power of God.

> Their position [the rebellious angel's decision to revolt] is thus identical with that of person such as Milton who had dared to deny that Charles I had Divine Right; identical morally, though Milton believes that God actually had it and Charles hadn't. Whether the rebels deserve blame for their ignition doubt of God's credentials, before God had supplied false evidence to encourage the doubt, is hard for us to tell, but once they have arrived at a conviction they are not to be blamed for having the courage to act upon it. (Empson 1965 pp. 46-47)

But this reading requires a disregard of the biographical evidence of Milton's lasting Republican beliefs and his deep respect and adherence to Christianity. Perhaps Milton was still sore from the dismal failing of parliamentarianism and his frustration are

represented here. Indeed it may be a ploy to appear disloyal to parliament after the Restoration as he had been such a prominent and public supporter of regicide.

Milton meticulously describes the opulence and grandeur of the buildings and the interiors of Pandemonium, whose lavishness is often interpreted as a thinly hyperbolic satirical comment on the lavishness of the Vatican or 'a blatant attempt to rival the glory of heaven' (Knott Jr 1970, p.489). The scale of the troop of fallen angels is conveyed, both individually, in their vast magnitudes and collectively in their substantial throng. Milton's descriptions lead the reader to expect an elegant, eloquent, and productive parliamentary meeting amongst 'A thousand demi-gods on golden seats' (*Paradise Lost* I.796), yet crucially at this point, Milton removes the respectability which he had cultivated so carefully. As the angels settle into the hall they are described as:

> Thick swarmed, both on the ground and in the air.
> Brushed with the hiss of rustling wings. As bees
> In spring time…
>
> *Paradise Lost* 1.767

Milton's placement of a full stop, and therefore a pause, before revealing the fallen angels' similarity to bees was calculated so as to ensure the full effect of the illuminating comparison. Like bees, the indignant angels swarm and fly together while their symbolic stings and buzzing may be irritating, they remain only superficially powerful, limited to the confines of their hive, or hell. In reality, their motions remain symbolic. Much like a beekeeper who allows his bees the freedom to cultivate honey for his own enjoyment or profit, God uses the inglorious angels for his own means, to bring about greater goodness in the universe. While they believe they are making a stand against their tyrannical leader through their parliamentary

meeting, over the next forty lines the fallen angels are repeatedly belittled; they are referred to as ‘dwarf’, ‘pygmean’ and ‘faerie elves’, all in an effort to mock their self-professed importance. (*Paradise Lost* I.779-781).The incongruity between the self-perception of Satan’s fallen angels and their objective appearance functions as a solid ground for the grotesque in *Paradise Lost* (Bičak 2015, p.117).

The reader’s opinion of the angels has gradually decreased throughout Book One, Milton forces the fallen angels through a process of ruination, which mirrors their true fall from heavenly glory. The shocking revelation of the angels being like fairies, pygmies, or bees is made all the more thrilling because of its unexpectedness. Even despite the forewarning, the reader remains deceived up by Milton’s cunning wordplay. Milton expects even the most sophisticated reader to still be deluded by his style of writing; as Fish puts it ‘In other words one can analyse the process of deception only after it is successful.’ (1998, pp.6-7). Furthermore, Fish notes that the simile comparing the fallen angels to bees hhough hyas a further layer of insult, it is also intended as a parody of Virgil’s work where the hierarchy of the bees is compared to the relation of a subject to their monarch.

2.7 Mock-heroic – Hyperbolic treatment of triviality

Nature too becomes corrupted by the Fall. Adam’s sense of confusion, responsibility, and terror add much comedy to this serious moment. The readers feel incongruity at Adam’s hyperbolic reactions to such trivial problems as the weather and carnivorous animals. After the Fall the entire earth becomes misaligned which rationally explains how an Earth created attuned to humanity’s needs could have become so extreme in temperature and environment. If humanity’s natural state was

nudity then the weather must not have presented a danger to them. Since neither Eve nor Adam complain of frostbite, sun-stroke, or becoming soaked by rain before the Fall, these must have been impossibilities. Even the previously herbivorous, peaceful animals ominously begin their hunting of each other only post-fall:

> Beast now with beast gan war, and fowl with fowl,
> And fish with fish; to graze the herb all leaving,
> Devoured each other; nor stood much in awe,
> Of man, but fled him, or with count'nance grim
> Glared on him passing:
>
> *Paradise Lost* X.709-714

Animals also flee from humanity now that the relationship between humans and animals has become severed, which mirrors the new distance between humanity and the divine. Generally in artwork depicting Eden, the animals are presented as frolicking together peacefully. This harmonious existence between animals can be clearly seen in Jan Brueghel and Peter Paul Rubens' *The Earthly Paradise and the Fall of Adam and Eve* (c1615) where predatory felines, dogs, and alligators play with their traditional prey. The default diet for all life in Eden, Eve and Adam included, was vegetarian. This idea is supported by Milton when he has Death consume his first life after the Fall, once the predatory animals turn carnivorous. Sin and Death feel the moment of the Fall and at that moment Death says:

> …such a scent I draw
> Of carnage, prey innumerable, and taste
> The savour of Death from all things there that live:
>
> *Paradise Lost* X.267-9

Adam feels a mounting burden of responsibility for these changes to wildlife and is fearful of the ramifications of his sin. Yet these occurrences are only the benign

beginnings of what will come to constitute human existence. The reader sees Adam as melodramatic and enjoy their superior understanding of the fallen human condition when compared to Adam. The full extent of the Fall will not begin to be understood until Adam is shown the visions of the future of humanity.

2.8 The Absurdity of Hope

Tragedies tend to build drama until they culminate in a brutal finale in which the main characters die or are in some way severely altered physically, emotionally, or mentally. The main characters' lives become irrevocably altered; it is impossible for the previous state of normality to return to these characters and so the story is complete. Conversely, comedy is concerned with life. Comedy deals with unending cycles and is propelled by humanity's stubbornness and endurance. Every human lives in a state of perpetual waiting; it is the great unavoidable condition of life. All the sons and daughters of Adam and Eve are doomed to die; this is a certainty. What makes it truly traumatic is that while one knows that death is inevitable, the timing remains enigmatic. This mental torture weighs heavily upon the human race. Everyone is inevitably moving towards their indeterminable demise. With no time to adjust to the cycle of life and death, Eve and Adam suffer terribly from the knowledge of an unavoidable, eventual death.

Consequently, death is noticeably rare in comedy though sequels and cyclical narratives are frequent. Representations of death show the essential difference between tragedy and comedy. *Paradise Lost* ends in a vision of enduring morality; it ends in a vision of humanity humbled, degraded and mortal. Adam and Eve walk away 'hand in hand with wandring steps and slow, / Through Eden took thir solitarie

way.' (*Paradise Lost* XII.648-9). Adam and Eve will remain together and live out their mortal lives united. Yet a chasm has engulfed their relationship and generated resentment between them.

The Fall is not an easy account for Milton to relate. Most humans are too engrossed in their petty lives to reflect upon the effect that the Fall has had on them. Milton makes his readers feel the loss of Paradise first-hand; he forces them to encounter the horrors of enduring a nature forever blemished and distant from God, having shown the deep connection which once existed between humanity and the divine. Their closeness with God is lost.

The classic myth of Pandora's Box seeks to answer this same questions as the story of Eve and Adam's temptation and draws the same conclusion about the singular importance of the role of hope in the destiny of humanity. 'In essence, Pandora is a trap; she is as alluring as she is deadly—a common theme in presenting the monstrous feminine in contemporary culture: the femme fatale.' (Decker 2016, pp.745-746). Milton's characterisation of Eve confirms to this same mould as will be shown. According to the myth of Pandora's Box, a plague of suffering, sicknesses, and death is suddenly released upon humankind. Much like in *Paradise Lost* where the knowledge of such bleak realities is revealed in the post-lapsarian world. This cruelty is due to Pandora giving into the same enticing curiosity that seduced Eve. The result of the Jar having been opened, runs the risk of triggering a mass suicide amongst humanity, as they can see no purpose to living out their lives, which will now be dominated by agony, decay, misery, and eventual death. Zeus anticipated the mass hysteria, despair, and dire reaction that humanity would have to the jar, and so he also added Delusive Hope to the jar knowing the effect this feminised, personification would have on the human race. This idea that 'Delusive hope was

included in Pandora's box lest we should despair and destroy ourselves.' (Hunter 1978 p.132) proves that Zeus knew how to maximise the suffering of humanity, which serves to highlight his cruelty. With her, Zeus had devised a means of keeping humankind deluded by hope long enough to reproduce and thus perpetuate the cycle of life, suffering, and death. Delusive Hope betrayed humanity with her promise that things would become better. She did this by implying that although suffering is characteristic of your current life, it is by no means the sole extent of your existence.

Milton's God says that for however long it takes Hell to reach capacity 'The World shall burn;' (*Paradise Lost* III.334). Between the Fall and the Second Coming there will be no respite from the suffering on Earth. In effect, Folly promises the exact opposite of reality. In reality, everything is in decline. The healthiest peak of each human's life lies within an extremely narrow band. One can hope that they will remain immune to illness, ageing, chronic pain, and eventual death, but such hope is acutely deluded; although necessary to ensure the continuation of humanity.

Milton's understanding of reality was shaped by his devout Christian beliefs and his unshakable conviction that through the Son all people can find redemption. This belief serves as the same optimistic force of hope that Delusive Hope played within Pandora's Jar. Through His son, God the Father can justify anything; humankind is capable of enduring terrible hardship due to their fervent hope that they might come to inherit a blissful afterlife with God in heaven. Within the Bible, Jesus' message of the Beatitudes supports this theory perfectly. 'Blessed are you who are hungry now, for you shall be filled. Blessed are you who weep now, for you will laugh' (Luke 6.21). The only drawback is that you must wait for death to experience this delight.

2.9 Visions of Sins: Modifying Adam's Behaviour

Michael is tasked with showing Adam the results of the Fall which requires Michael to show him visions of the future. 'The archangel's dissertation on providential history amounts to a bleak chronicle of the impact of sin and death upon the fallen human condition…' (Hillier 2011, p.612). The exact purpose of these visions is unclear. All that is clear, is that God causes Adam to see, the only three certainties of life: toil, decline, and death.

> By the end of the poem Adam, like Job (and the mature Milton), has assimilated loss and is learning to trust – sometimes "in spite of" rather than "because of" life's experiences, but always with hope rather than contempt for this life. (Tanner 1992, p.176)

Adam's visions are restricted to the biblical. Imagine then the spectrum of evil that could be envisioned if there were no limitations on these. Beckett presents such an engrossing spectrum of wretchedness. Who would want to raise a family under such conditions? Who would want to continue their own lives?

Perhaps the intention of these visions is to foster faith and hope. Shawcross sees the visions as serving three separate but interlinked goals: firstly to show humanity the steps necessary to regain their former glory, second to highlight the Son's pivotal role in the redemption and lastly to pay glory to the Father's mercy and the Son's love (Shawcross 2010, pp.6-7). Perhaps they are expected to ease the blow of leaving paradise in some way or maybe they aim to educate Adam about the far-reaching consequences of his sin. Another possible purpose of these visions is to serve as a means of allowing Milton to incorporate other biblical stories into his epic. Russell Hillier sees these visions as serving a comic role.

> Adam's task is to discern, despite the bloodbath of history, the divine provision of a restorative comedy that is inclusive of the faithful, who must suffer the taxing, but mercifully transient, processes of fallen human events. (Hillier 2011, p.614)

Although I believe the comedy is better seen it its hyperbolic bodily focus and grotesque descriptions as will now be shown.

According to Fish 'Michael's strategy in Book XI is Milton's strategy in the entire poem, whereby his reader becomes his pupil, taught according to his present capacities in the hope that he can be educated, in tract of time, to enlarge them.' (1998, p.22). What remains clearer is the impact of these visions upon Adam: he finds a reason for continuing the species 'but for Milton and us after the Fall, what Adams learns intellectually we have to learn to live with' (Ziegelmaier 1965, p.518). Although he is traumatised by the horrible visions, he grows to become comforted by them. Michael pre-emptively warns Adam of what he can expect to see:

> …good with bad
> Expect to hear, supernal grace contending
> with sinfulness of men.
>
> *Paradise Lost* XI.358-60

Michael explains what he sees as the true goal for Adam as a result of seeing these visions. He will be shown how:

> …to learn
> True patience, and to tempter joy with fear
> And pious sorrow,
>
> *Paradise Lost* XI.360-2

This is not an optional task for Adam to complete; he is denied the freedom to refuse it.

Maria Theresa Ib identifies a Miltonic atmosphere in Kubrick's film adaptation of *A Clockwork Orange* (2003, Kubrick 1971). She uses Fish's *Surprised By Sin* to support this claim, stating that both have the same moral entangling and enthralling grip on the audience. Both also represent a charismatic, antihero in Alex and Satan. Parallels can also be drawn between Michael showing Adam visions and the application of the Aversion Therapy, known as the Ludovico Technique to Alex. The goal for both was to modify their behaviour, turning them away from apathy, depression, or aggression towards a more temperate life. However as Milton himself outlines in *Areopagitica* (Milton 1868), when the choice is removed, so too is the moral worth. Milton would have objected to someone having aversion therapy without consenting to it, yet Adam is forced to undergo a personality altering procedure without having consented to it or even understanding what was entailed in advance.

Michael provides a potent mixture of drugs to remove the clouding film which was placed over Adam's eyes by 'that false Fruit that promis'd clearer sight' (*Paradise Lost* XI.413). Michael counters the visual impact of Adam's having eaten the 'false fruit', by having Adam's eyes 'purg'd with Euphrasie and Rue / The visual Nerve, for he [Adam] had much to see' (*Paradise Lost* XI.414-5). Hillier sees this purging of Adam's vision as necessary to restoring the balance against the murkiness impacted because of the world of temptation.

> Michael's healing herbs, nostrums, and waters are designed to brighten Adam's spiritual perception of the opportunity for renovation, grace, and repentance within a world darkened by Satan, Sin, and Death. (2011, p.614)

Euphrasie and Rue are herbs believed to clear eyesight. According to the *Longman* edition of *Paradise Lost,* Milton meticulously chooses these particular herbs, when many varieties of herbs were said to contain similar properties because:

> Both euphrasy and *rue* are mentioned in Gerard's *Herball* as remedies for restoring or quickening the sight. But there were many such remedies, and M.'s selection of these particular ones is the result of a deliberate choice. The name 'euphrasy' . . . [means] 'cheerfulness', while the bitter 'rue' puns on rue=sorrow, pity, or repentance . . . In other words the herbs are correlates of the 'joy' and 'pious sorrow' that Michael told Adam to temper, at II.361ff. Note, however, that the tempering is connected with the operation of the *well of life*: true Christian patience depends on grace and repentance. (Fowler, Milton 1998, p.585)

It is telling that during the time when Adam is educated as well as punished, Milton decides to include a pun on the names of the herbs which gives more evidence of Milton's sense of humour.

Adam is forced to watch these visions, without the slightest of dulling to his eyesight. Yet, even ensuring clarity of sight through forced drugging, is not enough for these visions to be fully successfully, Adam also needs his 'mental sight' cleared. He needs to be able to look at the 'nobler sights'.

> And from the Well of Life three drops instill'd.
> So deep the power of these Ingredients pierc'd,
> Even to the inmost seat of mental sight,
>
> *Paradise Lost* XI.416-8

Michael relies on the potency of these three drops from the Well of Life to ensure that Adam will be able to fully engage with the visions. Everything is heightened in preparation for the visions. No similar precautions were taken elsewhere to ensure the piercing quality of the education. One can wonder about the possible implications if such measures had been taken during God's warning to Adam and Eve not to eat

of the Tree of Knowledge. In the preparation for these visions God is meticulous; he removes all the variables which might have ensured an unsatisfactory outcome. With these preparations in place, Michael now compels Adam to watch his unfolding visions.

> That Adam now enforc't to close his eyes,
> Sunk down and all his Spirits became intranst:
> But him the gentle Angel by the hand
> Soon rais'd, and his attention thus recall'd.
>
> *Paradise Lost* XI.419-422

Each vision shows him 'Th' effects which thy original crime hath wrought' (*Paradise Lost* XI.424) even though they did not 'sinn'd thy sin, yet from that sin derive / Corruption to bring forth more violent deeds.' (*Paradise Lost* XI.427-8). Michael's attempt to reassure Adam consists of laying the blame squarely upon Adam. This can only serve to maximise Adam's feeling of guilt.

2.10 Visions of Sins: The Bodily and the Grotesque

The first vision Adam sees is the killing of Abel by Cain. Adam is unaware that these two men are brothers, or that they are his own future sons. Abel is the first human to die and he was murdered by his own brother. While Adam is shown this prophecy he does not understand the true significance of the violence. He is disgusted at the manner of death he observed and it is presented in graphic, almost musical imagery.

> Whereat he inly raged, and as they talked,
> Smote him into the midriff with a stone
> That beat out life; he fell, and deadly pale
> Groaned out his Soul with gushing blood effused.

Paradise Lost XI.444-7

This is far from a dignified end and one can only imagine the trauma that Adam would have felt witnessing this, considering he had never even seen someone bleed. The extent of the violence that Milton describes here is so extreme that it becomes a farcical moment. The ‘gushing bloud effus’d’ is more reminiscent of a low-budget splatter or slasher film, than a dignified tragic poem.

The bodily focus of these visions causes them to be more accurately defined as comedy than anything else. Common ailments which are treatable by modern medicine, had only ineffective treatment options in Milton’s day and so the visions of ailments would have been more torturous than the modern reader would be aware. Diana Treviño Benet lists several contemporary treatment for gout as ‘bleeding, purging, and sweating’ with ‘cannabis, alcohol, mandragora, and opium’ (Benet 2010, p.94) offered as analgesics.

Chapter 3 Heroes and Fools for Milton and *Paradise Lost*

3.1 Inspiring Milton's Epic

Milton traversed a controversial political and personal life with remarkable boldness, relentlessly propelling his convictions, no matter their popularity. He entered nothing lightly and fought against his adversaries both frequently and with ferocity. Many of the same ideas he discussed in his great Epic *Paradise Lost* can also be found in his earlier political pamphlets. His pamphlets were frequently written in Latin or in highly legalistic, theological, or political language which made them inaccessible to many people. Ackerley finds Milton elitist in his poetry and prose and finds this backed up in Coleridge, Hill, and in 'Marxist critics' (1994, pp.15-6) and within *Paradise Lost* itself we see Milton saying he expects to 'fit audience find, / though few.' (*Paradise Lost* VII.31-32) which proves 'he is willing to sacrifice his audience's size for its understanding' (Shullenberger 2005, p.193). Why Milton choose to write about the same topics through the radically different medium of epic poetry is unknowable. Perhaps with epic poetry, Milton had found a more radical, and persuasive, medium through which he could more easily achieve his goals. This would be argued by Lewalski:

> But I want to consider here Milton's construction of a less militant but no less zealous role for himself: the promotion and creation of poetry that helps produce a national culture able to nurture free citizen as opposed to slavish subjects of a king or bishop. (2010, p.25)

Milton was renowned and is still well remembered as an exceptionally diligent, learned, and accomplished man.

> Milton know the literatures not only of Hebrew and classical and post-classical antiquity, but of Italy and England and the Latin writers of modern Europe ; he studied history, geography, logic, philosophy, and criticism ; he was versed in theology and the Church fathers, in civil and church government, in the principles of religious and civil liberty. He knew music, mathematics, and astronomy. (Riley 1929, p. 156)

Amongst the classical writers 'Milton knew and respected his Aristotle. He took his primary cues about tragedy from Renaissance genre theory and his working examples from the Greeks and the great tragic inventions of Shakespeare and his contemporaries in English at the turn of the century.' (Shullenberger 2005, p.118).

Of unanimous agreement is Milton's lifelong goal of writing the greatest epic English poem (Lewalski 2008, Hill 1979). Originally Milton had intended to write on an English theme such as King Arthur, however, the turbulent political upheavals during the reign of Charles I and the restoration of his son Charles II, coupled with the dismal failure of the Cromwellian Interregnum, ruined all thoughts he had of an epic focusing on the greatness of Britain. In Cromwell, Milton believed he had found a worthy leader of the Commonwealth, perhaps even a fitting protagonist for his already delayed epic. However, the glaring shortcomings of his dictatorial reign showed Cromwell to be far from the model epic hero. Milton then lost his hero, both literally, in his natural death and in his subsequent posthumous decapitation, and symbolically in Cromwell's disappointing leadership. Cromwell tyrannically assumed absolute power and personally adopted the nepotism that Milton was so against, by appointing his son Richard Cromwell to replace him as Lord Protector of England (Lewalski 2008, p.352). Being vehemently parliamentarian, Milton could not write an epic which celebrated the achievements of the British monarchy. Nor would he be able to write directly against them, as anything published which might be interpreted as anti-royalist would risk his safety and livelihood. Although royalist

language, such as the bee imagery mentioned earlier and the use of phrases such as "the monarch" (*Paradise Lost* II.467) are identifiable. This language serves as a thin veil behind which Milton hides his lasting republican sympathies. Milton was left with the challenge of finding a new hero for his epic who was not royal; 'Notably, Milton's muse entirely ignored the various royal and courtly occasions…he has no poem on royal wedding, births, coronation, funerals, visits, or the like.' (Lewalski 2010, p.28)

Around this time, Milton's eyesight had declined to the point of complete blindness; many saw this as divine punishment for Milton's public support of regicide. Regardless of the reasons, he had been incredibly lucky to escape public execution through the humiliation of quartering for his very public crimes of high treason (Lewalski 2008, p.408). Which is evidenced by his tract *The Tenure of Kings and Magistrates* (Milton, Allison 1911), whose 'rhetorical purpose [was] the rallying of as large a part of the population as possible to support or at least accept the trail, the regicide, and the new commonwealth' (Lewalski 2008, p.230). Milton himself was subject to public ridicule in satirical poems and polemics (Lewalski 2008, p.402,405). Disillusioned with the idea of an English Republic, Milton needed to drastically rethink his poetic aspirations. Rather than admitting defeat in his lifelong goal of writing a classically inspired epic poem, Milton instead expanded his literary ambition further; he eventually decided to write about the Christian mythological explanation of the creation of the universe, humankind, evil, and suffering. This second Genesis would allow him to pay homage to the one true leader, God the Father, perhaps even absolving Milton from some of the public humiliation he endured due to his part in promoting regicide. It could even help to ensure his acceptance into the one perfect kingdom of Heaven.

Within *Paradise Lost* Milton reveals that he was delayed in starting his epic: 'Since first this subject for heroic song / Pleased me long choosing, and beginning late.' (*Paradise Lost* IX.25-6). Even after he decided on the subject of Eden, he initially planned on expressing his Edenic story through a five-act tragedy entitled *Adam Unparadiz'd* (Demaray 1967). The deciding factor in Milton's rejection of a stage production of the Fall was the necessity of the actors to be naked to the plot, and the impossibility of representing their nudity onstage (Low 1977, p.319). As Eve and Adam could not appear on stage until after the Fall when they are shamed into covering up. Even if Milton had them wear skin-coloured suits, had them speak from off stage, positioned objects to cover up his actors' bodies, or used any form of censorship it made a mockery of the innocent nakedness he was trying to represent. Milton's notes on the play suggested that even after the Fall Adam and Eve are to be 'dressed not merely in a fig leaf or two, but are described as 'cover'd with leaves' (Low 1977, p.319), showing them even semi-naked was problematic even after the Fall. Additionally, Milton was ardently against censorship, as it deprived a person of the chance to be truly good since they were denied the opportunity to reject the objectionable material for themselves. What use is there in providing a free will if that person is then prevented from having their moral compass tested or tempted? For Milton there can be no morality in mindless, forced obedience, likewise, no glory can be gained from hiding away from all sinful triggers. If one cannot interact with the sin then they cannot prove themselves to be truly good by having overcome the temptation. Original nakedness was as majestic as it was normal; their nudity was humanity's former glory. Yet the fallen audience cannot help but project shame onto and leer at the actors' nakedness and because of this, the story of Eve and Adam is unfit for the stage.

The nakedness of Eve and Adam is integral to the story and so Milton had to choose a more suitable means of representing their nakedness; their nudity could not be sacrificed. Epic poetry allowed him the scope and freedom to represent all his biblical characters without limitations. It also provided a better means of representing the extremes of the characters from the depraved to the impeccable, the ideal and the intolerable; it is impossible to do justice to representations of Heaven and Hell, Satan and God within the confines of the stage. With epic poetry, Milton had finally married his audience with his message. His audience was impressive; the notoriety which surrounded him was no doubt utilised by Milton as *Paradise Lost* steadily gained popularity, with reprints becoming frequent from the second edition in 1674 (Fowler, 1998, pp.7-8). While Milton was in many ways following traditional epic styles, he was far from enslaved by them. We must understand the intentional differences in style, form, and subject matter between Milton and the Classics. Milton's Epic:

> with no middle flight intends to soar
> Above th' Aonian mount, while it pursues
> Things unattempted yet in prose or rhyme
>
> *Paradise Lost* I.14-6

Not only would his poem be epic according to the classical sense but it would also ‘soar / Above’ anything else ever attempted. Milton’s chosen subject matter includes a pre-history to the creation of humanity in a universe, which is as yet, without time and space. Yet crucially, Milton believes that Christianity is the one true religion, therefore, his Epic must and by its very nature will soar above the classics since it alone is aided by the one true muse – the Holy Spirit. This idea will be returned to during the discussion of God and Satan’s heroism.

3.2 Cosmic Irony: Satan Fooled

There is plenty of cause to question Milton's inclusions of such strategically coherent arguments for the rebellion of the fallen angels. He appears to be justifying the rebellious angel's uprising almost as much as he is validating God. The fallen angels may actually end up becoming more excused than God since the angels are deceived by Him into rebelling. Despite Milton's claim of justifying God, he lays the blame of humanity's suffering entirely on that all-knowing, all-caring creator, God. Milton goes to great lengths to show that Satan and his troupe only accomplish whatever God permits. God could stop Satan before he starts, yet He chooses to let him go only so far. God intervenes when He deems it necessary, but why does He allow any level of evil to enter or persuade humanity? Is God not causing evilness in allowing Satan his freedom to pursue it? God passively allows inescapable, ruthless, and pandemic evil and suffering to penetrate humanity.

God ensured Satan believed He was not almighty. Satan's motivation for the Heavenly attack was to test the arms of the almighty, which had not previously seen action. A sinful thought spontaneously entered Satan's mind, causing the birth of Sin out of his head fully formed like Athena (*Paradise Lost* II.758). This first sin was simply wondering whether God was not actually all-powerful and whether it would be possible for him, Satan, to equal or surpass God. This was a natural thought process, which may occur amongst any free thinking beings, angels or not. If God had somehow usurped the rightful leader of Heaven or mislead the angels about the extent of His powers, then He should be removed from power. In choosing to attack God, Satan led a significant number of fellow angels in revolt. According to Milton, 'the third part of Heav'ns Sons' (*Paradise Lost* II.692) decided to back Satan's

rebellion; which is a huge proportion of God's elite beings. Satan would have logically supposed many things about his God, like Epicurus did: if He was omniscient then He would foresee the battle and stop it in time, if He was omnipotent then He would have the power to stop the fighting the moment it began, and if He was omnipresent then any battle tactics would be impossible. If God was none of these things, then He had no right to remain unchallenged as their supreme leader. For Satan to have withstood against God for any length of time proves to Satan that God was imperfect which shows that Satan was justified in his rebellion. Lewalski feels 'the good angels' inability to defeat the rebels…redefines war as tragic rather than gloriously heroic' (2010, p.37), whereas the readers share in the dramatic irony that God is intentionally dragging out the war for the benefit of his Son.

> God is detached emotionally from the conflict and sits in His lofty position above it. It is from this elevation, carried to the extreme altitudes of stellar space that the bombshells of cosmic irony are dropped and we can laugh with God…(Ziegelmaier 1965, p.519)

Stein views the war in heaven as hyperbolic, absurdist, excessive and firmly within the overall category of the mock-heroic; Stein equates the angels' throwing of mountains to the throwing of custard pies (1953, p.17ff). 'Surely it is naive to think Milton straining for grandeur in this passage' (Stein 1953, p.24), it is more likely that Milton intentionally included such ridicule here. Especially as God's laughter and indifference are mentioned frequently especially during this battle in heaven: God's tone is mocking, accusatory, stern, and uncaring, all of which makes Him unsympathetic.

One's first step towards uncovering the genre of a work is to balance the hero or protagonist against the average person.

> In literary fictions the plot consists of somebody doing something. The somebody, if an individual, is the hero, and something he does or fails to do is what he can do, or could have done, on the level of the postulates made by him by the author and the consequent expectations of the audience. Fictions, therefore, may be classified, not morally, but by the hero's power of action, which may be greater than ours, less, or roughly the same. (Frye 1990, p.33)

The hero can be 'superior in *kind* to other men and to the environment' which makes this hero a divine being, typically a god belonging to a myth (Frye 1990, p.33). But who exactly is the hero of *Paradise Lost* and do they remain heroic throughout? Douglas Bush claims the restructuring of *Paradise Lost* from ten books to twelve was intended to make the central emphasis of each of the three sections, of Satan, Christ, and humanity more pronounced; adding that 'The new arrangement had the further effect of reducing the tragic emphasis on the fall and increasing emphasis on man's restoration.' (1952, p.180). This reshaping may account for the multiplicity of heroic representation in *Paradise Lost.*

While I agree that the tragic treatment is lessened in the final section of *Paradise Lost*, I believe this is due to the increased comic treatment of Eve and Adam. Whilst they are unsure of their fate and of God's merciful plans for them to atone, their despair seems to risk their survival. It is only in their expulsion that the cycle of their life and failings can be shown. Restoring Eve and Adam to their former glory will take God's grace, their good works and a very long time. They are only beginning their story; while the story of Eden is complete, one knows that they will continue to have great difficulty in adapting to their new lives. They are certain to make plenty of entertaining and educationally enlightening mistakes throughout the remainder of their lengthy lives. Hence, it is only in their Fall and their subsequent expulsion that the reader can fully identify with Eve and Adam. However, it is at this point that the narrative abandons them, with the exception being the glimpses into the future that

Michael shares with Adam and, therefore, the readers. This is consistent with comedy where the characters' stories are unfulfilled, instead the story ends with cyclical uncertainty.

3.3 God the Father as Hero

Deciding whether God is given a heroic role in *Paradise Lost* will help us to identify Milton's use of genre and its associated motifs.

> Milton, almost alone among heroic poets, specifically related this definition to the image of God originally bestowed on man, subsequently obscured by sin, and finally restored by divine grace. Adam's fall had radically altered man's capacity for heroism. (Steadman 1967, p.xiv)

Milton confidently chooses to profess both God's will and words.

> On such principles, the poet Milton can find biblical warrant for portraying God as epic character who expresses a range of emotions (fear, wrath, scorn, dismay, love), who makes himself visible and audible to his creatures by various means, and who engages in dialogue with his Son and with Adam. (Lewalski 2008, p.420)

Milton gives God a voice and presents Him as a real character, with a personality, who interacts with those around Him. 'Milton declares, in *De Doctrina Christiana,* that "God, as he really is, is far beyond man's imagination, let alone understanding" (*CPW* 6:113).', Bryson goes on to suggest that 'If God is beyond imagination, let alone understanding, how can he be represented in literary form?' (2012, p.102). Milton's frequent, lengthy, and, competent voicing of God presumes a more superior understanding of God than most possessed. Evidence of Milton's conviction lies within the text itself; Milton clearly deemed his version of events to be worthwhile and, furthermore, necessary to pass on to fellow Christians and Englishmen. He felt

the general public lacked the ability to understand the complicated, inner workings of God's mind and Milton saw his writings as an opportunity to help his countrymen to better connect with God. There is strong evangelical energy in his writing, with an aim to convert people back to an understanding of a just God, worthy of following.

The above concerns which one may have over God's goodness can be somewhat quelled by understanding the crucial difference between a just god and a merciful god. While Milton does attempt to present God as good and just, he does not necessarily aim to present Him as merciful, benevolent, or sympathetic to humanity. These qualities are, after all, not admirable in a god. They portray a weak, kind-hearted leader, who lacks the unyielding resolve necessary to prove true power and greatness. Milton's justification of God stems from a perceived sense of duty, motivated as many spokesmen for God have been, by a sense of obligation to defend their religious organisation. Milton need only present God as objective, moral, and reasonable; He need not be compassionate. The Son represents the empathetic, caring, and human face of God.

Milton's ultimate task in *Paradise Lost* is unquestionably a difficult one. In his epic quest to 'assert Eternal Providence, / And justify the ways of God to men.' (*Paradise Lost* I.25-6) Milton has to find some way of vindicating God's reputation which has become tarnished in some people's minds, due to the belief that He created humanity with the intention that they would Fall, and subsequently punished them for something they could not help but do. For God to punish the inevitable seems unfair, perhaps even villianous. Humans were never going to resist this temptation and God always knew that. Why does God choose to give Satan temporal victory by making him the middle-man in our salvation? Why did God not simply create everyone blemished from the beginning? He could then improve humanity beyond

their original condition, rather than simply restoring them back to their former glory. This would imply that God was involved in creating imperfection, but surely making his creatures to be so susceptible to seduction could be construed as imperfection? God is either cruel or not immune to making mistakes.

Evidence of God's cruelty lies in the awakening of the fallen angels by the burning lake, Empson claims 'God has allowed them to recover consciousness merely to give them future torture.'(1965, p.38). This is the theological and philosophical mess that Milton must untangle in order to justify God and present him as a hero. This validation remains of central concern throughout *Paradise Lost*. Milton, in all of his endeavours, attempts to justify God to his audience and to act as a mediator from God to humanity. Ziegelmaier claims that some readers of *Paradise Lost* can see a comic side to Milton which may help him to justify God:

> Indeed, what is for some heaviness and moral weight, is for us sublime, but still light humor, a divine humor with which Milton was endowed by the truth of his poetic muse and which seems to be a part of his "justifying the ways of God to man." (1965, p.516).

While Milton's theology in *Paradise Lost* contains many heresies in comparison to the contemporary religious practices at his time, such as the division of the Trinity into very separate beings, *creatio ex material* or creation from something rather than nothing, and the co-eternal nature of light with the Father, he remains an absolute devotee of God and appears to be motivated from a position of unadulterated faith. Milton's position of absolute faith ensures that God the Father is always represented in a dignified manner. Yet despite Milton's obvious motivation, God comes off as far from good or perfect. In this sense, it can be argued that *Paradise Lost* is a failure; it fails to achieve what it sets out to do. God is not

vindicated. If God is not justified then who is and how does this impact on His heroism?

By definition, God must be better than all humans. He is the true author of all things and so loving of His creatures that He grants them the very freedom to damn themselves by rejecting His love. God insists that His creatures come to love in freedom, rather than inflicting His presence and causing Stockholm-syndrome to develop in those who would have remained ambivalent towards Him. Due to His superiority, it becomes very difficult for the reader to identify with God the Father making His identification as hero problematic.

3.4 The Son as Hero?

Fish states unequivocally that 'For Milton all history is a replay of the history he is telling, all rebellions one rebellion, all falls are one fall, all heroism the heroism of Chirst' (1998, p.35). Should Fish be right in such a claim, it seems crucially important to look at the heroism of the Son, Jesus. Milton puts so much emphasis on representing the extreme grimness of the initial stages of the Fall so that the eventual self-sacrifice of the Son's death can be appropriately praised. The Son's sacrifice needs to be proportional to what he is attempting to atone humanity for. No person since the Fall could save themselves from damnation: 'Fallen Man is hopelessly corrupt and his corruption resists even the grace freely offered to him through the intercessions of Jesus Christ.' (Fish 1998, p.39). It is exclusively through the Son that worthy Christians may be saved and regain paradise in their death, and this thought would have been comforting to practising Christians, as Milton was (Fish 1998,

pp.44-45). Humanity's horrible fallen condition must equal the atrocity of a humiliating, torturous death to one person of the Christian Godhead.

Milton presents life as utterly unlivable without the second-chance that the Son's death gives humanity. Evidence of their struggle lies in our foreparents inability to clothe themselves against a changing climate, their incessant squabbling, which all prove and their suggestion of suicide and the pre-extinction of humankind because they cannot adjust to their cursed existence and do not want to be responsible for inflicting the curse of humanity on to their offspring. Through their discourse and actions, it is clear that Eve and Adam have rejected their current life as they acknowledge it serves no purpose. They are merely awaiting their death. Thus the Son acts as the redeeming hero who gives his life for the betterment of all humanity. This is the hallmark of a true hero.

In contrast to Satan, the Son shows wisdom, temperance, tenacity, and remains pious.

> The Jesus-Satan debates press readers to think rigorously and rightly about kingship, prophecy, idolatry, millenarian zeal, the proper uses of civil power, the uses of learning, and the abuses of pleasure, glory, and power, as they try to determine what is wrong with the intellectually complex and worthy-sounding arguments posed by Satan and just why Jesus refuses them. (Lewalski 2010, p.39)

Milton assumes his fit readers will be able to look beyond Satan's flashy heroism to see the true heroism of the humble, suffering, servant: the Son. Steadman explains in his introduction that Milton sees virtue as godliness and heroism as martydom and sainthood, therefore Milton's definition of hero is crafted in opposition to tradiditional heros such as Satan (1967).

Clearly then, it is the Son who is worthy of the most dignified representation, but given the narrative limitations of Milton's story, the tragic treatment of the Son is confined to Michael's prophecy and divine, hypothetical conversations. The Son has not yet become incarnate, and so He exists outside of humanity and is therefore not capable of arousing an empathetic response from the readers. There are a few requisites for tragedy, none of which the Son meets. Tragedy remains the domain of human suffering and so the heavenly bound Son of God does not yet meet this requirement as he has yet entered the human race. A tragic hero must suffer a downfall or change in fortune, misplace their faith in something or someone which causes a major disaster in the narrative. The Son's faith is true and during his noble quest, he suffers no downfall as he follows God's plan exactly. Though he is devalued and humiliated as a result of his mission, it cannot be correctly classified as a downfall or degradation since he knowingly agreed to the steps. The hero must also be banished from society, but the Son has not yet joined humanity. It is also difficult to pity the Son, considering he chose the manner of his demise; he also understood the higher purpose that his sacrifice served throughout his mission. His choice and acceptance, therefore, negates the tragic worth of his action; they were not fated but chosen.

3.5 Adam as Hero?

One would imagine that Adam would be the hero of *Paradise Lost*. Adam was created 'just and right, / Sufficient to have stood, though free to fall.' (*Paradise Lost* III.98-99) meaning Adam's will was 'strong enough to make steadfastness possible, and flexible enough to make it meaningful' (Fish 1998, p.68). Presumably, as all humans would have been created, before original sin. 'The reader [of *Paradise*

Lost] who falls before the lures of Satanic rhetoric displays again the weakness of Adam, and his inability to avoid repeating that fall throughout indicates the extent to which Adams's lapse has made the reassertion of right reason impossible.' (Fish 1998, p.38). Perhaps only men were created sufficient 'whether Eve was created fallen, whether women are not Education's but "Nature's fools," doomed from the start to be exiles and outcasts despite their illusion that they are hardy and free.' (Gilbert and Gubar 2000, p.283) remains a troubling question and is one which will be returned to later.

Fish (1998, p.261ff) sees the soliloquy by Adam at lines *Paradise Lost* IX:896-917 as self-protecting and evasive. At times, he corrects himself, in recognising that Eve committed a sin in disobeying God's sole command, and yet within several lines, he has already relayed the blame back to Satan, and far from Eve. Adam claims to be unable to understand how something which was created to be his companion could instead lead him towards wrongfulness. He cannot grasp how something so beautiful could also be immoral. For Adam beauty is simple and superficial. Within all of God's creation so far, external beauty has been a mirror of internal goodness. In Adam's mind beauty equates with goodness. Although this idea appears exceptionally shallow, it is understandable for Adam to make such an assumption. Firstly, lying does not exist within Adam's world and this mismatch of internal and external beauty would appear to lying remained a vacuous concept to him Adam to be a falsity. Yet the fallen human race knows all too clearly, that temptations to sin are usually presented by a seductive spokesperson. In support of Adam's theory, Satan is himself 'In dim eclipse' and 'changed in outward lustre' (*Paradise Lost* I.597, I.97) after his rebellion, becoming a shadow of his former self,

thus cementing the association with external beauty and moral goodness in Adam's world.

Within Adam's soliloquy after learning of Eve's transgression, he begins by praising her beauty and virtue:

> O fairest of Creation, last and best
> Of all Gods works, Creature in whom excell'd
> Whatever can to sight or thought be formd,
> Holy, divine, good, amiable, or sweet!
>
> *Paradise Lost* IX.896-899

Yet in their initial conversations after the Fall, Adam blames and distances himself from Eve and describes her in far less flattering language. She has transformed from the beauty into the beast. Adams's biggest error, in his otherwise satisfactory personality, was his eating of that fatal fruit that was given to him by his beautiful companion. If one believes Adam's reason for eating the fruit, so that he may stay alongside his one true love, then Adam is a chivalrous, romantic hero who chooses his love, despite the certainty of death. This is the version he presents:

> How can I live without thee . . .
> . . . No no, I feel
> The link of nature draw me: flesh of flesh
> Bone of my bone thou art, and from thy state,
> Mine never shall be parted, bliss or woe.
> . . . if death
> Consort with thee, death is to me as life.
>
> *Paradise Lost* IX 908, 913-6, 953-4

But just how romantic, or indeed heroic a gesture is this? Crucially he chooses not to die for Eve but to die with her. His motivation for eating the fruit, therefore, stems from cowardice rather than gallant love. He is more afraid of being alone than of

facing this hitherto unknown threat of 'death'. While Adam's action is understandable, it is not heroic.

The level of Adam's feeling for Eve's external beauty runs the very real risk of overpowering his sense of reason and remains his biggest flaw. His susceptibility to her beauty is crucial, though not exclusively to blame, for Adam's decision to eat. When confronted by the Son, Adam attempts to denounce his accountability of the sin by blaming his eating on Eve's loveliness. Adam's adoration of Eve is disconcerting to Raphael before the Fall, causing him to form a 'contracted brow' (*Paradise Lost* VIII.560) after Adam explains the depths of his feelings for Eve and the effect they have on him. He is overcome or 'Transported' (*Paradise Lost* VIII.530) by her beauty and cannot believe that anything harmful could come from such a beautiful vessel. In what begins as a chauvinist, though historically accurate, rant, Adam explains that while he knows Eve is beneath him in the most important ways, in her 'mind / And inward faculties' (*Paradise Lost* VIII. 541-2), and

> that what she wills to do or say,
> Seems wisest, virtuous, discreetest, best;
> All higher knowledge in her presence falls
> Degraded, wisdom in discourse with her
> Loses discount'nance, and like folly shows;
> Authority and reason on her wait,
>
> *Paradise Lost* VIII.549-554.

Adam claims that despite his 'higher knowledge', he becomes dysfunctional in her presence; her beauty makes her seem the more intelligent, rational, and authoritative person.

Adam transfers culpability to God by claiming he was tricked by God's gift of a manipulative Eve. As already noted, Adam increases in stupidity with close

proximity to Eve, which causes problems in their relationship especially in issues relating to responsibility and autonomy. Adam is bewitched by her beauty into overvaluing her rational faculties and Adam feels an uncontrollable compulsion to unite with her in all aspects of his life. As Schoenfeldt writes 'Adam cannot be complete without Eve, since a piece of him was used to make her, but Eve possesses a physiological integrity that underwires her psychological autonomy.' (2003, p.371).

3.6 Satan: Hero, Villian or Victim?

While Comedy is about survival, endurance, adaptability, and living life, it often simply serves to humiliate a proud and arrogant person in order to ridicule their self-professed superiority. As when the fallen angels are shown as self-obsessed and Milton's own readers are shown to be gullible and prone to give into sensory or linguistic seduction. Satan is the classic example of such an epic fall from heavenly grace. In *Paradise Lost* the relative heroic appeal of Satan is a divisive issue, with much debate over the heroic value of Satan, and whether Milton intentionally wrote such an alluring hero, and if so why?

Many critics see Satan as the true hero of *Paradise Lost*. Blake famously said 'The reason Milton wrote in fetters when he wrote of Angels and God, and at liberty when of Devils and Hell. Is because he was a true Poet and of the Devil's party without knowing it.' (Blake, 1908, p.179). Sir Walter Raleigh famously claimed that Satan's 'very situation as the fearless antagonist of omnipotence makes him either a fool or a hero, and Milton is far indeed from permitting us to think him a fool.' (Raleigh 1900). Satan can be seen as the most appealing of all the characters in this Epic as 'He exemplifies a form of heroism most of us find easy to admire because it

is visible and flamboyant' (Fish 1998, p.49). His courage and achievements are admirable, even his justification is too.

> By presenting Satan as an attractive, eloquent, epic like hero/leader and associating but also contrasting him with various epic and tragic heroes – Aeneas, Achilles, Prometheus, and others – Milton engages the reader in a poem-long exploration and redefining of heroism. (Lewalski 2010, p.37)

Like these tragic heroes Satan's character is flawed, the odds are stacked against him and he is taking on a god. Once Satan is reminded of his family ties, he becomes a source of familial unity to the unholy Trinity of himself, Sin, and Death. He manages to find a way through chaos and to slip past the heavenly guards of Eden. His speeches justifying the rebellion of the fallen are persuasive and provide the only source of relief for his comrades in the otherwise torturous Hell. His tenacity and desire for autonomy are also genuinely admirable qualities for a hero to possess. Satan's successful seduction of humankind resulted in a huge disruption and disturbance to the original plan of humankind. His triumphant plan of ruining God's latest pet seems an overwhelming victory.

Milton portrays God as always knowing that Adam and Eve would Fall and consequentially God would have been able to prevent it should He have intervened. For Milton's God, 'Satan and his rout tend to become puppets, jerked about by their own passions' (Ziegelmaier 1965, p.519), whose apparent victory in Eden served only as the means through which God could send forth the Son in redeeming sacrifice to bring infinite goodness. Milton makes his readers gradually realise that Satan should not be considered a true hero, Milton challenges us to reevaluate our definition of hero. Evidentially for Milton a true hero may possess courage as Satan did, but

virtue and respectability must be the absolute hallmarks of a true hero as, exemplified by Virgil (Fish 1998, pp.47-49).

Benet's explains the pain that the fallen angels suffer and how it

> Threaten[s] to subvert Milton's stated objective of justifying God's ways to men in several ways: by creating an unacceptable sympathy for the apostates; by elevating them to heroic stature, and simultaneously lowering the stature of the obedient angels; by pointing to the intrinsic unfairness of the war in heaven; and by exposing God's undisguised violence. (2010, p.91)

At first it seems Benet is claiming the angels as heroic, but later Benet says Milton does this 'to ensure that no trace of heroism attaches itself to the rebels, Milton shows Satan and Moloch reacting to their wounds with something less than fortitude.' (Benet 2010, p.101) Thus Milton attempts to belittle their strength and prevent the reader from identifying with them since the loyal angels are not a source of heroism as they are ethereal. The damage inflicted on them is not lasting; they suffer no permanent injury from the fighting beside a flurry of rage, which is itself a fallen emotion. This ensures inequality in the battle since only the rebel angels can suffer flesh wounds.

So whether you believe the fallen angels, particularly Satan is heroic depends on your definition of a hero. They are not faultless but flawed as Achilles was. For Milton their lack of virtue prevented their classification as hero, however modern literature take a much muddier view of the heroic

3.7 Eve as hero or femme fatal?

Milton's portrayal of Eve has been hailed as anything from proto-feminist to shallow, to entirely misogynistic. Determining the moral worth and potential for heroism for Eve is challenging. As already discussed, Frye claims a useful determiner

for genre to be looking at ‘the different elevation of the characters’ (1990, p.33) with the lowliest being confined to comedy. Frequently Eve is reduced to a stock character for our amusement, Milton portrays her as more laughable than admirable. From her very first scene, Eve is shown to be foolish, laughable, and dangerously beautiful. Miltonic characters frequently suffer from acute narcissism (Le Compte 1978, p.69), but the difference between Satan’s egocentric love and Eve’s is that her self-adoration stems from innocence rather than vanity or pride. She was unaware that the beautiful reflection she gazed at was her own. Eve claimed that if God had not interjected

> there I had fixed
> Mine eyes till now, and pined with vain desire,
> Had not a voice [God’s] warned me.
>
> *Paradise Lost* IV.465-7

She found her own beauty so captivating that like Narcissus she would have gazed unceasingly at her reflection until she died, either from drowning or starvation. This is an interesting spin on Ovid's account in *Metamorphoses* where Narcissus rejects Echo’s body first and then later her voice. Maggie Kilgour investigates the deep connection Milton had to Ovid and the importance of understanding this relationship. She claims Milton’s version of the myth of Narcissus ‘becomes a means of exploring the relations between self-knowledge, desire, and art.’(Kilgour 2012, p.xvii), all of which are essential themes in *Paradise Lost.* In Milton’s version it is a beautiful woman, Eve, who is cast as Narcissus, which implies that God's voice becomes rejected and dejected like Echo. In Ovid’s tale Echo is so affected by her broken heart that she shrinks in importance until she becomes nothing more than a disembodied voice, capable only of mimicking. In Milton's account, Eve listens to God and leaves her watery image, even if it is with more than a little reluctance. This is something

which Echo was never able to achieve. Having been instructed by ‘a superegoistic divine voice’ (Gilbert and Gubar 2000, p.283) that the pleasing image is ‘*merely* thyself’(Gilbert and Gubar 2000, p.283) reflected in water, and after his assertion that ‘him [Adam] thou shall enjoy/ Inseparably thine’ (*Paradise Lost* IV.472-3), Eve then sees Adam for the first time. She finds him

> fair indeed and tall,
> Under a platan, yet methought less fair,
> Less winning soft, less amiably mild,
> Than that smooth wat’ry image; back I turned
>
> *Paradise Lost* IV.477-80

Far from love at first sight.

So why did Milton choose to have Eve act in this way? She rejected Adam in favour of her own image. Perhaps God's voice is more akin to Echo’s than it appears at first, considering she disobeys His order by favouring herself. It is possible that Milton has Eve behave like a fool to conform to the idea that she is a vacuous beauty and intellectually inferior whilst aesthetically superior.

If true, the humour here relies upon superiority theory, making Eve the fool and consequentially making the development of a bond between Eve and the audience challenging. Without such a bond, Eve cannot be considered a hero. However Eve possess heroic qualities too, such as her independence. Belsey implies that the above scene shows both the independent, stubborn side of Eve, as well as her ability to comprehend and follow, at least in part, both the commandments of God and Adam. She eventually learns to submit to Adam’s superior ‘manly grace’ (*Paradise Lost* IV.490) as would have been expected from a wife that time time.

> Aristotle, whose influence on Western culture and thought is incalculable, argues in his *Politics* that women are better suited to submission to a male master, since they lack the necessary moral awareness of men. (Decker 2016, p.744)

As already discusses, Milton was a fan of Aristotle and so Milton adhered to the convention in showing Eve submit to her husband.

However, the entirety of the story of the Fall of Man depends upon Eve's disobedience to both Adam and God. Highlighting this weakness in Eve's from her first action is crucial in foreshadowing her great disobedience. Ultimately Belsey identifies this scene as comic:

> It seems unlikely that Eve would be permitted to make a joke. Epics are no laughing matter. And yet the behaviour of the newly created Eve, read as if it were an episode in a novel, at once presents itself as a comedy . . . The account of Eve surveying Adam, finding him unappealing and in turning back resolutely to her lake-mirror is an unexpected twist in the story which is pure delight. (1988, p.61)

Evidentially Eve is capable of being headstrong yet I agree with Belsey that as unlikely as it seems, Eve narrates one of the funniest scene of *Paradise Lost*. Another opinion on this scene sees it not as comic relief or a kind of belittling of Eve's intelligence or integrity, but instead as a logical consequence of Eve's life purpose which is to love and be loved. In Turner's discussion on Edenic Sexuality, he feels that dismissing Eve's attraction to herself as vain or dim-witted is far too blunt and simplistic. Eve is only acting exactly as God made her.

> Eve (made for 'softness and 'sweet attractive grace') falls in love with her own image in a lake . . . She moves to embrace the object she finds most lovable, and turns away from what does not meet her standards. First God, and then Adam, must woo her reason to approve the nuptial arrangement. It is perverse to accuse her of vanity on the basis of this mirror-scene . . . (Turner 1987, p.238)

The fact that this story is told from Eve's perspective in hindsight is also very interesting and draws analysis from both Belsey and Turner. Belsey thinks Eve is telling this story as a 'piece of innocent sexual teasing which places her as simultaneously knowing and naive' (Belsey 1988, p.61). Eve is flirtatiously to Adam and joking about her sexual attraction to herself. Turner thinks that Eve is expressing an 'amused relief at her escape from fleshless unreciprocated "desire", from a state of pining that tortures Satan himself, only a few lines later as he watches the embrace.' (Turner 1987, p.238). This interpretation is reinforced by the intensity of the theme of companionship and sexual union throughout all Adam and Eve's scenes in *Paradise Lost*. Eve frequently discusses her desire for physical affection and amuses herself here by thinking about how awful it would be to have that desire unfulfilled, like Satan comments upon as he watches their embrace scene (*Paradise Lost* IV.492-504).

Since Eve is recounting this story, she takes ownership of her foolishness which moves her away from being characterised as the fool. Eve feels no shame in her beauty and enjoys how alluring she is to others. She was taught to believe that her sole superiority lay in her looks, so why should she not take pride in her excellence of form? Eve's beauty is marvelled at by everyone she encounters, including herself as already discussed. While Eve 'Ministerd naked' (*Paradise Lost* V.444) to the angel Raphael, Milton interrupts the flow of conversation to assert the following

> … if ever, then,
> Then had the Sons of God excuse to have bin
> Enamour'd at that sight; but in those hearts
> Love unlibidinous reign'd, nor jealousie
> Was understood, the injur'd Lovers Hell
>
> *Paradise Lost* V.446-449.

Here Milton is referring to the interbreeding which occurred between some earth dwelling angels and female humans during the height of humanity's sinfulness. This sexual misconduct resulted in the creating of a mixed race known as the Nephilim. Milton jokes that for the angels to want sexual relations with Eve is understandable, as she was that desirable. Angels engaging in such promiscuity with any other, much plainer, human woman would be inexcusable. It is interesting how Milton makes light of this major theological sin. However, Milton stresses that their appreciation of her was 'unlibidinous' or without lust. Here this same impulsive attraction to Eve is referenced but this time, Eve is described in divine terms; Eve is compared to Venus the goddess of love and sex. She is so attractive that it is as if she has access to Cupid's powerful arrows. 'With Goddess-like demeanour forth she went; /…And from about her shot Darts of desire / Into all Eyes to wish her still in sight.' (*Paradise Lost* VIII.59,62-3)

> That entire passage, we may now see, is, like Botticelli's *Primavera*, a variant of the standard Renaissance convention of Venus in her springtime garden. Fruits and flowers, we are told, "at her coming sprung, / And toucht by her fair tendance gladier grew" (8.46-47). She is attended, of course, by the Graces, and to the fundamental Homeric context are added the "Darts of desire" (line 62), like those that Cupid shoots from above Venus's head in the *Primavera*. Homeric convention is seen through Renaissance lenses. (Forsyth 2009, p.252)

The extent of Eve's beauty allows for an understandable level of self-confidence, especially since it is her sole glory. Her beauty undermines her virtue, and fuels her narcissism. It also aligns her to the role of femme fatal.

The provocative images desciribing Eve's beauty show the potential for darkness here. For instance, while Satan looks at the human couple holding each other

tight, there is erotic language and gender inequality clearly present in the description, despite this scene taking place before the Fall; Eve with

> …meek surrender, half-embracing leaned
> On our first father; half her swelling breast
> Naked met his under the flowing gold
> Of her loose tresses hid: He in delight
> Both of her beauty and submissive charms
> Smiled with superior love,
>
> *Paradise Lost* IV.492-499

Later in this same scene, Eve and Adam's affection is demonstrated 'with kisses pure' (*Paradise Lost* IV.502) as they are 'Imparadis't in one anothers arms' (*Paradise Lost* IV.506), with Milton making 'His ferocious pun' on them being 'Imparadis't' (Jacobs 2001, p.56).

> Milton's Satan knows only too well, nothing is more calculated to arouse envy than the sight of another's happiness. In *Paradise Lost* it is the "sight hateful, sight tormenting" of Adam and Eve "Imparadised in one another's arms" which makes Satan turn aside "for envy", and "with jealous leer malign" eye the happy couple "askance" (IV 502-506). What Satan envies is a perfect happiness which appears all the more intolerable because it borders on the excessive – the "happier Eden . … / Of bliss on bliss" (IV 507-508). (Christensen 2000, p.282)

The reader is then pulled away from this image of almost stifling 'bliss' and made to refocus their attention back to Satan, whose reaction to the above scene is very telling. This sight causes 'envy' and 'jealous leer malign' in Satan.

Eve's beauty is almost a superpower with the capacity for great evil or good. The evil is clearly shown through Eve's seduction of Adam, whereas her beauty's capacity to instil goodness will be described later through exploring another effect she has on Satan. In Book IX we see Eve's power and allure when Satan chances upon 'Eve separate' (*Paradise Lost* IX:422,424), a phrase repeated twice within three

lines his appreciation of her seems to resonate more closely with love than lust which is in contrast to Le Comte who claims ‘Satan is the narcissist who loves himself only’ (1978, p.69). Eve was not seen as an object of lust by Satan, his reaction seemed to be motivated by genuine affection for her.

In Milton’s life, he faced the repulsion of the plague. The cramped, overpopulated cities were rife with poor hygienic standards. Milton’s parish was one of the worst affected by the plague, in terms of both fatalities and the great exodus of residence, including Milton and his family.

> Overall, about one-fifth of the population of London and its Liberties and surrounding parishes dies, with Milton’s parish, St Giles Cripplegate, one of the hardest hit. By mid-July it was taking a harsh toll in Cripplegate: 421 in the third week of July and 554 the next week. (Lewalski 2008, p.414)

It is within this context, of Milton’s escape from diseased city-life to the sanitary, tranquil surroundings of the country, that we should read the following quote taken from Satan’s soliloquy.

> Much hee the Place admir'd, the Person [Eve] more.
> As one who long in populous City pent,
> Where Houses thick and Sewers annoy the Aire,
> Forth issuing on a Summers Morn to breathe
> Among the pleasant Villages and Farmes
> . . . Such Pleasure took the Serpent to behold
> This Flourie Plat, the sweet recess of Eve
> Thus earlie, thus alone; her Heav'nly forme
> Angelic, but more soft, and Feminine,
> Her graceful Innocence, her every Aire
> Of gesture or lest action overawd
>
> *Paradise Lost* IX.444-460

Within Milton’s lifetime the miasma theory, that infections are spread through bad air, was the best possible explanation for the rapid spread of diseases, such as the plague. In this extended simile, Satan claims that proximity to Eve is like that first,

deep purging breath after leaving the polluted and infectious city air behind. There is nothing lewd in this description of her. She is sustenance, purity, and beauty. There is no stereotypical presentation of Eve from Satan's description. Unfortunately Eve's beauty does not sustain Satan's tranquillity. The potential power of her beauty is foster virtue is rendered insignificant due to the duration of its effect. Momentarily, we see Eve as a hero, endowed with a magical ability to transform pain to peace, however its results do not last. Making her heroic prowess temporary too.

It would only serve to diminish the true glory of the Son and the Father if Eve and Adam were constantly portrayed as dignified persons, whose otherwise good character should be taken into account when passing divine judgement. In their first authentic action, which was neither praising God nor following His decrees, they choose the only wrong option available to them. It is, therefore, difficult to support the claim that they were upstanding representatives of humanity when they so readily failed in the only possible way they could. Their suffering was entirely brought about by their selflessness; the Son's suffering was completely selfless and for that reason, it is noble, dignified, and worthy of a tragic representation although his character is unsuitable for such portrayal as has been explained. The first parent's actions are far from equal to the Son's and therefore, their story needs an alternative representation to tragic. At the time Milton wrote *Paradise Lost*, there existed no well-defined mode of genre which could adequately represent the complexity of character he wanted to portray. This combination is typically referred to as tragicomedy and can be seen in many of Beckett's works.

3.8 Heros and fools

Compelling arguments can be made for the heroic and foolish status of all the main characters in *Paradise Lost.* Older traditions would see the divine characters as

the true heroes. Yet modern readings of *Paradise Lost* have seen a cruelty in God the Father which discredits the good work He does. His apparent ambivalence towards his creatures leaves Him lacking in moral worth. The Son, by contrast, remains the most classically heroic character. He is completely good by any definition; he is virtuous, brave, and caring. His finesse in fighting coupled with his selflessness combine to give the appearance of a perfect hero. He does, however, fail to uphold one aspect of the hero, he is not human and he is the agent of his own downfall so he exhibits to fatal flaw, only fatal humility and servitude.

The tension between the heroic worth of Satan, Adam, and Eve is what makes *Paradise Lost* so compelling. The creation of such complex characters allows for a variety of arguments as to their worth to be made, as I hope to have shown. Much of the comedy of these three characters relates directly to this tension as readers enjoy feeling superiority, relief, and incongruity at these characters' actions throughout the epic. Milton shows awareness of these tensions, as shown through his mocking of his readers in *Surprised by Sin (Fish 1998)*. Granting flexibility to identifying any one, true hero is *Paradise Lost* may have been intended by Milton to show the complexities of theology and humanity. I conclude that no one character can be considered the true hero of *Paradise Lost*. The epic, being true to life, do not portray the world in black and white and challenges the reader to forgive the fool and aspire to be the hero worthy of God.

Chapter 4: The Comic Philosophy of Beckett and Milton

4.1 Intertextuality in Beckett

Samuel Beckett is widely regarded as an author who utilises fragmentation; a literary magpie, whose minimalist works alternate between fleeting and sustained applications of literary, philosophical, and theological ideas. He usually draws out these ideas to their absolute extremes and uses his writings as an exploration of the limits of these ideas. Often Beckett takes a neo-Descartian position of duality to emphasise the utter alienation of the mind from the body, and the body from the mind. A common literary model for Beckett was Dante; repeatedly Beckett's works explore a corrupted *Divine Comedy* in which he presents a seemingly eternal hell on Earth. The extent to which Beckett is influenced by other authors can be seen when he says the primary motivations for his reading and writing in non-native languages was to estrange himself from the stifling weight of English literary and philosophical influences and expectations. Below is an excellent summary of Beckett's philosophical connections:

> In a France much influenced by Cartesianism, he approached that divided image of mind and bodything using the literary, especially Irish, tradition of satire directed at the ironic self-tormentor. He repeated two images, a human calming and consoling himself in a rocking chair and a human struggling to travel on a bicycle, to satirize the desires of a mind locked into the mechanics of the body. (Oppenheim 2004, pp.5-6)

While Beckett did not wish to be a philosopher himself, philosophy held great influence over him. Comedy was also influential to Beckett, and he utilised it throughout his works, alternating between satire, slapstick, cosmological, cruel, and absurdist comedy (Cohn 1959). Beckett's varying use of comedic styles implies his

alternating attitudes to life and the outlook of the particular characters which inhabit each of his works. Typically when Beckett makes use of satire it implies his desire for some form of catharsis in what he is mocking. Although sceptical of the effectiveness of comedy's power to achieve this, Beckett can aim and hope for a positive change. This hopeful desire shows that Beckett was not wholly pessimistic. Nevertheless at other times, it is clear that Beckett does not believe it possible to exact any substantial or lasting improvement in the quality or condition of human existence. Much like human happiness, it seems Beckett's sense of hope is also fleeting. Which explains why his comedies become absurd.

In Enoch Brater's chapter "Intertextuality" he lists several literary influences on Beckett's writings:

> In these early fictional enterprises Yeats is merely a point of reference - a literary allusion here and there, and not much more than that. Surely Dante can be more dependable, as is the occasional flourish from Baudelaire, St Augustine, Schopenhauer, Balzac, Mallarmé, Ruskin, Horace, Holderlin, Homer, Matthew Arnold, Lord Byron, Racine, Keats, Virgil, Ronsard, Dickens, Einstein, Freud, Nietzsche, Pushkn, Leopardi, Conducius, Plautus, and 'Bernard Pygmalion'. (Brater 2004 p.32)

Milton is not mentioned. Yet the similarities between these two writers can be seen when one looks at their connections, such as to Lord Byron and Keats who served as middleman between Milton and Beckett. Byron and Keats wrote much under the influence of Milton, and Beckett frequently referred to Keats and Byron in his own work. It is, therefore, possible to find Milton, filtered through Byron and Keats, in the work of Beckett. Yet direct comparisons between Milton and Beckett in criticism are infrequent and where they do occur, they remain underdeveloped. Of all the dozens of authors and philosophers who are frequently mentioned as deeply

influential to Beckett, Milton hardly gets a mention, despite the similarities of their subject matter: eternity, suffering, morality, fallen nature, the free will, sexual attraction and repulsion, the nature of humanity, the morality of propagation, God's relation to humanity, the duality between body and soul, to list only the most striking similarities. The following quote was written about Milton, but it could have been about Beckett: 'He deals in horror and immensity and squalor and sublimity but never in the passions of the human heart. ' (Gilbert and Gubar 2000, p.190). Their biggest divergence lies in their opposite conclusions about the goal of life, and in particular the afterlife. Perhaps it is for this reason that a sustained comparison between Milton and Beckett has not yet been compiled. Yet their thinking very closely resembles each other. It is on their similarities and variations upon the same themes that this chapter will focus upon. As William Shullenberger says 'we limit the possibilities of critical insight if we restrict the direction of Milton's ethical and aesthetic discourse…only toward those [writers] who precede and surround him in time.' (2005, p.118).

Beckett's intertextuality is most thoroughly inspected in *Samuel Beckett's Library* which categorically traces the references and scribbled allusions to other authors by Beckett, both in the marginalia of his private books and in his draft texts and notebooks. The lack of mention between Beckett and Milton is noted in *Samuel Beckett's Library* while describing seventeenth-century influences on Beckett.

> If Donne was not necessarily to Beckett's taste, one would think that the more classical poet John Milton would be. Beckett's reading of Milton is however rather difficult to evaluate; he was undoubtedly familiar with Milton's major works from his reading in the 1920s; *Paradise Lost* was a set text at TCD in 1925. The [Beckett's] library contains three editions: *Paradise Lost* (1904), a modern edition of the Poetical Works (1969) and an antiquarian edition of Milton's Paradise Regained and Samson Agonistes dating from 1713. (Van Hulle, Nixon 2013 p.29)

Beckett's retention of his student copy of *Paradise Lost,* his ownership of a recent compendium of Milton's poetry and, most tellingly, a rare old edition of *Milton's Paradise Regained and Samson Agonites* points to Beckett's lifelong interest in Milton.

4.2 Death

> How is the tantalizing promise of death a source specifically of laughter? A clue, I think, comes from Franco Moretti's comment on Jacobean tragedy, that it presents us with the "sudden mockery of slaughter." The predicament of Jacobean tragedy is the converse of Milton's Eden; everyone meets a violent death. But the effect is similarly "the reduction of everything to "nothing." (Wallace 2013, p.215)

The relationship between death and comedy is well established and Milton represents his overlap very well. When Eve and then Adam disobeyed God by eating the fruit it resulted in death becoming a reality for the world of humanity: 'whose mortal taste / Brought death into the World, and all our woe,' (*Paradise Lost* I:2-3). While Milton shows the distress that death brings he also shows how comedy begins its existence at this existence.

There is comic tension between the absolute assurance of our finitude and the ultimate insignificance, and interchangeability of each individual's life. From one's first breath to their last, their lives are characterised by toilsome labour, until they grow infirm and incapable of sustaining themselves and transfer the effort to maintain their life onto someone else. Humans are fearfully aware of their vulnerability, frailty, and mortality. One can drop dead at any moment and the shock of this causes incongruous laughter at the thought of death. This idea can be seen in Freud's theory of *thanatophobia*, where he states that the subconscious believes itself immortal (Meyers, K., 2009, p.104). As evidence to this he draws upon the impossibility of

imaging yourself dead, when even if you can imagine it, your viewpoint is out-of-body and looking down upon your lifeless person. One cannot imagine themselves as an entirely empty and unresponsive vessel. This impossibility leads Freud to deduce that the mind instinctively cannot imagine itself non-existing (Freud 1918).

Comedy serves to show us that while life is indeed denting, it is not wholly destructive. One can almost always find occasion for laughter. Death represents the ultimate destruction – it is rarely the outcome in any comedy, including our lives, as it can only happen to each person once. Death is, therefore, the only sure limitation on comedy; within in all other interactions between living humans there is always potential for comedy. When death is represented in comedy, it frequently has no lasting consequences. As can be seen in cartoons or in superhero comics, where crippling, disfiguring, or fatal violence has no permanent effect and this representation of death is in stark contrast to the enduring death of tragedies. Within American graphic comics, death is used as a means of character development with the previously dead characters becoming reborn. Death can, therefore, be seen as a positive force (Thomas 2015).

> The stuff of comedy is precisely this repetitive resourceful popping-up of life – whatever the catastrophy, no matter how dark the predicament, we can be sure in advance that the small fellow will find a way out. (Zizek 1999, p.4)

So while death plays a role in comedy the focus remains on representing death as fleeting, insignificant, and funny. True lasting death remains an external fantasy to the mind.

Looking to the work of the existentialist philosopher Martin Heidegger will help to cement this point in his influential work *Being and Time* on the significance

of existing, of being alive in the context of facing one's own unique mortality (Heidegger 1996). Nobody exists in isolation and in almost all regards one person can be substituted for another individual who makes up 'the-they' or *Das Man*. This interchangeability characterises the modern dictatorship of enforced averageness. For Heidegger, the only means of becoming an authentic person is to face our one's own mortality, as it is the sole thing from which one cannot be substituted. Yet most humans remain in this 'Fallen' state which is Heidegger's own terminology and hardly an impartial word. Their lives are characterised as being lost in inauthenticity due to the unrealised 'Anxiety' at one's finitude being suppressed. Heidegger sees the power of liberation in death, on the condition that people would take ownership of it. By disregarding it, one would fail to realise their uniqueness.

So both Freud and Heidegger have acknowledged the role tension and anxiety plays in death. It is for this very reason that comedy can work so powerfully at these times. Primarily the comedy of death incorporates Relief Theory, but in the darker, macabre or grotesque representations of death Incongruity Theory generates the laughter. As Freud acknowledges, death remains an idle phenomenon, apart from the reality of our existence. Death refuses to conform to our patterns and recognition of such and so it becomes incongruous.

If one follows a theistic worldview, one's very life is controlled by God as the master comedian; everyone's actions being thereby dictated by pure divine whim. If one believed this completely they would take no precaution against any action as all actions and outcomes have been predestined. From an atheistic viewpoint comes the stark realisation that the present condition is all there is; this moment could be your last. This can result in opposing viewpoints, it can cause motivation to *carpe diem* or cause acute depression because this realisation identifies life's futility. Why should

proponents of either side want to endure or raise children who will inevitably face the same inescapable suffering unto death? The invention of comedy allows humanity a coping mechanism to ensure they can last long enough to continue the species, and so the cycle of birth, suffering, and death repeats. Without this innovative ability of humankind to express comedy, the suicidal impulse of humanity would throb and risk overwhelming. This point will be returned to during a discussion of hope. An existence without laughter to help to cope could eventually, perhaps rapidly, fall into chaos.

The overlap of scholarship between Milton and Beckett is limited. It takes someone who has specialised in both authors to realise their surprising connections. Upon reading John Calder's book, *The Philosophy of Samuel Beckett* (2001) and Christopher Ricks *Beckett's Dying Words* (1993) some hitherto unexplored comparisons between Milton and Beckett became apparent. Ricks had written exclusively on Milton: his most celebrated work on him being *Milton's Grand Style* (1963). It is with unavoidable familiarity and a deep knowledge of Milton that Ricks inevitably reads Beckett. The references to Milton within *Beckett's Dying Words* (1993) are due to Ricks' expertise. This book contains the greatest exploration of Milton and Beckett that I have encountered.

In Ricks' chapter "Death" he describes how representing the relief and mercy of death is characteristic of much of Beckett's writing (1993); including *All That Fall* which will form the anchor to my comparison of Beckett's work and Milton's in the next chapter. Ricks notes that Milton is one of the very few authors who adequately represent this same idea of the mercy of death. Another author Ricks singles out is Blake, who represents death as a relief in his writings. Although Blake does alternate between portraying death as torment and gift. Ricks backs up his claim about Blake's

belief in the mercy of time and death by quoting from his poem *Milton* which illustrates Blake's belief that:

> Time is the mercy of Eternity; without Times swiftness
> Which is the swiftest of all things; all were eternal torment.

It is interesting to note that this quote is taken from Blake's poetic dedication to Milton; so Blake must also see Milton as representing death as kindness or mercy in his writing. Otherwise, why would this image of merciful time enter his dedication to Milton? Whether Blake sees Milton's mercy of death in any way linked to his unavoidable allegiance to the Devil's Party is an interesting consideration especially considering Satan is responsible for the gift of death in *Paradise Lost*:

> Death, then, is peculiarly Satan's gift to man; when the devil entered Paradise, he came we are told, "devising death to them who lived." Yet in the last two books of the epic Milton apparently contradicts himself; he tells us that death is not a curse but a comforter, not the gift of Satan but the gift of God. (Erskine 1917, p.573)

Both Milton and Beckett adopt mythological language, but while Milton uses ornate language, Beckett has a more minimalist approach. Both focus on symbiotic relationships where a character feels unable to cope with their existence without their partner. The conclusion of both *Paradise Lost* and *Waiting for Godot* are remarkably similar. Due to the strength of these relationships, the characters choose to continue to endure each additional day together, even though it means facing the negative certainty of life.

> Most people most of the time want to live for ever. This truth is acknowledged in literature, including Beckett's. But like many a truth, it is a half-truth, not half-true but half of the truth, as is the truth of a proverb. For, after all, most people some of the time, and some people most of the time, do not want to live for ever. This counter-truth–that, on occasion and more than moodily, we want oblivion, extinction, irreversible loss of

> consciousness–is insufficiently, or is mostly prophylactically, rendered by literature. (Ricks 1993, p.1)

Despite the sweeping generalisations within this quote, Ricks seems to have discovered more than a kernel of truth. Beckett wants oblivion. 'Of Beckett's forerunners in embodying this direction in which desire of oblivion may run, the greatest are famously Swift, Milton, and Dante.' (Ricks 1993 p.25).

A Beckettian life view would propose that a person's life is marked by pointless existence, one is rendered somewhat significant in our beginning and ending, everything else is mere decline:

> Only birth and death have real significance. In between lies a pointless existence, a great waste of the magic of creation, a non-event that follows the fusion that has made life: the waiting, the trivia, which we can see as a journey to nowhere or an extended dream; the growing-up, the career or lack of one, the decline. (Calder 2001, p.9)

This same pointlessness is seen in *Paradise Lost*, most especially post-Fall, as will be discussed later. For Beckett, life is an unrelenting failure, our only brief respite from this suffering is in moments of temporal success. Failure is lasting and success is temporal. With Adam and Eve's Fall, failure permeates into human nature and has been reverberating there ever since; ultimately ensuring that success is removed as a possibility for humankind. A Miltonic perspective sees all future glory as coming exclusively from the Son's sacrifice. Humanity is more deserving of our disgust than our praise. This is largely how Beckett presents the human condition and there are moments in *Paradise Lost* where this view is most definitely present. In a divine time warp the Son's sacrifice compensates for all the past, present, and future sins of the human race. This ultimately voids humanity's efforts to be morally upstanding, since

it is not their goodness but rather God's mercy through Christ which ultimately saves them. Christ-the-loophole wipes all slates clean, although it is dependent upon the sole condition that that person feels repentant.

Eve and Adam maintained this extremely pessimistic view until they remember that they are prophesied to have a descendant who will absolve humanity from their great sin and thus make life meaningful again. This prophecy refers to the Son. Unfortunately, for Beckett and his characters, there is no divine scapegoat who removes the pointless suffering that constitutes human existence. The sin of humankind is left unpaid and so existence remains a stewing of suffering which can be tenderised only through companionship whether platonic or sexual. 'Companionship helps to make life tolerable it is the sharing of misery, an important part of the Beckett ethic.' (Calder 2001 p.5). Adam justifies his decision to eat the fruit for the following reason, he claims it is better to Fall into the unknown with Eve than stay in Paradise without her:

> Should God create another Eve, and I
> Another Rib afford, yet loss of thee
> Would never from my heart; no no, I feel
> The Link of Nature draw me: Flesh of Flesh,
> Bone of my Bone thou art, and from thy State
> Mine never shall be parted, bliss or woe.
>
> *Paradise Lost* X.911-6

It is from this context, humanity doomed to live an unlivable life, that the Son's sacrifice is presented by Milton. Considering that the Son volunteers his life for the sake of humanity adds an extra dimension of heroism to his actions. Milton adopts a tragic treatment for the Son exclusively, although he claims otherwise. Milton begins Book IX with the following quote which reflects his conscious decision to alter genre:

‘I now must change / Those notes to Tragic’ (*Paradise Lost* IX.5-6) yet his tone is by no means confined to tragic; the comic mode also increases in frequency from this point on.

4.3 Bleak Beckettian Universe

Justifying God is of central concern throughout *Paradise Lost* yet God cannot be justified so long as the readers believe His punishments were overly harsh. Milton’s presentation of despair post-Fall, particularly in Book IX and X, paints a damning, though realistic, portrait of human life without the Judeo-Christian saviour. This is the life represented in Beckett’s works. Even when a divine figure exists within a Beckettian text it is pathetic, impotent, or needy. In *Paradise Lost* Milton shows that humanity’s endurance has been exclusively due to the promise of the Son’s redemption of humanity through his selfless sacrifice. Adam and Eve needed assurance that a better future for their descendants will be possible; only with this guarantee did they agree to continue the species. God knew that humanity needed an opiate to ensure their continuation. Milton voiced God’s logic as follows:

> And now without redemption all mankind
> Must have bin lost, adjudg'd to Death and Hell
> By doom severe, had not the Son of God,
> In whom the fulness dwells of love divine,
> His dearest mediation thus renewd.
>
> *Paradise Lost* III:222-6

Without divine saving grace, mercy, and compassion existence becomes fruitless. Fish proposes that for Milton ‘Fallen man is hopelessly corrupt and his corruption resists even the grace freely offered to him through the intercession of Jesus Christ.’ (Fish 1998, p.39). To reject salvation is clearly irrational. It would result in death

being abrupt and final. For Beckett, while this annihilation is inevitable it remains strangely desirable.

When such religious assurances about the meaningfulness of life are removed, one is left with a characteristically Beckettian universe. In the communicational chasm which has nestled between humanity and God post-Fall, this Beckettian condition becomes very apparent. Despite God's frequent communications with the original couple prior to the Fall, the exact nature of their punishment remains unexplained. Immediately after the Fall, Adam and Eve have no idea what God's reaction will be. God's threat of death seemed terrible, but its exact meaning remained unexplained by anyone with authority of knowledge over them. Until that point, nothing had ever died. They could only speculate upon its meaning. How could they have been expected to understand the ramifications of their choosing to eat?

This lack of understanding is what lead to Adam and Eve feeling wholly overwhelmed in their postlapsarian world. This combination of confusion and steadfast faith is extremely well represented within Beckett's "Waiting for Godot". It is in Adam and Eve's despair that they appear at their most human, in the depth of their despair. As Milton's readership is already fallen they can easily identify with their foreparents, which may explain why Milton increases his comic treatment of them around this time. Even if this was unintentional or subconscious, the result was the reader's prevention of identifying or sympathising with Eve and Adam. Milton demeaned the character of Eve and Adam, so as to successfully prevent over-identification with them. It is clear from his preamble to *Samson Agonistes*, called *Of that sort of Dramatic Poem which is call'd Tragedy*, that Milton was familiar with Aristotle's genre theory and so it is appropriate to summarise a brief Aristotelian comedic analysis: Milton has Eve and Adam transformed into fools in their post-

lapsarian world so as to avoid his readers overly identifying with them. Milton's readers are encouraged to laugh in supposed superiority as Adam and Eve's stupidity lowers their worth as humans.

The only means they had to educate themselves was to defy God's laws. Through their eating of the Tree of Knowledge they should have gained a better understanding of how everything works, yet they fail to grasp practicalities whose understanding would have been a given amongst Milton's readers, such as the reality of death. Although readers can identify with their reason to sin, Adam and Eve appear extremely naïve and foolish, especially when they suggest such foolish plans as to 'hid themselves among / The thickest Trees,' (*Paradise Lost* X.100-1) from an omniscient God. Their knowledge, even now, is so limited that it can be best classified as juvenile. According to Beckett's philosophy 'The acquisition of knowledge is simply a way of passing the time while we wait to die.'(Calder 2001 p.23); it serves no greater purpose. In the case of Eden, this statement is acutely accurate, as it was in their acquisition of knowledge, in the form of the forbidden fruit that resulted in their unspecified future death.

In Milton's *Areopagitica* (1868), the centrality of choice in helping a person to mature into someone morally upstanding is emphasised. Milton believes that the cost involved in this process of moral enlightenment is worth paying. A person needs to be shown the reality of life, from the euphoric to the putrid, only after such a process of enrichment can one be capable and free to draw their own conclusions about life and choices. Once the full spectrum of reality was laid out for Beckett, he became determined to represent the complex continuum of human existence. Beckett's message is that suffering is characteristic of life in this world, the only

worthwhile action one can take is to try to prick the being responsible for bringing them into this dreadful world, even if such an action remains symbolic.

> Beckett's driving desire was to look at the full horror of the situation into which God (or whatever the cause of our suffering can be called) has put us, and to realise it fully and absolutely with nothing to deflect that gaze. He also needed, out of anger and his understanding of what our invisible enemy has done to make some gesture, however puny, against that evil power. This could only consist of doing something impossible at times, in order words, it can accomplish a kind of miracle. Sure a gesture may well be pointless, but it is an action taken against the determinism of our situation, and out view of his writing can be just that, determination. (Calder 2001, p.76).

This Promethean impulse is one reaction to witnessing the suffering which is characteristic of life. Indeed it represents the thought process of Milton's Satan very well.

> There was never a question of giving up, of ceasing to struggle. To God, to nature, to the panaceas of society as much as to tyranny, there is only one course of action: defiance. Beckett cast himself as Prometheus and was willing, in his mental torment, to share his fate. (Calder 2001, p.31)

If such a divine being existed and one made a stand against it, all that may serve to do is draw out that deity's anger.

Milton took an opposite approach towards God as he adopted a theistic view of life. Foremost during our reading of *Paradise Lost* we must remember that:

> He [Milton] is struggling to make his God appear less wicked, as he tells us he will at the start (1. 25), and does succeed in making him noticeably less wicked than the traditional Christian one; though, after all his efforts, owing to his loyalty to the sacred text and the penetration with which he makes its story real to us, his modern critics still feel, in a puzzled way, that there is something badly wrong about it all. That this searching goes on in *Paradise Lost,* I submit, is the chief source of its fascination and poignancy; and to realize that it is going on makes the poem feel much better at many points, indeed clears up most of the objections to it. (Empson 1965, p.11)

If Milton's primary objective was to justify God, as he claims it to be, then he could have painted a more flattering portrait. Hill states that if you adopt a historical and metaphorical reading of Genesis, as Milton does:

> …this approach may help us to understand Milton's failure to make God a sympathetic character. God is history, is the world as it really is, not as we would romantically like it to be. Milton is no more able than any other theologian to explain how beneficent omnipotence has been unable to make a better job of running the universe. (Hill 1979, p.345)

No portrayal can explain away God's allowance of cruelty and lack of mercy. There is a blatant immorality, almost cruelty, in the judgement of God and it becomes increasingly harder to ignore upon closer inspection. Scratch a little below the loving veneer of Christianity and you will find a God who is desperate for vindication.

Intrinsic to the Christian mythological viewpoint is that all human life is tarnished after Eden. Even the most innocent, newly born baby is infected by this genetic ailment. Whether Original Sin begins at conception or birth is debated amongst the factions of Christian groupings; although it is interesting to note that the other Abrahamic religions, Islam and Judaism, have no concept or theory similar to Original Sin despite having the same story of Adam and Eve. Beckett shares Milton's belief in Original Sin, although he has an irreligious definition of it:

> All of Beckett's *alter ego* characters are also in a sense Adam, the first man. And Adam has brought to man the curse of original sin. Beckett is in no doubt as to what original sin consists of today: it is 'the sin of having been born' (Calder 2001, pp.24-25)

For Beckett, Original Sin exists as part of the fabric of reality. It is embedded into all of humanity inescapably and it is simply the sin of having come into existence. Beckett, according to Calder, thinks life must be a punishment after seeing the effects

of Original Sin (2001, pp.24-5) Calder sees Proust and Schopenhauer as strongly shaping Beckett's belief of Original Sin (2001, pp.24-5). Calder describes Beckett's belief regarding the misfortune of birth as follows:

> Beckett realised that life is a total accident, but whereas other considered themselves supremely lucky to be fathered by the fusion of one sperm in billions that found one egg in millions, Beckett felt the opposite. That tiny chance of life is a supreme disaster, because even if one is born into fortunate circumstances, lives in a period of peace in a prosperous civilisation, in a part of the world where such things are possible, one still has to face the lifelong certainty that one will die at the end; nothing is certain during that lifetime, nor can one know how or when one will die. (Calder 2001, pp.13-14)

Adam and Eve saw the very same cruelty in the uncertainty of death, this in particular, caused them the most distress after they fell. They felt that the ever-lurking, ever uncertain timing of death was far worse than facing 'whatever thing death be,' (*Paradise Lost* IX.695).

4.4 Impact of Afterlife on this Life

The extent of Milton's feverant hope in eternal Providence can be clearly seen, as in the collections of essays on Milton's vision and violence (Lewalski 2010). Had Milton been less faithful, less hopeful of an afterlife and less sure of humanity's goal then he would have found himself very Beckettian. But this Beckettian scepticism is portrayed most clearly by Milton within the characters of Eve and Adam after the Fall. When they believe, as Beckett does, that death is final and unending, their lives lose their purpose. Yet Milton seems to have remained steadfast in his belief of an afterlife. Like so many of the beliefs held by Milton, his theory regarding the afterlife was heretical; he believed in thnetopsychism or soul-sleep which means

that the soul remains in a dormant sleep-like state until the Day of Judgement. In *De Doctrina Christiana* (1935) Milton states:

> I will show, that in death, first, the whole man, and secondly, each component part suffers privation of life. It is to be observed, first of all, that God denounced the punishment of death against the whole man that sinned, without excepting any part. For what could be more just, than that he who had sinned in his whole person, should die in his whole person? Or, on the other hand, what could be more absurd than that the mind, which is the part principally offending, should escape the threatened death; and that the body alone, to which immortality was equally allotted, before death came into the world by sin, should pay the penalty of sin by undergoing death, though not implicated in the transgression? (Sewell 1935, Ch.13)

This means that all who have died are left in a comatose, vegetative state, in their mind and body, while they await the Second Coming and their full re-awakening.

Lewalski identifies that while writing *Lycidas* Milton:

> still excepted the orthodox notion that the soul or spirit goes immediately to heaven or hell after death…Milton now argues (as had Overton) that the soul or spirit as well as the body suffers physical death and that the whole person is then resurrected at the last day. (2008, p.431)

It is through the death of the Son that Milton discovers the point of humanity; the soul can wake up. It is only through Christ's sacrifice that human lives matter; one can reconnect with the Father in the same eternal bliss that existed prior to Eve and Adam's expulsion. Milton sees two options for any human life: one can squander their life hedonistically and risk eternal damnation, or live morally upstanding lives and potentially gain eternal joy. It is a choice between heavenly 'bliss' (*Paradise Lost* VI.52) or hellish 'hiss' (*Paradise Lost* X.508). Although a straightforward decision for Milton, it remains crucial for his theology that people have the freedom to choose to pursue the good. Through Milton's portrayal of the supremacy of God, to the point of tyranny, and the despair of Adam, Eve, and Satan, he inadvertently highlights the

corrupt core of Christianity; it may not have been his aim, but Milton certainly leaves God accountable.

4.5 Cycle of Suffering or Reproduction

This same perpetuating wretchedness in humanity is represented in the works of Beckett where the results of the Fall are magnified and analysed in minute detail. As a species, humans are incapable of lasting happiness yet they are unwilling to stop the cycle of suffering and choose to reproduce. For Beckett, God wills humanity's continuation and the elongation of each person's life.

> For providence could have been counted on to be up to no good, nothing but good intentions paving the way to our living hell:
> There is providence for impotent old men, to the end. And when they cannot swallow any more someone rams a tube down their gullet, or up their rectum, and fills them full of vitaminized pap, so as not to be accused of murder. (Ricks 1993, p.19)

The cowardly desire to continue, to hope to thrive in an afterlife motivates this belief. Rejecting even the option of salvation requires huge confidence. Beckett displayed this assurance. Although rather uniquely for Beckett, the idea of Heaven seemed tortuous and not at all enjoyable; the idea of eternity so unsettled him. In the quotation below Ricks is speaking about the motivating factors around the theological creation of Hell. There has to be something to make an eternity in Heaven seem a worthy reward and an eternity of suffering, called Hell was imagined, to make Heaven seems desirable:

> One surreptitious way, in the old days, for Christians and other afterlifers to acknowledge this half of the truth, and bring home the thought, incompatible with their system of rewards and punishments, that an eternity of consciousness would inherently be torture, was duly to imagine an eternity of torture. (Ricks 1993, p.24)

Most people see little harm in practising a religious rite, even if they do not actively practice that faith since all one could possibly gain is eternal bliss. This practice, of adhering to religious beliefs and customs in the off chance that they are correct, is exemplified in Pascal's Wager which was found in the posthumous writings of Blaise Pascal in the seventeenth century. Empson provides an explanation of the logic as follows:

> …since the penalties for disbelief in Christianity are infinitely horrible and enduring, therefore, if there is any probability however tiny (but finite) that the assertions of the religion are true, a reasonable man will endure any degree of pain and shame on earth (since this is known beforehand to be finite) on the mere chance that the assertions are true. (1965, pp.45-46)

Beckett's *Waiting for Godot* can be viewed as a meditation upon Pascal's Wage since the endurance of Vladimir and Estragon is based upon their hope that they will eventually meet Godot. As the messenger boy says 'Mr Godot told me to tell you he won't come this evening but surely tomorrow.' (Beckett 2011, p.40). It is better for them to live in the hope that Godot will appear rather than commit suicide and never know. The fallen angels rebelled for the opposite reason. They correctly believe God's authority and power was untested and therefore possibly unworthy of his leadership, they decide to mutiny '…to obey God merely out of cowardice…would be a gross dishonour.' (Empson 1965 p.46).

While Milton may have been familiar with this theory it is likely, from Milton's actions, letters, polemics, and his encyclopaedic knowledge of religious beliefs and practices, that he was a truly devout believer. Milton would likely argue that an observer of Pascal's Wager should not be rewarded the same as a true devotee, as that person's belief is hypocritical, superficial, and externally motivated.

Motivation and action are both important in determining accountability. It is not religious devotion if the belief is motivated by the wrong reasons, it is a falsity.

4.6 Death as Merciful Remedy to Life

There is something harrowing in the intention of Milton's God the Father. It is very clearly in His interest that Eve and Adam Fall, yet God repeatedly portrays His devotion to humanity as shown here:

> …I at first with fair gifts
> Created him endowed, with happiness
> And immortality: that fondly lost,
> This other served but to eternize woe;
> Till I provided death; so death becomes
> His final remedy… second life…
>
> *Paradise Lost* XI.57-64

The meaning of 'fondly' is foolish, as when Adam says 'fondly overcome with female charm.' (*Paradise Lost* IX.999). Having lost their happiness, God generously provides the ultimate out for Eve and Adam. There is, of course, no solution to life other than the 'final remedy' (XI.62). By providing death, their woe becomes finite. 'Death has of course to be the ultimate escape for all of us. Every attempt to escape life other than death is doomed to be frustrated…' (Calder 2001, p.27). God claims responsibility for the creation of death in *Paradise Lost*: 'Till I provided death' (XI.61). At this point, Milton has already explained, in grotesque detail, how Death came into existence through the incestuous union of his father/grandfather Satan and his mother/lover Sin. If God provided Death, then why did he generate him through such means?

Death is personified in *Paradise Lost* and he seems to view all living things as his eventual food, which he tortuously toys with in ailment and in the gradual decline of all living things into old age. Death is ravenous yet tactful; he allows enough time for all life to mature and reproduce in order that he can ensure a constant supply of food. This cruelty of death is not implied in God's speech above, yet it is clearly represented by Milton. Death here is understood as a 'remedy' or solution to life. There is no mention of the powerful entity that becomes satiated in another's passing. God had already provided sin and death so that humans could be appropriately threatened and punished for their misdeeds. Since Sin and Death were realities before Eve and Adam transgressed, they were bound to their fate of eating the fruit and becoming mortal.

Death as a blessing, as Milton's God tries to pass it off, is characteristic of much of Beckett's work. According to Calder 'In nature he [Beckett] sees only cruelty and pain and states quite clearly that the reason for our existence might simply be to allow pain to exist.' (2001, pp.9-10). While discussing violence and pain in *Paradise Lost* Benet similarly says 'An essential aspect of human experience, pain plays a central role in Christianity.' As the personifications of Sin and Death predate the creation of humanity, this adds evidence to the argument that humanity was created to Fall so as to serve as fuel for Sin and Death. While this is not directly argued by Milton, his omniscient God does allow these hideous offspring of evil to be created, passively at least, by not stopping their birth. God could see the necessity of sin and death in order to judge the sincerity with which each individual human loved and obeyed Him. Without the punishment of death, which is the consequence of sin, people would have no reason to follow God's commands, especially when God's laws seem as arbitrary as forbidding them from eating from two trees. To reject

God's love and the gift of salvation, an individual most give over to sin. Then when the sinners die, they are doomed to an eternity of hell. When the consequence of death is removed, and it can no longer serve as a deterrent to sin, the motivation to love God out of fear is removed.

If God's decision to add death to humans' lives had been motivated from a position of mercy, then why not ensure a pain-free death for all? Why must death be so often coupled with pain; how is that merciful or caring? Why can one not simply cease to be without trauma?

4.7 Melancholia and Knowledge

The constant morbid thoughts that can overcome any deeply pensive person played heavily on Beckett's mind.

> Beckett knew from experience and from deep thought, partly connected with his years of hiding in Roussillon during the war, partly from the time he believed he was going to die from a tumour in his cheek, what is was to live in the constant expectation of death. (Calder 2001, p.14)

This type of intellectual depression is traditionally referred to as melancholia; Milton represents it well in *Il Penseroso* when the speaker asks for 'vain deluding joys, the brood of folly' to leave him alone as they seek to only cloud the mind. Earlier, when we discussed Erasmus' *In Praise of Folly* as exemplifying Wood's theory of the Comedy of Forgiveness (2004), here Folly serves as cure to the miseries of life, as the more thoroughly you understand the doomed reality of human existence the more depressed or detached from reality you become. The assurance of an uninterrupted, final death, coupled with knowledge of pointless and constant suffering in life made Beckett genuinely believe that the slim chance of life was an undignified tragedy; life

is comedy. Once Sin and Death roam as freely upon Earth as Eve and Adam, there is cause for great distress. Toil, as a punishment post-fall, will now categorise their life and death will be the only end to their suffering. In the consequences of Eve and Adam's Fall God has shown Himself to be chillingly powerful. For Milton however, God does offer meaning in death, through the redemptive power of the Son's sacrifice. For Beckett no such meaning is offered.

4.8 God's sense of humour

Much of the suffering portrayed in *Paradise Lost* is hyperbolic. Eve and Adam are melodramatic due to their naivety. Their exaggerated responses to trivial topics are humorous to the modern reader. Critics have acknowledged that God takes pleasure in His creature's misfortunes 'Certainly God experiences something suspiciously like malicious glee in prolonging the war in heaven…' (Von Sneidern, 2005, p.60). and we find a series of 'God's blood-curdling jokes' (Empson 1965, p.29) within *Paradise Lost.* If one can see the comedy within these darkest moments it can help to instil hope and acceptance of the current situation. As God is omniscient He sees the world on a cosmic scale, which naturally trivialises the mundane suffering of Adam and Eve, and indeed all humans. This thought can motivate polar opposite responses. Either to see life as meaningless or to challenge them to move beyond negativity quickly to try and find purpose, perhaps even humour within the situation or beyond it. When we are faced with the harsh realities of life 'How can one better magnify the Almighty than by sniggering with him at his little jokes, particularly the poorer ones.', as Winnie puts it in Beckett's *Happy Days*.

Chapter 5: Fallenness in *Paradise Lost* and *All That Fall*

5.1 Humanity is Fallen

As already discussed, I see Milton's characterisation of Eve and Adam post-Fall as Beckettian. They eventually commit to propagating the species, but only after they are assured that the Son, with his redeeming sacrifice, will be their progeny. Before this decision they are bleak, depressed, even suicidal. Showing the transformative power of faith. Beckett's *All That Fall* lack this hope. All is in decline. All are hopeless. All are fallen.

Paradise Lost is an explanation of how humanity came to be fallen and how they hope to rise again while *All That Fall* is an exploration of what it means to be fallen. The title of Beckett's work is what first compelled me to explore it in comparison to Milton's *Paradise Lost* because the idea that much comedy is limited to the fallen is central to this thesis. As only once humanity has fallen can comedy becomes debasing, abusive, superior or black. *All That Fall* became a natural choice to explore how this sense of fallenness is represented within the modern secular world nourished by a sense of helplessness and despair. In a letter to Nancy Cunard Beckett described the inspiration of what would become *All That Fall*:

> Never thought about radio play technique but in the dead of t'other night got a nice gruesome idea full of cartwheels and dragging of feet and puffing and panting which may or may not lead to something. (Frost 1991, p.361)

What in particular makes this a 'nice gruesome' radio play: the invalidity of the main characters, the possible murder of a budding youth, the sexually explicit puns and wordplay coming from a septuagenarian, or perhaps the heavy, oppressive noises of dragging feet, groans, and sighs? The true hideousness of this play, I believe lies in its accuracy to life, its identifiability; it is realistic though hyperbolic.

This text is unusually biographical for Beckett. In keeping with the typical way in which towns were named literally in Ireland, Beckett gives his village the realistic, although surprisingly profound name of "Boghill".

> Beckett's play plays with "the abhorred name" of Boghill, and mentions linguistic change even if only in inscriptions over lavatories. More pervasively, it alludes to dust – a word that occurs eight times (perhaps more) within a very short text. (Mc Cormack 2001, p.195)

As indicated by the title, this village is inhabited by fallen people. He places his characters within an imagined recreation of his hometown of Foxrock, Dublin. It is a predominately Christian area, with the train station giving siginificance to the lives of this suburban community in Dublin. The characters are drawn from the real people that continued to populate the Foxrock of Beckett's mind.

> Radio drama was a new medium for Beckett and within the play All that Fall he exploited, with more relish than perhaps anywhere else in his work, his mastery of local colour and character vignettes. (Goldsmith 2006, p.15)

The real life inspirations for these characters and setting is surely the key to the sense of identifiability which draws the listener in. Boghill has a strong sense of community and authenticity which is typically lacking in Beckett's works. Although this sense of connection amongst the community is very real, their solidarity is motivated by the desire to share misery.

Rather than portraying the residences of Boghill in the typical mode of sinners, which is the common representation of the fallen, Beckett instead draws out the reality of their fallenness by having his readers accompany his characters for a normal day of their cursed existence. The residents of Boghill have been born into an oppressive state of ruination; there is a stifling atmosphere of malaise and mortality.

Beckett sees Original Sin as manifest in the struggle of people to maintain any substantial joy or contentment in life beyond a fleeting respite. This sin of having been born, of being fallen is the overarching theme of his body of works and it is the primary theme of this text.

Milton's text explains how humanity came to be fallen, from a Judaeo-Christian perspective. Although Milton's choice of title for *Paradise Lost* would appear to be quite straightforward, it is interesting to note that it has a neutral, blameless title. Common titles for this topic include the Expulsion, being driven out of Eden, the Exile from Eden, the First Sin, the Temptation, the Fall of Man and so on. These phrases conjure up more dynamic and damning images, which can be seen to be in contrast to the passive title that Milton chooses. There is also a sense of wrongfulness, blame, or culpability in the above phrases. This culpability is absent in Milton's title as it is possible for something to be lost in error, by neglect, or accident; a person may not be responsible for something becoming lost. Without any prior familiarity with Genesis, it would be natural to suppose this text could be about someone losing paradise due to disorientation. This erroneous, blameless meaning of lost is not allowed to continue for long. Upon examination, it is clear that Milton's use of the word lost does carry a negative connotation within this poem. Paradise is not lost passively; Eve and Adam are responsible for falling into sin. This negative meaning can, for example, be seen during Adam's internal monologue after he learns of Eve's transgression. In it Adam refers to Eve as doomed and lost:

> O fairest of Creation, . . .
> How art thou lost, how on a sudden lost,
> Defac't, deflourd, and now to Death devote?
>
> *Paradise Lost* IX.896-901

Eve becomes lost as a resulting of eating of the Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil, a consequence of her new lost state is that she is now 'Defac't, deflourd, and now to Death devote'. The meaning of 'devote' here is doom, so Adam recognises that she is now condemned to death. Her external beauty has been spoiled in the same way that Lucifer was dimmed post-fall (Defac't), she has also been sullied of her innocence (deflourd). The harsh alliteration of the 'de' sound is further emphasised by the rhythmic stress on the first syllable and by the central placement of the 'and now to', which draws further attention to the damning 'de' sound. Ricks twice quotes this same phrase from *Paradise Lost* 'to Death devote' when discussing Beckett and death. Clearly, then this phrase must resonate strongly with Beckett's worldview according to Ricks. In the above quote, Milton has Adam deliberately repeat 'lost' within the same line to point to the immovability of her new lost state and to show how it was a deliberate, unchangeable action.

5.2 Beckett's Attachment to All That Fall

According to Christopher Murray *All That Fall* 'was to be a landmark play in his [Beckett's] writing career.' (2007, p.113). The motivating factor in Beckett's choosing to write for the radio for the first time was the repeated invitations he received from the BBC. This was due to the interest generated by the Parisian production of *En Attendant Godot* which eventually gave this new project the final push needed to get started (Frost 1991).

> In 1953 the BBC radio department (Third Programme) had toyed with the idea of making a radio drama of *Waiting For Godot* but thought better of it. Three years later, following the London success of *Godot*, the BBC tried again, sending their woman in Paris to talk to Beckett early in July 1956 about an option on the newly finished *Fin de partie*. He was unhappy with

> that idea but said he would like to write an original play for radio, though doubtful of his ability to work in this medium. (Murray 2007, p.112)

Before writing *All That Fall*, Beckett had been writing entirely in French. This project gave him the opportunity to reconnect with his native language, but through the filter of a new mode of writing.

> In the years preceding *All That Fall*, Beckett had been writing exclusively in French. Radio provided the opportunity to write in English again, which marked an important moment in his development. When he returned to his native language, he was able to use material drawn from his youth in Ireland. (Frost 1991, p.362)

This adoption of a new medium of writing, coupled with his rediscovery of writing in his first language, led to a very productive period for Beckett. Beckett completed this work rather quickly, but he also fell into serious depression whilst writing it. What triggered Beckett's depression can only be speculated upon, but a potential cause could be the stress of tackling a new genre, in an unpractised language, coupled with the unusually personal nature of this work: 'In the last week of August 1956, he wrote to Barney Rosset [his publisher] that he was "in a whirl of depression at the moment"' (Knowlson 2004, pp.430-431). He also cancelled a week of appointments; he was so affected by the writing of this radio play that he could not cope with his normal daily commitments. The act of writing this text was either traumatic or therapeutic for Beckett; all that can be concluded with any degree of certainty is that Beckett was left raw from writing this.

It may be for this reason that Beckett was so protective of the integrity of this text. He banned it from being staged theatrically, and later Beckett's estate continued to enforce this. Beckett was always very reluctant to change the medium of his texts. Yet he retracted on this by allowing two live-action recordings of *All That Fall* to be

made in his lifetime. Despite it having been written in English first, the two approved dramatisations of it were staged in France and Germany.

> Beckett authorised a French TV version adapted by Robert Pinget, shown on RTF on 25 January 1963. A German stage production was given at the Schiller-Theatre, Berlin in January 1966; Beckett was not happy with either. (Ackerley 2006, p.11)

It may be that Beckett had believed that staging it in another language might have added enough distance between the original radio text and the theatrical version of it. He 'refused permission to the British National Theatre when Laurence Olivier and Joan Plowright wished to play Dan and Maddy Rooney.' (Cohn 2014, p.215). Whether language was a motivating factor in this decision is unknown but it may be relevant as it was common in both of the allowed stagings.

> All That Fall is specifically a radio play, or rather radio text, for voices, not bodies…A perfectly straight reading before an audience seems to me just barely legitimate, though even on this score, I have my doubts. But I am absolutely opposed to any form of adaptation with a view to its conversion into "theatre." It is no more theatre than End-Game is radio and to "act" it is to kill it…Frankly the thought of All That Fall on a stage, however discreetly, is intolerable to me. (Frost 1991, p.366)

Unsurprisingly then, he was unimpressed with both recorded versions of *All That Fall* (Ackerley 2006, p.11).

A recent stage production of *All That Fall*, directed by Trevor Nunn, ran in a small London theatre, followed by a short run in New York (Brantley 2013). Beckett's estate allowed for the staging of this play on the condition that it was not to be acted out bodily and only read as if for a radio play. This limited the actors to reading from their scripts. Facial expressions and hand gestures had to be minimised. The goal was to recreate the atmosphere of a radio studio, with microphones hanging

from the rigging and even a typical “on air” light glowing red during the performance. Very clearly then, this is a text where the meaning is conveyed solely through the language and sound effects. Having the text acted out impacts upon the meaning that Beckett is trying to convey through the medium of voice exclusively. A close textual analysis may uncover what Beckett is trying to explain linguistically.

As a radio play, *All That Falls* relies very heavily upon sound effects, whose meaning would become diluted if transferred to a traditional theatrical staging. The radio play was written with the assumption that the listeners would give their full attention to actively interpreting the audio and linguistic sounds that they heard. Beckett had a precise idea of how he wanted his sounds represented, in order to faithfully convey these noises a great deal of experimental research was carried out by the BBC.

> Beckett's script demanded a degree of stylized realism hitherto unheard of in radio drama and new methods had to be found to extract the sounds needed…These experiments, and the discoveries made as they evolved, led directly to the establishment of the BBC's Radiophonic Workshop. Beckett and *All That Fall* thus directly contributed to one of the most important technical advances in the art of radio (and the technique, and indeed technology, of radio in Britain). (Frost 1991, pp.368, 370)

This type of sound engineering has since become commonplace, but it was cutting edge at the time of Beckett’s writing in 1955. He teamed with Donald McWhinnie who produced *All That Fall*.

> [Donald] McWhinnie was interested in experimental radio, and on the strength of his involvement with *All That Fall* was to go on to found the BBC’s Radiophonic Workship in 1958. His idea was that although the text was in some measure naturalistic, and for Beckett extraordinarily so, with a mainly Irish cast including J.G. Devlin, Jack McGowran, Patrick Magee, Harry Hutchinson and Allan McClelland, the sound effects should be in various ways unrealistic or rendered abstract. . . His solution was to have the

> actors mimic the sounds stylistically. Beckett was not happy with this decision. (Murray 2007, p.113)

Beckett's involvement with radio production resulted in an acceleration in the field of sound engineering. His perfectionism lead to excellent results, and luckily his initial reluctance and modesty in his ability to write in the medium of radio play was unfounded.

5.3 Writing for the Genre

One such way in which Beckett's writing through the medium of radio can be shown as superior is through his representation of Mrs Rooney's obesity. Mrs Rooney is grotesquely overweight; much of the humour in *All That Fall* relies upon her massiveness and her corresponding struggles to battle through even the most basic of movements. If an overweight actress were cast as Mrs Rooney in a stage production, much of this amusement would be dulled. Placing the actor into a fatsuit would break the illusion and add a pantomime atmosphere to the production, which would blunt Beckett's cutting humour. This is identical motivation to Milton who, as I mentioned earlier, rejected the staging of a dramatic production of Eden due to the inability to stage his characters the way he wanted. From the Trinity manuscript, we know that Milton looked to the bible for inspiration for his Aristotelian Tragedy (Lewalski 2008, pp.123ff). From it, you can see that even in this early stage of his research, he considered the title *Paradise Lost* for his play. He later landed upon the title 'Adam Unparadiz'd' but the crippling hurdle was being unable to find a means of portraying Eve and Adam before the Fall, in their naked glory. Their natural innocence and nudity would be made inauthentic if the actors were clothed in flesh-coloured suits. This need for decency mocked the very dignity Milton was hoping to convey.

Another solution Milton contemplated was to have a narrator describe 'the Fall occurring offstage' (Lewalski 2008, p.124). This would, unfortunately, limit his Tragedy to the aftermath of the Fall. This obviously proved to be too much of a compromise for Milton. He eventually rejected this idea of a staged tragedy in favour of an epic poem which could convey so much more. By choosing the genre of Epic poetry, Milton could represent Heaven and Hell, God and Satan, as well as nudity with justice. He felt this was his best means of representing the narrative concerns of the story of the Expulsion. He can achieve so much more by guiding the imagination of his readers:

> Once again, however, the audience is not to see Adam and Eve before their fall, presumably owning in part to the impossibility of actors performing nude. In turning from stage to page, Milton will leave behind this constraint and present Adam and Eve "with native honor clad / In naked majesty" (*PL* 4.289-90). Milton will be allowed to see, and to share with his audience, what his Moses in early drafts hid behind a veil. (Fallon 2014, p.5)

Common to both Milton and Beckett is the desire for an active, attentive audience for their works; one that will attempt to visualise their images thoroughly. With radio, the listener can visualise the huge, unstable bulk of Mrs Rooney and enjoy the jokes aimed at her. There is something private about a radio play, where a listener can have an authentic individual response. Kim Conner provides a selection of quotes about Mrs Rooney's size, including the impeccable comparison of her to a blancmange described further below (1997). Conner claims that the radio, most especially, allows the imaginative scope of Mrs Rooney's size to be pictured as boundless:

> Each of these descriptions presents the listener with vivid visual images… Indeed it would be a wholly different play if the verbal descriptions were "framed" by the vision of an actual face and body. We in the audience would interpret what we were hearing about her in light of what we were

> seeing, and the descriptions could have a metaphoric value only. On the other hand, with radio, the metaphoric value of such descriptions in a way can become literalized through our imaginative visualization of Maddy. She can become in our mind's eye a big fat jelly out of a bowl, then a roll of tarpaulin, then a big pale blur, and so on…(Conner 1997, p.304)

Despite, or perhaps because of the emotional turmoil of writing *All That Fall*, it was written up 'comparatively quickly' (Murray 2007, p.112). This is unusual for Beckett, but the core idea of this story came to him in an intense vision he had while in bed. Drawing on biographical details was also certain to have help speed up Beckett's writing process.

5.4 Compulsion for Companionship

Adam's greatest foolishness is his inability to see Eve's capacity for immorality. Adam wants Eve to have been tricked or in some way deceived, rather than admit she fell because of her self-serving ambition. She ate because she was dissatisfied with her lot, her lower status to Adam. Having 'Greedily engorged' (*Paradise Lost* IX.791) after careful consideration, she decided to offer the fruit to Adam in the hopes of artificially creating harmony and equality between them. Although she did rely upon her beauty to seduce him.

> She gave him of that fair enticing Fruit
> With liberal hand: he scrupl'd not to eat
> Against his better knowledge, not deceav'd,
> But fondly overcome with Femal charm.
>
> *Paradise Lost* IX.996-999

There may be significance in the numbering of Adam's sin at IX.999, an inversion of the Number of the Beast. Perhaps implying that although Satan believes himself victorious in the moment, really this is the means through which the Son will prove

Himself. While it seems to be a success for evil, it will only serve to allow greater goodness to come from it; through God's loving grace, in the form of the Son, to redeem humanity from this sin. Milton can be very exact in his line numbering and placement as seen right before the temptation scene. When Satan encounters Eve isolated, Milton includes an acrostic poem. The first letter in each line between IX.510-14 spells out 'S A T A N'. This reference which may go unnoticed, much like Satan's own dishonesty and cunning going unnoticed by the innocent Eve.

Fish states that Adam repeatedly tries to 'make Eve the victim of an evil external to her' (1998, p.262). He cannot comprehend the idea that Eve is guilty of any wrongdoing.

> To protect himself from pain he has conferred on the fact of disobedience a meaning he will feel comfortable with : Eve does not sin, she is un-done by some 'cursed fraud'. Presenting with a fact too un-pleasant to contemplate directly, but too large and insistent to suppress, Adam finds a way to think about it without truly confronting it, just as the reader does if he turns away from the Fall to concentrate on its anticipations and finds its cause in some past action or in Eve's flawed nature. In both cases the mind confers on disobedience a meaning it feels comfortable with – Eve, Adam decides, does not sin, she is undone by 'some cruel fraud' – ignoring the meaning stipulated by God and so exalting itself above His Word. (Fish 1998, pp.262-3)

This rhetoric causes Adam to distance himself from God before he has technically sinned; which is impossible considering the true definition of sin is something which separates someone from God. This is exactly what Adam has done, in the moment of his decision to eat, he has already sinned before that first bite.

Fish also clearly explains Adam's primary motivation for eating the fruit; it is not love but fear. In this same soliloquy, Adam rapidly moves from praise of Eve's beauty, to anger in her misbehaviour, to shifting blame to 'som cursed fraud' (*Paradise Lost* IX.904) before making 'Certain' his fate:

> And mee with thee hath ruind, for with thee
> Certain my resolution is to Die;
> How can I live without thee, how forgoe
> Thy sweet Converse and Love so dearly joyn'd,
> To live again in these wilde Woods forlorn?
> Should God create another Eve,
>
> *Paradise Lost* IX.906-911

It is possible for Adam to live without Eve, by his own admission yet he melodramatically claims it is 'certain' that he should eat the fruit and die; he cannot imagine an alternative. That these complexities are contained within six lines is a testament to Milton's ability to use language economically when he so chooses, it also helps the reader to imagine how rapidly Adam's emotions fluctuate as he attempts to come to terms with the life-altering information that Eve has told him.

> The question 'How can I live without thee?', is answered by Adam himself. He can live without her as he has before ('to live *again*'). As a serious query this cry has no more force than Eve's obviously rhetorical address to her flowers : 'from thee / How shall I part ?' (xi. 281-2) (Fish 1998, p.263)

Here Fish is referring to when Eve learns of her expulsion and like Adam she initially thinks of what she will lose, she cannot imagine her existence without the native flowers of Eden for company. This triviality makes Eve seem foolish and distances her from the readers, making her susceptible to superiority theory. Eve selfishly and foolishly wants to remain with the flowers, in a similar way to Adam who would rather remain with Eve, no matter the consequences. Neither wants to lose their joy-bringing beauty. For Eve especially, but also for Adam to superficially value beauty over life itself shows the extent of their foolishness. They become very human and relatable at this point. Their logic is flawed and therefore humorous. Using Wood's comedy of forgiveness, our identification with their situation can provide an

explanation for this alternative comedy. Adam chooses companionship over compliance with God's orders, consequentially the human race is damned.

This same compulsion for companionship can be seen in *All That Fall.* Mrs Rooney is desperate for external verifications and valuations of her existence and worth. She deeply desires intimacy from those she encounters, but most especially from her husband, although he obviously does not fulfil this need for attention. After she finds Mr Rooney at the train station she asks that he:

> MRS ROONEY: Kiss me!
> MR ROONEY: Kiss you? In pubic? On the Platform? Before the boy? Have you taken leave of your senses? (Beckett 1986, p.28)

Mr Rooney views physical affection as a domestic activity, he thinks Mrs Rooney crazy to desire for a kiss in public. As soon as the boy Jerry leaves and the two are alone, Mrs Rooney again pursues her husband for affection.

> MRS ROONEY: Put your arm around me.
> MR ROONEY: Have you been drinking again? [*Pause.*] You are quivering like a blancmange. [*Pause.*] Are you in a condition to lead me? [*Pause.*] We shall fall into the ditch.
> MRS ROONEY: Oh Dan! It will be like old times!
> MR ROONEY: Pull yourself together or I shall send Tommy for the cab… (Beckett 1986, p.29)

As part of Mrs Rooney's pursuit of attention, she hopes to establish a linguistic connection with Mr Rooney. At first, she questions him, as she hopes to, at least, engage him conversationally, if not physically, but he cuts her off. For Mrs Rooney to desire bodily contact and close proximity with Mr Rooney causes him to question her sobriety. After this painful rejection, he then proceeds to describe her as 'quivering like a blancmange', which is a piercingly accurate description of how her obese body must move and the texture it must have whilst in motion. The force of

this image works best in the medium of radio as the listener's imagination is free to vividly represent her as a wobbly, skin-coloured blob. Mr Rooney considers his walk out of the station and then home, a 'Matterhorn' (Beckett 1986, p.24) of a climb and would rather get on with it, uninterrupted and unattached.

Just before the above quote, Mr Rooney claims he will no longer attempt to communicate whilst moving and so he asks his wife to stop interrupting their walk home. Mrs Rooney imagined her husband would be happy to have a change of company to mark the occasion of his incalculable birthday, but he seems irritated by this deviation from the norm. Mrs Rooney longs to return to the passion of their youth. Yet Mr Rooney is so disgusted by his wife's behaviour that he would rather pay for a cab to come collect them and leave them home, rather than have Mrs Rooney continue to fish for attention. This is even after he miserly costs up each hypothetical penny. Her conduct is so off-putting that Mr Rooney reckons it would be worth the cost of 'two and one' (Beckett 1986, p.29) pence to stop her neediness.

5.5 Knowledge and Certainty

During his calculation of the cab fare, Mr Rooney is reminded that he does not know the exact number of steps at the station's staircase. This uncertainty unnerves him. He asks Mrs Rooney to tell him precisely how many steps she sees but she begs him not to make her count.

> MRS ROONEY: Do not ask me to count, Dan, not now.
> MR ROONEY: Not count! One of the few satisfactions in life!
> MRS ROONEY: Not steps, Dan, Please, I always get them wrong. Then s you might fall on your wound and I would have that on my manure-heap on top of everything else. No, just cling to me and all will be well. [Confused noise of their descent. Panting, stumbling, ejaculations, curses. Silence.] (Beckett 1986, p.30)

Mrs Rooney finds comfort in Mr Rooney while he finds solace the invariance of numbers. Mrs Rooney would deem life liveable, no matter what external activities were ongoing, provided she can remain locked in an embrace with Mr Rooney. Mr Rooney seems to cling to what he believes to be the two certainties in life: death and mathematics. Yet even counting becomes distorted for Mrs Rooney and so it cannot serve as an anchor of certitude in their stagnant world. Why Mrs Rooney cannot count accurately is not explained, but similarly, she has difficulty in recognising other people.

> She is constantly not recognising the people about her; Dan does not remember his age or the number of steps at the station despite his obvious proclivity for counting. Everything seems to be in doubt… (Goldsmith 2006, p.19)

Whether she is meant to be unintelligent, senile, or innumerate is left for the listener to consider. In comparing Maddy Rooney to Molly Bloom, Murray notes that Maddy has a greater degree of education:

> She [Maddy] is a class higher than Molly, for Beckett's comedy depends, in part, on class difference. She is more educated and can quote poetry. Like Vladimir before her and Winnie after, her memory lapses can be revealing when she is quoting. (Murray 2007, p.116)

Mrs Rooney's unreliable memory may be a sign of dementia. She alternates between stammering and struggling to express herself, to showing flourishes of linguistic flare. In some areas, she recalls quotes at length and in others, such as counting, she remains infantile in her knowledge.

Beckett enjoyed dabbling in mathematics. The most viable theory for why he applied numerical concepts to his literature is that it appealed to him in much the same as writing in French did. Beckett wanted to estrange himself from the unavoidable clichés of language and applying mathematics, linguistically and visually, allowed him to incorporate precision, isolation, and distance into his textual works.

> Beckett was constantly looking for ways to escape the common use of words…Mathematics offered a readily available means of doing this…similarly, Chinhong Lim Chang suggests that Beckett moved from English to French (a "less familiar language") to give "himself more room for creative manipulation"…If one accepts this theory, then it follows that Beckett would have been attracted to mathematics for its potential to avoid the pitfalls inherent in all languages. (Gontarski 2010, p.166)

This mathematical application to his work can be seen in his choreographed movement piece *Quad*. This performance-art consists of combinations of up to four dancers wearing block colours and following a strict pattern of movement so as to ensure continuous almost-collisions. The abrupt break in the pattern and the avoidance of a collision causes nervous energy. The comedy here is incongruity coupled with relief. However as the relentless rhythm continues, tensions build and it stops being funny but instead feels threatening in its methodical precision.

Like Beckett, Adam has an inquisitive, philosophical mind and is interested in learning all he can about the universe from his knowledgeable angelic teacher.

> …Divine
> Hystorian, who thus largely hast allayd
> The thirst I had of knowledge, and voutsaf't
> This friendly condescention to relate
> Things else by me unsearchable, now heard
> With wonder, but delight,…

Paradise Lost VIII.6-11

To thirst for knowledge is an honourable pursuit and yet Adam's questioning for information is cut off. His opportunity for education is capped by divine command. Adam is greedy to hear more and more from Raphael and this drive for knowledge foreshadows Adam's eventual decision to eat the Fruit of Knowledge. The beginning of Book VIII consists of Adam's understanding of the cosmos, which attempts to marry the biblical account with Milton's contemporary scientific thought. Interestingly Beckett's story 'From an abandoned work' has a father and son discuss Milton's cosmology which hints at Beckett's appreciation of Milton. Adam desires a conversational companion, with whom he can both learn from and teach. Eve is not the intellectual companion Adam would have hoped for. Raphael tells Eve not to worry herself trying to grasp such difficult topics, it would be better if she could focus her attention on what is tangible and comprehensible for her.

> And thy faire Eve; Heav'n is for thee too high
> To know what passes there; be lowlie wise:
> Think onely what concernes thee and thy being;
> Dream not of other Worlds, what Creatures there
> Live, in what state, condition or degree,
> Contented that thus farr hath been reveal'd
> Not of Earth onely but of highest Heav'n.
>
> *Paradise Lost* VIII.172-8

Eve's intellectual mismatch with Adam would seem to be a vast oversight by God. If God had wanted to relish in the pride of His perfect creation for Adam, why then did God distance them intellectually? Did God not want their partnership to be 'good' like everything else He created? If it is impossible for God to make a mistake, God must have wanted Adam to lack an intelligent counterpart. This could possibly be to enjoy the inevitable bickering that would occur between them. It is dull to have to

watch something working flawlessly. This mismatching of our foreparents is a very poor joke. This oversight or joke by God is the reason why Eve chooses to eat the Fruit of Knowledge; she desires to equal Adam intellectually as she is repeatedly told that reason excels beauty in worth. Since beauty is fleeting it seems difficult to imagine what would have attracted Adam to Eve as they aged. Milton outlined in his divorce tracts that the personalities need to match in a marriage, and if sexual incompatibility is a legitimate reason for annulment or divorce then surely personality incompatibility must likewise be allowed.

> Milton's proposal of divorce for incompatibility moves far beyond the continental Protestant norm: it has precedent in Jewish law and in a few Protestant treatises, but was virtually unheard of in England… The primary one [grounds for divorce] is of a wife unfit for conversation and companionship because of mental dullness…Such images…register Milton's baffled resentment over Mary's lack of interest in and unwillingness or inability to share the intellectual pleasures at the center of his life. (Lewalski 2008, p.163)

Milton knew the anguish of being trapped in a marriage to a woman whom he could not converse with. It seems strange for him to have intentionally lowered Eve's intellect and interest in the world in comparison to Adam. Genesis 5:5 states unambiguously that Adam lived to be nine-hundred-and-thirty-years old; perhaps Adam had improved her intellectual capacity over that considerable time. If that was the case, their companionship may not have survived had Eve not eaten the Fruit of Knowledge. Perhaps had Eve and Adam remained in paradise, they may have eventually required a divorce as their personalities appear to be fundamentally mismatched. Milton himself thought divorce was warranted when the wife was "unfit for conversation" or suffered from "mental dullness" (Lewalski 2008, p.163).

5.6 Eve and Maddy

The personality of Mrs Rooney is very similar to Eve. Both have a mistrust of their intellect and a deep desire for bodily intimacy. As already pointed out, Mrs Rooney is not confident in her ability to count. The other characters in *All That Fall* also frequently misunderstand or ignore what Mrs Rooney says; she also admits to feeling unable to express herself linguistically.

> MR ROONEY… Do you know, Maddy, sometimes one would think you were struggling with a dead language.
> MRS ROONEY: Yes indeed, Dan, I know full well what you mean, I often have that feeling, it is unspeakably excruciating.
> MR ROONEY: I confess I have it sometimes myself, when I happen to overhear what I am saying. (Beckett 1986, p.34)

From her first contact with others, Eve has been told that her intellectual aptitude is unequal to Adam's. It was then explained to her that due to her weakness of mind she must be beneath Adam in glory. Adam's intelligence is God-given and so he has not earned his superiority over her; he was arbitrarily granted it. Eve's primary function is to be beautiful. Her magnificence is what makes her a worthy companion for Adam. She is programmed to view herself as an empty vessel, but a masterfully decorated one: the model Stepford Wife. Eve only admits that the intellect is superior after she has been educated and persuaded as such.

> My other half [Adam]: with that thy gentle hand
> Seisd mine, I yielded, and from that time see
> How beauty is excelld by manly grace
> And wisdom, which alone is truly fair.
>
> *Paradise Lost* IV.488-91

As already stated, Eve's very decision to sin was motivated by her awareness of her inferior intellect. She wanted to better herself so as to improve her ranking in comparison to Adam. Her husband makes it clear that he prefers to discuss educational topics with the angels and she hopes that by eating the Fruit of Knowledge she can open up a new avenue of intellectual connection between them. She even briefly considers keeping her superiority, in this regard Eve's pride aligns her very closely with Milton's Satan. This point is well outlined within 'Milton's Bogey: Patriarchal Poetry and Women Readers' where Eve and Satan are preoccupied with the perceived sense of inequality and dissatisfaction with their social standing:

> After *her* fall, Eve considers the possibility of keeping the fruit to herself "so to add what wants / In Female Sex, the more to draw [Adam's] Love, / And render me more equal" (*PL* 9. 821-23) (Gilbert and Gubar 1980, p.196)

It would be like Mrs Rooney getting numeracy lessons so as to better connect with her husband. Eve acknowledges her failings and attempts to address them. As already mentioned, the compatibility of the personalities of spouses was hugely important to Milton, as seen in his divorce tracts. He educated his daughters rather well for that time, although this may have been driven by the future need he foresaw of them being able to read to him, due to his deteriorating eyesight (Lewalski 2008, p.407). Whilst motivated more out of selfish reasons than egalitarian principles, he did decide to have his daughters educated to some extent. Although it has been claimed that they only knew how to pronounce the letters in other languages, and they understood nothing of the meaning of what they read.

> Edward Philips implies that all of them [Milton's daughters] could read, and states that the two younger were taught (evidentially by Milton, for who else could do so?) to read to him in several languages – Hebrew, Greek, Latin, Italian, Spanish, Dutch and French – with exact pronunciation though

> without understanding what they read except in English. (Lewalski 2008, p.407).

Although the truth of such allegations cannot be agreed upon. Lewalski also 'suggests that Milton saw himself in 1662 as a vulnerable Lear-figure, persecuted by his daughters' (Lewalski 2008, p.409).

5.7 Gender Differences and Supposed Punishment

In their 'naked majesty' (*Paradise Lost* IV.290) the difference of gender is obvious between the primordial parents. Milton states very clearly that the differences between them extend beyond the bodily:

> …though both
> Not equal, as thir sex not equal seemd;
> For contemplation hee and valour formd,
> For softness shee and sweet attractive Grace,
> Hee for God only, shee for God in him:
> His fair large Front and Eye sublime declar'd
> Absolute rule; and Hyacinthin Locks
> Round from his parted forelock manly hung
> Clustring, but not beneath his shoulders broad:
>
> *Paradise Lost* IV.295-303

Adam is blessed with brains and brawn; Eve is blessed with elegance in manner and motion. Adam's intellect is a reflection of God's while Eve was created beautiful primarily to be more attractive to Adam. As Eve was created from Adam's rib she considers him her originator. She was made to complete Adam's happiness and thus they can both praise God unceasingly. Adam is closer to God than Eve because he was created in God's image. Eve was created from Adam and for him. "Hee for God only, shee for God in him:" (*Paradise Lost* IV.299). Milton's imagining of Adam

here evokes Apollo, the patron god of music and poetry. Adam, like Apollo, is represented as beardless, athletic, and youthful.

In this section of Book IV, there is a strange register; the narrator describes what Satan observes when he first looks upon the human race. The scene represents through Satan's fallen, perverted eyes seeing the perfection of the first humans.

> Shee as a vail down to the slender waste
> Her unadorned golden tresses wore
> Disheveld, but in wanton ringlets wav'd
> As the Vine curles her tendrils, which impli'd
> Subjection, but requir'd with gentle sway,
> And by her yielded, by him best receivd,
> Yielded with coy submission, modest pride,
> And sweet reluctant amorous delay. . .
>
> *Paradise Lost* IV.304-311

Half of the description describes Eve in a very submissive manner. She wears her hair 'as a veil' like a cover, implying her degradation and humility. However, this raises the question of why Eve requires any covering of any kind before the fall? As Turner says 'Privacy assumes a world already populated, half-veiling encourages voyeurism, modesty is a fig leaf…' (1987, p.263). Adam is the sole male human at this point in the story of humanity and his admiration of his wife's beauty can hardly be viewed as perverted. That she should need to cover up is contrary to expectation, it implies that her original nudity was in some way shameful, when shame should only exist as a result of the Fall. Eve's servitude to Adam is likewise supposed to be a punishment for her recklessness in instigating the Fall. At this point neither should be in service to the other, both should be equal, yet this is not the case. Mrs Rooney has this same impulse to challenge the authority of her husband, with him following the example of Adam by trying to restrain his wife. Mr Rooney demands that she 'Pull yourself

together' (Beckett 1986, p.29) and show a little decorum. She needs to be reminded of her accepted duties and struggles to follow the etiquette expected of her. The reason Mr Rooney's authority may be challenged more than Adam's is that Mr Rooney must rely solely upon his authority while Adam has God on his side too.

From the above quote extract, 'Yielded' appears twice to reinforce just how readily Eve should and does submit to Adam. Her submission is described as 'coy' which lacks the playful connotations that the word has grown to incorporate, it instead means that Eve acted demurely. She is the ideal wife, humble and submissive to her superior husband. Yet this picture is not complete. There is a surprisingly 'wanton' description of Eve considering she inhabits a sin-free world and is, therefore, faultless.

> …Eve's beauty, too, begins (to an experienced reader of *Paradise Lost*) to seem suspect : her golden tresses waving in wanton, wandering ringlets suggests at least a sinister potential…(Gilbert and Gubar 1980, pp.198-9)

Her hair is unruly, wild; which serves as a microcosm of Eve's defiance. The serpentine language that Eve is repeatedly described in hints that the snakelike curls and coils of her hair are not the only similarity she shares with the beast; pride is their fall. Her golden hair is represented in a sexualised manner; it is 'unadorned' and 'Dishevelled'.

Adam is granted a superior intellect by God yet it is easily overcome by Eve's beauty. He needs constant reminding that her aesthetic excellence does not imply her superiority over him. Her beauty disarms Adam of his rationality and, therefore, his superiority. This irrationality caused by Eve can also be observed in Satan's response to her. Her very existence overwhelms him to such an extent that his mind short circuits; he is so overcome with the sight of her beauty that he is rendered:

> Stupidly good, of enmitie disarm'd,
> Of guile, of hate, of envie, of revenge;
>
> *Paradise Lost* IX.465-7

However this relief is short lived as Satan contains within himself a hell and his respite from his damned and accursed life can only be temporary.

> But the hot Hell that alwayes in him burnes,
> Though in mid Heav'n, soon ended his delight,
> And tortures him now more, the more he sees
> Of pleasure not for him ordain'd: then soon
> Fierce hate he recollects, and all his thoughts
> Of mischief, gratulating, thus excites.
>
> *Paradise Lost* IX.468-472

This respite from his internal burning makes the return to normality all the more painful. Unfortunately, for Mrs Rooney, she is gifted with neither beauty nor brains. She does not have supernatural beauty that disarms men and stupefies them. Unlike Eve, Mrs Rooney struggles to communicate, at least, Eve can converse with Adam although their conversations may be simplified for her benefit.

Milton has Adam converse with Raphael without Eve present: 'Milton's Eve is usually excluded from God's sight and, at crucial moments in the history of Eden, drugged and silenced by divine ordained sleep…' (Gilbert and Gubar 1980, p.195). This preferential treatment is based on gender and intellect. Eve's mind will stay underdeveloped if it is not challenged and nurtured through stimulating conversations, but she is denied this opportunity to better her intellect. Milton has Eve state that she does not enjoy listening to the conversations of the divine messengers, this makes Eve's attendance a personal preference rather than a gender issue. Adam is enthralled by the angels and would like to question them for as long as possible. Yet Eve wants

these theological, celestial, scientific, or philosophical conversations to be filtered by Adam, dumbed down so they do not require her full attention.

> And when Eve slips out to the garden for the more abstruse part of the dialogue with Raphael, it is not (Milton insists) because she is bored or intellectually out of her depth, but rather because she prefers to share mingled conversation and kisses with her lover. (Turner 1987, p.234)

She would also rather have Adam punctuate their conversations with kisses and signs of affection:

> …such pleasure she reserv'd,
> Adam relating, she sole Auditress;
> Her Husband the Relater she preferr'd
> Before the Angel, and of him to ask
> Chose rather: hee, she knew would intermix
> Grateful digressions, and solve high dispute
> With conjugal Caresses, from his Lip
> Not Words alone pleas'd her. . .
>
> *Paradise Lost* VIII.50-57

It may be that Adam is not comfortable being affectionate with Eve when others are around, in this regard Adam shares the same reservation that Mr Rooney had at the station. The difference between them is their relative attraction to their wives. Eve is the most beautiful woman to have ever lived; Mrs Rooney is far less universally desirable. Goldsmith's description of Mrs Rooney goes a long way in showing the differences of their external beauty 'Maddy cuts a sad figure, over fourteen stone, staggering around the countryside, clothed in curtain material, alternately bemoaning her existence and singing Abide With Me.' (Goldsmith 2006, p.19). Yet she is affectionate and supportive of Mr Rooney, and he values her company, just not her physical proximity.

> MR ROONEY: Let us hasten home and sit before the fire. We shall draw the blinds. You will read to me. I think Effie is going to commit adultery with the Major. (Beckett 1986, p.29)

Mr Rooney gets his warmth from artificial means such as the fireplace and he also refers to the book *Effi Briest*, which describes how an unhappily married woman comes to commit adultery, but this affair is discovered years later leaving her divorced, estranged from her daughter, and emotionally and physically weakened due to the death of her lover. The temporality of happiness rings through in this novel, as it does in this radio play and in the most human points of *Paradise Lost*.

5.8 Reproduction and Rejection

There is evidence within the text to suggest that Mrs Rooney may have had and lost a child, a daughter called Minnie. Or Mrs Rooney has longed for the existence of a daughter with such conviction that she has convinced herself that it was true. During her conversation with Mr Tyler, she becomes overwhelmed, yet she does not provide any clear reason for her emotional distress:

> MRS ROONEY: If you see my poor blind Dan tell him I was on my way to meet him when it all came over me again, like a flood. Say to him, Your poor wife, She told me to tell you it all came flooding over her again and…[*The voice breaks.*]…she simply went back home…straight back home…
> MRS ROONEY: [*Sobbing.*] What? What's all this now? [*Calmer.*] Can't you see I'm in trouble? [*With anger.*] Have you no respect for misery? [*Sobbing.*] Minnie! Little Minnie! (Beckett 1986, p.16)

Mrs Rooney could be suffering from Post-traumatic Stress Disorder which is frequently found in the mothers of children who have died. However, this is dependent upon the condition that Minnie had actually existed. Mrs Rooney does not want to be comforted, she would rather be left alone. Nor will she explain to Mr Tyler

what has caused her outburst. Whether Minnie actually existed, or Mrs Rooney was ever pregnant is unknowable. All that can be speculated upon is what her reaction reveals about her character.

Mrs Rooney fluctuates between different emotional states, after referring to herself in the third person 'it all came flooding over her again' (Beckett 1986, p.16) as if on cue her emotional state deteriorates and she alternates between sobbing, regaining composure, becoming angry, before returning again to weeping. At a loss as to how to respond to Mrs Rooney, Mr Tyler lands upon a phrase and repeats it exactly every time he is required to respond to Mrs Rooney.

> MR TYLER: Come, Mrs Rooney, come, the mail has not yet gone up, just take my free arm and we'll be there with time and to spare. (Beckett 1986, p.16)

After he begins his third, possibly fourth utterance, Mrs Rooney explodes with frustration and asks will he 'get along with you now and cease molesting me?' (Beckett 1986, p.16). There is an implication of unwanted sexual attention in her choice of words, and if this meaning was not implied then Mrs Rooney could have used any other synonym of annoy. Mr Tyler had repeatedly asked if he might be permitted to rest his hand upon her shoulder, so as to keep his bike from wobbling, as he had to cycle slowly to keep pace with her dragging steps.

> MR TYLER: Perhaps if I were to lay my hand lightly on your shoulder, Mrs Rooney, how would that be? [*Pause.*] Would you permit that?
> MRS ROONEY: No, Mr Rooney, Mr Tyler I mean, I am tired of light old hands on my shoulders and other senseless places, sick and tired of them. (Beckett 1986, p.15)

The two times Mrs Rooney most forcibly rejects Mr Tyler, directly above and when she accuses him of molesting her, she accidentally refers to him as Mr Rooney. Since

she repeats the misnaming it must contain some significance for Beckett. It is not a matter of confusion or habit as nowhere else does Mrs Rooney call Mr Tyler her husband's name. Yet after Mr Tyler eventually leaves her, peddling away on his flat tire, she calls after him:

> MRS ROONEY: Oh cursed corset! If I could let it out, without indecent exposure. Mr Tyler! Mr Tyler! Come back and unlace me behind the hedge! [*She laughs wildly, ceases.*] (Beckett 1986, p.17)

Mrs Rooney desires physicality in her relationship with her husband, yet he does not satisfy this need. Her rejection of Mr Tyler's reasonable request to rest his hand on her shoulder hints at her mistrust of her mind and her body. She may feel that in allowing this harmless level of touch, she could unintentionally open the floodgates and become greedy in her desire for ever increasing physical attention. Mrs Rooney clearly imagines the possibility of developing her relationship with Mr Tyler 'behind the hedge'. Perhaps she was already indulging in these sexual fantasies before Mr Tyler asked for permission to rest his hand on her shoulder. This would explain why she blurted out her husband's name, she was feeling guilty over her imagined infidelity.

During their time in Eden, Adam and Eve remain childless. Milton repeatedly states that our foreparents had sexual intercourse while in Eden, as it was one of his goals to dignify marital sex by having our sinless foreparents engage in their conjugal duty. It does seem strange that in the perfect fertility of Paradise, Eve could not become pregnant. This is despite the command of God to dominate and fill the land with their offspring:

> Male he created thee, but thy consort
> Female for Race; then bless'd Mankinde, and said,

> Be fruitful, multiplie, and fill the Earth,
> Subdue it, and throughout Dominion hold
> Over Fish of the Sea, and Fowle of the Aire,
> And every living thing that moves on the Earth.
>
> *Paradise Lost* VII.529-534

The traditional answer to the question concerning Adam and Eve's conjugal duty was that they did not have sex in Paradise, as this would mean that Eve's firstborn may have escaped the curse of Original Sin. As all humanity inherited Original Sin, Eve's marriage must not have been consummated before she was cursed. This belief has the damaging effect of debasing sex as a fallen activity. If Eve and Adam were never expelled from Eden; would they have remained abstinent, never discovering sexual union, or would God have rendered them perpetually infertile? Could the human race have even existed without Falling? Biblically and Miltonically, the command to multiply comes before the Fall and so sex and pregnancy are not products of the Fall but remain integral to the original plan for humanity. Hence, it must have been possible for them to get pregnant in Eden, so God must have delayed the conception of the first human until after their expulsion, so as to ensure all humanity suffered the same fate.

Throughout *Paradise Lost* Milton refers to Adam, but most especially Eve in parental terms. Her identify, even before she became pregnant, was fixed as maternal; she is identified by events which had not yet happened to her. It is only once Eve and Adam eat the Fruit of Knowledge that they experience an intense melancholy of life. Once they know that death is a certainty, they become positively overwhelmed by the burden of life. Adam finds the idea of breeding a cursed race intolerable. Eve agrees. She calls for a militant abstinence from sex. Their guilt centres on their propagation of an entire race of cursed people, all that suffering stems from her one transgression.

The ability to prevent the regeneration of mankind lies exclusively with Eve and Adam. If they choose they could stop Death's cultivation of human lives in order to satisfy the bottomless pit of his hunger.

> That after wretched Life must be at last
> Food for so foule a Monster, in thy power
> It lies, yet ere Conception to prevent
> The Race unblest, to being yet unbegot.
>
> *Paradise Lost* X.985-988

As much as she enjoys her conjugal duties with Adam, Eve claims that she would forfeit that bodily connection if it meant Death would have to be satisfied with two human lives. Next she suggests suicide: 'Let us seek Death…With our own hands' (*Paradise Lost* X:1001-2). That suicide should be suggested, serves as further evidence to their nativity and inexperience. Suicide remains a very grave subject, and the triviality with which Eve suggests that they should kill themselves is so startling that could produce surprised laughter from incongruity.

Eve wants to unburden 'What thoughts in my unquiet brest are ris'n,' (*Paradise Lost* X.975), she feels honest communication is crucial to bettering their present hardships. She states that she does not want to bring 'certain woe' to her 'descent' (descendants). She tells Adam 'Childless thou art, Childless remaine' (*Paradise Lost* X.989). For Eve to suggest wilful barrenness would be strongly at odds with expected marital duties in Milton's time. Children were the duty of the wife and the legacy of the family. Despite the hardships present in the birthing process, for mother and baby, it was a wife's sacred duty to beget as many children as possible to uphold the first commandment to "Be fruitful, multiply," (*Paradise Lost* VIII:396). The father was expected to provide for them. Eve is suggesting the exclusion of all

future human life. Furthermore, she believes she is justified in her suggestion of it. Mary Shelley read the works of Milton over several years during which time she 'was almost continuously pregnant, "confined", or nursing.' (Gilbert and Gubar 2000, p.224). '*Frankenstein* is ultimately a mock *Paradise Lost* in which both Victor and his monster, together with a number of secondary characters, play all the neo-biblical parts over and over again – all except, it seems at first the part of Eve.' (Gilbert and Gubar 2000, p.230) since the main characters in *Frankenstein* are orphaned. Eve's worth is wrapped up in her identity as the mother of mankind.

The only other female character within *Paradise Lost* is Sin, she is also cast into a material role, although Sin's motherhood comes without her consent.

> Birthing innumerable Hell Hounds in a dreadful cycle, Sin is endlessly devoured by her children, who continually emerge from and return to her womb, where they bark and howl unseen. Their bestial sounds remind us that to bear young is to be not spiritual but animal, a *thing* of flesh, an incomprehensible and uncomprehending body, while their ceaseless suckling presages the exhaustion that leads to death companion of birth. (Gilbert and Gubar 1980, p.198)

The uncertainty of Mr Rooney's part in the death of the child on the train is significant, not least because he refused to offer any explanation for the delay to the train when Mrs Rooney asked. His culpability is, even more, questionable considering he asks his wife:

> MR ROONEY: Did you ever wish to kill a child? [*Pause.*] Nip some young doom in the bud. [*Pause.*] Many a time at night, in winter, on the black road home, I nearly attacked the boy. [*Pause.*] Poor Jerry [*Pause.*] What restrained me then? [*Pause.*] Not fear of man. [*Pause.*] Shall we go on backwards now a little. (Beckett 1986, p.31)

Mr Rooney's reasoning here is exactly the same as Eve's above. Had Mr Rooney been Eve's wife instead of Adam, it is possible that they may not have had any offspring and therefore no human race.

5.9 Relief from the Misery of Life

Eve says that their life, despite all its 'extremes' or hardships might yet become tolerable, if they could achieve 'some relief' like death or sedation, or an 'end, though sharp and sad' in death. This idea that life is only tolerable through some 'relief' or 'death' is the essential philosophical core of Beckett.

> …and miserable it is
> To be to others cause of misery,
> Our own begotten, and of our Loines to bring
> Into this cursed World a woeful Race,
>
> *Paradise Lost* X.982-984

It is not simply the physical pain and toil of their day-to-day lives that causes them to feel such acute misery. The knowledge of an unavoidable death, without knowing the timing of it leads them to feel deep emotional angst. This overhanging certainty over the uncertainty of death plays a role in Eve's succumbing to desolation. Overarching all these reasons is the horrid feeling of guilt that rests heavily on both their heads, but especially upon Eve's as she instigated their downfall.

Beckett's translation of Chamfort's line 'Vivre est une maladie dont le sommeil nous soulage toutes les seize heures. C'est un palliatif; la mort est le remède' (Translated by W. S. Merwin as: Living is an ailment which is relieved every sixteen hours by sleep. A palliative. Death is the cure.) Another way Beckett put it is:

sleep till death
healeth
come ease
this life disease (Ricks 1993, pp.13-14).

How pleasant would life be if we could sleep till death; would inexistence then not be even more convenient to sleeping one's way through life? Life for Beckett is a disease, the only cure is death and the only medication is sleep-induced unconsciousness. One of the few other eases in life is companionship. Art, like mathematics or philosophy, serves as mere distractions to the banality of existence. While Beckett was fond of these subjects, he would not have valued them highly enough to have wished to have been born in order to pursue them. Similarly Milton's fallen angels try to occupy their time so as to distract themselves from their intolerable agony. 'Hell is populated by soldiers, musicians, miners, builders, explorers, and even philosophers' (Benet 2010, p.93) all in an attempt to anesthetises their pain, much like humans do with their lives. Human hobbies do not contain the purpose of life or but are rather something that serves to occupy the mind and to kill time. The commonality of the phrase 'killing time' encapsulates this idea of passively awaiting death. Time is incomparably more valuable than all other things, and while wasting it is a travesty, it is a phenomenon that is all too human. Life is contingent upon time¸ so if you could stop some of that time, kill it, through various means, then that would be a most successful endeavour. Now there will be that much less time ahead until one faces their concluding second.

Milton variously represents sleep as restorative, inadequate, and troubling. Adam awakes from a blissful 'airy light' (*Paradise Lost* V:4) sleep, totally refreshed and ready to start the day. This is a wholly positive representation of sleep. It seems a good night's sleep can be had without tiring yourself. Perhaps the natural state is to

sleep like the child: carefree and unburdened. After Adam is finished delighting in the of ‘Aurora’s fan’ and in the tranquillity of his early morning rise ‘and the shrill matin song / Of birds on every bough’, he looks to Eve, expecting to share his appreciation of the splendour of the Edenic morning with her. Instead of finding an equally rested Eve, he instead discovers her dishevelled and blushing:

> …so much more
> His wonder was the find unwakened Eve
> With tresses discomposes, and glowing cheek
>
> *Paradise Lost* V.8-10

Whilst Adam had slept, Eve had been violated. Eve shows the danger and vulnerability of sleep by having her dream infiltrated by Satan. Humans spend about one-third of their lives asleep. This is a severe limitation on their lives. It could be argued to be an oversight of our creation to have made humanity with such rapidly depleting energy levels. Many other mammals require much less sleep to function. The vulnerability coupled with the frequency leads one to question God’s workmanship.

Conclusion and Further Research

Over the course of this thesis, I hope to have provided evidence for a variety of comedic modes within *Paradise Lost*. I explored Milton's own awareness of comedy by showing examples of his traditional comedy use, but as these were largely limited to dialectical, satirical, grotesque, or parody they were not beneficial to my overall argument. Instead, I argued for a darker, endurance-based comedy within *Paradise Lost*. This comedy aligns closely with Beckett's, and I compared his thoughts and writings to Milton's in order to highlight Milton's own dark comedy.

The major history of comedy theory was traced and a pattern emerged which highlighted the difficulties in defining comedy from classical times right through to the present. Modern comedy theories, in contrast to the classical theories, see comedy as essential to human life. It serves to heal and shield humanity from dark moments and even depression. This comedy is most evident post-fall when Adam and Eve become suicidal and wish to end the human species with them, by deciding not to reproduce. The audience finds comedy in their struggles and only once God's plan of redemption through the Son is revealed to Adam, do they decide to endure and leave Eden, hand in hand.

As comic responses are variable, I approached an explanation of the comedy of *Paradise Lost* in a variety of ways. Most frequently the comedy relates to the characters being foolish, making the reader laugh with superiority. The characters might surprise, even baffle us, which causes amusement due to incongruity. There may also be a sense of relief from a stressful situation which generates laughter. Our identification with the characters, through the comedy of forgiveness, as defined through Woods, allows us to reflect on our likelihood of acting the same way.

Milton portrayed Adam and Eve as both fools and heroes, yet as *Paradise Lost* was written by a fallen writer, to a fallen audience we are inclined to identify with them. They lost paradise the only way they could, and for that they deserve ridicule. Yet, we identify with them and forgive their foolishness and admire their steadfastness in the face of ejection from Eden. I also explored the difficulties all the main characters have with being classified as heroic, knowing the elevation of the characters is necessary to determine genre within comedy, according to Frye.

The philosophical similarities and differences between Milton and Beckett were highlighted, as well as identifying similar topics of interest such as isolation, companionship, sex, temptation, death, hopelessness, fallenness, original sin, reproduction, knowledge, and cowardice. I aimed to prove the benefit of exploraing their relationship and how this could be fruitful in defining Milton's own dark comedy. When Milton portrays a crisis of faith within *Paradise Lost* his work becomes very Beckettian. Both writers see death as a gift, but only Milton believes in the existence of an afterlife.

Due to the constraints of this thesis, only one direct comparison could be made between Milton and Beckett's texts. This limited the scope of my analysis and further research would be possible through comparing *Paradise Lost* to other Beckettian texts. *Waiting for Godot* would be the work I would choose next as the similarities between Beckett's Vladimir and Estragon and Milton's Adam and Eve are extensive, most notably in their great dependence on each other and their shared hope of a better tomorrow. Additionally, analysing Eve and Adam's squabbling, marriage and sexuality and comparing it to Restoration Comedy would be another potentially stimulating area of study.

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