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“The Image of their Glorious Maker”: Looking at Representation and Similitude in Milton’s *Paradise Lost*

Antoinina Bevan Zlatar

This essay reads the narrator’s representation of the Son of God in heaven and Adam and Eve in Eden in the opening Books of *Paradise Lost* alongside the famous chain of similes describing Satan in hell – the so-called leviathan simile. In so doing it suggests that Milton’s descriptions and similes are integral not just to the poem’s style and narrative but to its theology, anthropology, and diabology. What someone looks like is an ontological issue in the poem; it tells us about the nature of the being described and how far they resemble its God. As we shall see, Milton’s supernatural and prelapsarian beings are described in terms that accentuate their embodied visuality, a trait which valorises the material world and the sense of sight while suggesting that the division between the spirit and the flesh is not so absolute.

What is an image in Milton’s *Paradise Lost*? This essay will attempt to answer this question by exploring Milton’s use of what George Puttenham in *The Art of English Poesy* (1589) terms “*Hypotyposis*, or the Counterfeit Representation” (323-25), and, more specifically, “*Omiosis*, or Resemblance,” what we call simile (326-33).¹ It will quickly become apparent, however, that Milton’s descriptions and his famous similes are inte-

¹ According to Puttenham, “*Hypotyposis*, or the Counterfeit Representation” comprises “*Prosopographia*, or the Counterfeit Countenance”; “*Chronographia*, or the Counterfeit Time”; “*Topographia*, or the Counterfeit Place” and “*Pragmatographia*, or the Counterfeit action.” Hypotyposis is of course related to *enargeia*, *phantasia*, *ekphrasis*, *evidentia*, and *descriptio* among others. For a discussion of early modern *ekphrasis* in theory and as practiced by Sidney, Shakespeare, and Spenser, see Claire Preston.

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gral not just to the poem's style and narrative but to its theology, anthropology, and diabology. As we shall see, Milton's supernatural and prelapsarian beings are described in terms that accentuate their embodied visuality, a trait which valorises the natural, material world and the sense of sight.

This has not always been the prevailing view.² In the eighteenth century, Addison celebrated the similes for providing “sublime . . . Entertainment” (203) while Richard Bentley found several so irrelevant or silly as to doubt they were actually Milton’s. Centuries later, T. S. Eliot would commend Milton’s skill in “introducing imagery which tends to distract us from the real subject” (326). It was not until James Whaler’s article of 1931 that the relevance of the similes to their immediate narrative context or to future episodes was systematically proposed, a view championed by Christopher Ricks (118-50) and popularised by Alastair Fowler in his Longman edition of the poem (19-20). Anne Ferry, Helen Gardiner, and Stanley Fish, meanwhile, drew attention to those similes where the gap or dissimilitude between tenor and vehicle is most pronounced, a gap deemed inevitable when attempting to describe hell, heaven or paradise. More recently, Neil Forsyth has argued that Milton’s similes disturb the clarity of vision usually associated with them and thus undermine the authority of the narrator (100-05).

In what follows I will argue that counterfeit representation and similes are part of a larger exploration of similitude or likeness in *Paradise Lost*. What someone looks like is an ontological matter in the poem; it tells us something about the nature of the being described and how far they resemble its God. So as to make my case, I will begin by sketching Milton’s conceptualisation of the *imago dei* or divine similitude as it applies to the Son of God in Book III and to Adam and Eve in Books IV and following, and briefly indicate how it intersects with Milton’s monist theory of matter. I will then turn to the narrator’s first description of Satan in Book I – a description which famously ends by comparing Satan to the leviathan. This attempt to visualise Satan deserves special note because it is the first complex simile in the poem and because it introduces us to a type that is particularly prominent in hell. Here we have a series of images linked by “or” taken from disparate books of knowledge – classical myth, the Bible, and the natural world. The conjunction “or” suggests that no one image is definitive, none wholly accurate or sufficient. And yet, by linking the final twist of the figure’s long tail to a

² The following brief survey of the reception of Milton’s descriptions and similes is indebted to John Leonard (327-90).

specific print illustration from Conrad Gessner's *Historia animalium*, I hope to show that Milton is proffering an encyclopaedic model of knowledge based on a Protestant reading of the natural world, God's second book. In the process Satan is given a wondrously material body and made into a pre-eminent emblem of God's creative powers.

George Puttenham understood that using words to make something or someone "appear they were truly before our eyes though they were not present" required "cunning" (knowhow) and "great discretion" (323). As for trying to represent supernatural or fictitious things, still greater skill was needed:

And if the things we covet to describe be not natural or not veritable, than yet the same asketh more cunning to do it, because to feign a thing that never was nor is like to be, proceedeth of a greater wit and sharper invention than to describe things that be true. (323)

Significantly, Puttenham includes "heaven, hell, paradise" (324) in his list of places "not natural or not veritable."

If counterfeit representation was challenging, it was prized for its power to move by means of its appeal to the eye. In the *Institutio oratoria*, Puttenham's ultimate source, Quintilian had theorised it as a figure of particular utility to the forensic orator who set out to move his audience by making them see the crime scene in their mind's eye as though (he and) they were eyewitnesses (9.2.40-44; see also 8.3.61-71).³ Quintilian is drawing on a tradition in which sight was given pride of place in the hierarchy of the senses, where things seen were generally deemed more reliable, vivid, and memorable than things heard (Squire 8-19; Webb 209-16). As for "Omiosis, or Resemblance," the figure of similitude, it too was valued for its persuasive force:

As well to a good maker and poet as to an excellent persuader in prose, the Figure of Similitude is very necessary, by which we not only beautify our tale but also very much enforce and enlarge it. I say enforce because no one

³ Puttenham's other key source was Susenbrotus's *Epitome Troporum*. See Whigham and Rebhorn (23-43; especially 41).

thing more prevaleth with all ordinary judgements than persuasion by similitude. (326)⁴

Similitudes “beautify” and “enforce” the narrative by painting pictures. This is spelled out in the first of Puttenham’s three types of simile – “*Icon*, or Resemblance by Imagery”:

But when we liken a human person to another in countenance, stature, speech, or other quality, it is . . . called . . . Resemblance by Imagery or Portrait, alluding to the painter’s term, who yieldeth to the eye a visible representation of the thing he describes and painteth in his table. (329)⁵

He goes on to specify that “This manner of Resemblance is not only performed by likening of lively creatures one to another, but also of any other natural thing bearing a proportion of similitude . . .” (329).

In *Paradise Lost* counterfeit representation and “icons,” or a series of “icons” in the case of Milton’s celebrated epic similes, are especially evident in Book I when we are introduced to Satan and company in hell, and again in Book IV when we first meet Adam and Eve. But in the first half of Book III of the poem when the narrator attempts to represent God the Father and God the Son in heaven, complex similes are conspicuously absent. If a “proportion of similitude” or a degree of similarity between the things compared was a requisite, similes surely could not be used to represent God the Father or God the Son. The Reformation debate on images had made this abundantly clear: the infinite, omnipotent, omniscient, invisible God was beyond compare; to equate him with finite, visible things in the natural world, things so far beneath him on the ontological scale, was a violation of the second commandment.⁶ Yet, in the monist universe of *Paradise Lost* the division between spirit and flesh, supernatural and natural is not so absolute.

⁴ On *Homiosis*, see Quintilian, *Institutio oratoria* (8.3.72-81).

⁵ Puttenham follows Susenbrotus in splitting similes into three types: “*Icon*,” “*Parabola*,” and “*Paradigma*” (326-33). See Susenbrotus (97-99, quoted in Whigham and Rebhorn 326).

⁶ The official and most compendious discussion is found in the Elizabethan *Homily against Peril of Idolatrie*. The literature is vast; Margaret Aston’s two volume survey serves as a rich introduction.

Divine similitude in Heaven and Eden

In Book III the narrator takes the reader to heaven and shows her God the Father looking at the Son: “On his right / The radiant image of his glory sat / His only Son” (III.62-64). This Pauline conceptualisation of the Son as the “image” of the Father sitting at his right hand will be fleshed out more fully a little later:

Beyond compare the Son of God was seen
 Most glorious, in him all his Father shone
 Substantially expressed, and in his face
 Divine compassion visibly appeared,
 Love without end, and without measure grace. (III.138-42)⁷

How far is Milton’s Son of the same essence as the Father? How far subordinate to the Father?⁸ I will engage more fully in this debate elsewhere, but, for the moment, I want to focus on the idea of the Son’s visibility relative to the Father’s invisibility, an idea that is given its fullest expression in the angels’ hymn:

Thee Father first they sung omnipotent,
 Immutable, immortal, infinite,
 Eternal king; thee author of all being,
 Fountain of light, thyself invisible
 Amidst the glorious brightness where thou sitst
 Throned inaccessible, but when thou shad’st
 The full blaze of thy beams, and through a cloud
 Drawn round about thee like a radiant shrine,
 Dark with excessive bright thy skirts appear,
 Yet dazzle heaven, that brightest seraphim
 Approach not, but with both wings veil their eyes.
 Thee next they sang of all creation first,
 Begotten Son, divine similitude,

⁷“Who being the brightness of *his* glory, and the express image of his [the Father’s] person . . . when he had by himself purged our sins, sat down on the right hand of the Majesty on high” (Hebrews 1:3 KJV). The nature of Paul’s “image” has been much debated. For a succinct account that distinguishes the Pauline conceptualisation from that of Plato, Plotinus, and Philo, see Alain Besançon (25-86, especially 81-86). For a recent corrective account that seeks to foreground Paul’s visual piety by dissociating it from a Platonising denigration of the material world, see Jane Heath (13-61; 65-142).

⁸ The debate over the extent of Milton’s heterodoxy with regard to the Son is surveyed in Leonard (477-525), and Russell Hillier (9-36). For a reading that emphasises the Son’s subordination to the Father, see MacCallum (71-79).

In whose conspicuous countenance, without cloud
 Made visible, the almighty Father shines,
 Whom else no creature can behold. (III.372-87)

The emphasis on sight and seeing, on invisibility versus visibility in these passages prompts us to ask: what does the Father look like? According to the angels, the Father is “Fountain of light,” invisible amidst the brightness in which he dwells, paradoxically discernible through cloud, yet still too bright for the brightest seraphim to see. This is the negative theology of *deus absconditus*.⁹ But he is rendered visible in the “divine similitude,” in the Son in whose “conspicuous countenance” he shines. The Son, we are told, renders visible the invisible Father “whom else no creature can behold.” So what does the Son look like? The Son is the radiant reflection of the Father’s brightness “Substantially expressed” (III.140). He is the perfect likeness of the Father, “Beyond compare . . . / Most glorious” (III.138-39). There is a sense in which the exact nature of the divine similitude cannot be expressed because he cannot be compared to something below him on the ontological scale. And yet, in offering to become man and die for the sins of mankind, the Son becomes part of the material, visible world. The angels, privy to the Son’s conversation with the Father in which he offers himself in sacrifice and is told of his future exaltation (III.236-317), are here paying tribute to the Incarnation.¹⁰

If the angels’ hymn ultimately mystifies how exactly the Son manifests the Father and fails to satisfy the reader’s desire to see the divine face, this is surely intentional. In the *De Doctrina Christiana*, Milton embraces the doctrine of the Incarnation as scriptural but insists that we accept it as a “mystery,” unlike those who hand down its secrets as if, says Milton mischievously, they themselves “had . . . been present in Mary’s womb” (479). Nevertheless, the hymn suggests that it is precisely visibility that marks a difference between Father and Son. Once again this finds support in *De Doctrina Christiana*. Explicating scriptural proof texts that refer to the Son as “only-begotten,” Milton adds “— not, however, one with the Father in essence, since he was *visible*, given and sent by the Father, and issued from him” (135; my emphasis). Later, Milton marshals a chain of Pauline references to Christ as the image of God,

⁹ See Michael Lieb (205-07). Cf. *Paradise Lost* (V. 598-99).

¹⁰ Stephen Dobranski reviews the recent discussion of the (in)visibility of the incarnate Son in *Paradise Lost* (189-99); he argues that in the final Books of the poem the Archangel Michael serves as a “Christic surrogate” (201-03).

including Hebrews 1:3, as evidence that the Father and the Son's essence "is not single and that one essence is lesser than the other" (225).

If similitude is at the heart of the theology of Book III, it is no less integral to the poem's anthropology. This constitutes our (and Satan's) first sighting of the human pair:

Two of far nobler shape erect and tall,
Godlike erect, with native honour clad
In naked majesty seemed lords of all,
And worthy seemed, for in their looks divine
The image of their glorious maker shone,
Truth, wisdom, sanctitude severe and pure . . . (IV.288-93)

In the following lines we are told of Adam and Eve's sexual difference and "inequality," and it is difference and inequality that famously drives Eve's narration of her creation at IV.440-91.¹¹ Here I want to pursue the idea that they are *both* made in God's image – "Two of far nobler shape erect and tall . . . lords of all," and that this resemblance is manifested corporeally and visually "in their looks divine." We might object that these "looks divine" soon melt into abstraction – "Truth, wisdom, sanctitude severe and pure . . ." – just as the Son's face had melted into "Love without end, and without measure grace" (III.142). But, as the description continues the narrator gazes (with Satan) at the human pair and watches as they go forth hand in hand and sit down to enjoy their supper fruits in the company of "All beasts of the earth" (IV.341). We see them embodied in the Edenic landscape, their hands touching, their bodies cooled by the breeze, their mouths chewing the savoury pulp of the nectarine, smiling. Indeed, Satan soon confesses that he could love them "so lively shines / In them divine resemblance, and such grace / The hand that formed them on their shape hath poured" (IV.363-65). Later the sight of Eve's beauty will render Satan "Stupidly good" (IX.465) for a brief, poignant moment.

The poem will return to the doctrine of the *imago dei* in Raphael's account of the creation of Adam and Eve in Book VII. Raphael reports how God the Father turned to the Son and said "Let us make now man in our image, man / In our similitude, and let them rule / [. . .]" (519-20). Given that Creation is "performed" by both Father and Son, and that the Son is the perfect image of the Father as explored above, the

¹¹ Milton's portrayal of gender continues to court controversy. For a survey of the debate until 1970, see Leonard (650-704). For a reading which remains persuasive in celebrating Eve's virtues and creativity, see McColley.

imago dei would seem to refer to both Father and Son here. Raphael then turns to Adam and explains:

In his own image he
Created thee, in the image of God
Express, and thou becam'st a living soul.
Male he created thee, but thy consórt
Female for race. (526-30)

This is an amalgam of Genesis 1:27 and 2:7,¹² and, like its source, sheds little light on the precise nature of Adam's divine resemblance.

For a more expansive treatment of Genesis 2:7 and the implications of Adam's becoming a "living soul," we might turn to *De Doctrina Christiana*:

When man had been created in this way [Genesis 2: 7], it is at last said: *so man became a living soul [anima]*; from which it is understood (unless we prefer to be taught what the soul is by pagan authors) that man is an animate being [*anima*], inherently and properly one and individual, not twofold or separable – or, as is commonly declared, combined or composed from two mutually and generically different and distinct natures, namely soul and body – but that the whole man is soul, and the soul is man. (303)

Would that we knew who Milton had in mind when referring to "pagan authors" ("ab ethnicis authoribus" 302). What we can say is that, unlike more dualist thinkers who argued that body and soul were different and distinct, and who located the *imago dei* in the invisible *nous* (Philo) or *mens* (Augustine),¹³ Milton is here positing a monist understanding of the inseparability of the body and soul and suggesting that the *imago dei* is the whole man. Raphael pays fulsome tribute to this in Book VIII:

For God on thee
Abundantly his gifts hath also poured
Inward and outward both, his image fair:
Speaking or mute all comeliness and grace
Attends thee, and each word, each motion forms. (219-23)

¹² Genesis 1:27 reads "So God created man in his *own* image, in the image of God created he him; male and female created he them." Genesis 2:7 reads "And the Lord God formed man *of* the dust of the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and man became a living soul."

¹³ For a survey of this notoriously complex theology, see Besançon (82-84; 92-96; 101).

Adam as he sits before Raphael is God's "image fair" both inside and out. Whether speaking or silent, moving or still, he is "all comeliness and grace." And will the divine image survive the Fall? Yes, at least in part: it will be multiplied through Adam and Eve's progeny, right down to the seventeenth century, for it is the "human face divine" (III.44) that is the climax of the blind narrator's lament for the things that he can no longer physically see.

The inseparability of body and soul in man and woman is best understood in the context of Milton's theory of matter or animist materialism. In his pioneering *Milton among the Philosophers*, Stephen Fallon puts it thus:

Instead of being trapped in an ontologically alien body, the soul is one with the body. Spirit and matter become for Milton two modes of the same substance: spirit is rarefied matter, and matter is dense spirit. All things, from insensate objects through souls, are manifestations of this one substance [. . .] Milton [. . .] moved toward the position that all corporeal substance is animate, self-active, and free. (80-81)¹⁴

Given that God creates everything from the same dynamic substance, the difference between spirit and matter is one of degree not kind. Once again it is the affable angel Raphael who spells out this continuum:

O Adam, one almighty is, from whom
 All things proceed, and up to him return,
 If not depraved from good, created all
 Such to perfection, one first matter all,
 Indued with various forms, various degrees
 Of substance, and in things that live, of life;
 But more refined, more spirituous, and pure,
 As nearer to him placed or nearer tending
 Each in their several active spheres assigned,
 Till body up to spirit work, in bounds
 Proportioned to each kind. (V.469-479)

Indeed, mankind and the angels differ "but in degree, of kind the same" (V.490), and if Adam and Eve are "found obedient" (V.501), perhaps, in time, they may become more like angels and partake of angelic food just as Raphael can now share Adam and Eve's rural repast. Conversely, if found disobedient, the difference between man and loyal angel will

¹⁴ For recent qualifications of aspects of Fallon's study, see Donnelly; Sugimura.

grow, they will become less refined, spirituous and pure. Disobedience brings ontological dissimilitude in *Paradise Lost*.

(Dis)similitude in Hell

If, as suggested above, the narrator is at pains to describe the looks of the protagonists of Books III and IV, the question of what Satan and his fallen angels look like is even more urgent in Books I and II. Indeed, Satan's first words in the poem, his address to Beëlzebub, indicate the importance of appearance:

If thou beest he; but oh how fallen! how changed
 From him, who in the happy realms of light
 Clothed with transcendent brightness didst outshine
 Myriads though bright: (I.84-87)

Satan compares the fallen Beëlzebub to his unfallen self and the difference is registered in the hiatus introduced by the semi-colon followed by “but,” and in the delay between “thou” at the start of line 84 and “didst outshine” at the end of line 86. The devastating difference – “oh how fallen! how changed / From him” (I.84-85) – is so great that Satan initially doubts his compeer’s identity – “If thou beest he” (I.84; my emphasis). Yet, Satan does not specify the exact nature of Beëlzebub’s metamorphosis; all we can infer is that he has lost his former brightness. A few lines later Satan will assume that he too has suffered change in “outward lustre” (I.97), but, insisting on a dualist understanding of body and soul, will famously deny inward change (I.94-124). Much later in Book IV, Ithuriel and Zephon will fail to recognise him. In response to Satan’s “Know ye not me?” (IV.828), Zephon explains “thou resemblest now / Thy sin and place of doom obscure and foul” (IV. 839-40).

It is after some 100 lines of dialogue between Satan and Beëlzebub that the narrator deploys “Hypotyposis or Counterfeit Representation,” using first “Prosopographia, or the Counterfeit Countenance” – a description of an absent person’s visage, speech, and countenance, and then “Icon, or Resemblance by Imagery” or, rather, a series of “icons” making up the long-tailed simile we know:

Thus Satan talking to his nearest mate
 With head uplift above the wave, and eyes
 That sparkling blazed, his other parts besides
 Prone on the flood, extended long and large

Lay floating many a rood, in bulk as huge
As whom the fables name of monstrous size,
Titanian, or Earth-born, that warred on Jove,
Briarios or Typhon, whom the den
By ancient Tarsus held, or that sea-beast
Leviathan, which God of all his works
Created hugest that swim the ocean stream:
Him haply slumbering on the Norway foam
The pilot of some small night-foundered skiff,
Deeming some island, oft, as seamen tell,
With fixèd anchor in his scaly rind
Moors by his side under the lee, while night
Invests the sea, and wishèd morn delays:
So stretched out huge in length the arch-fiend lay
Chained on the burning lake, nor ever thence
Had risen or heaved his head, but that the will
And high permission of all-ruling heaven
Left him at large to his own dark designs (I.192-213)

The narrator begins with Satan's head "uplift above the wave." Given that Satan has just delivered two of the most grandiose speeches in English literature the fact that his head is barely above the "fiery surge" is surely a bathetic detail. The narrator will return to this head at the end of the passage and give it weight — it is immensely heavy, he must "heave" it to lift it, and he cannot lift it a millimetre without God's permission. A few lines later when Satan "rears from off the pool / His mighty stature" (I.221-22) and spreads his wings, we are told in an almost throwaway half line that the air "felt unusual weight" (I.227). All would suggest that Satan is a corporeal being. Yet, this corporeality is complicated. Joad Raymond distinguishes a spectrum of attitudes to the (in)corporeality of angels prevalent in seventeenth-century Britain: the Thomist position that angels were incorporeal and non-material beings who sometimes adopted bodies of air to appear before humans; the Hobbesian materialist and mechanist notion that they were corporeal and substantial; the monist position espoused by Milton that they were substantial and material, but, unlike humans, made of highly spiritual matter and therefore not corporeal (284-91). What we can say is that the narrator is keen to give Satan materiality and visibility — weight but also shape.

As for Satan's face (the "prosopon" in "prosopographia") all we are told is that his eyes "sparkling blazed." T. S. Eliot faulted this detail for inconsistency:

There are, as often with Milton, criticisms of detail which could be made. I am not too happy about eyes that both blaze and sparkle, unless Milton meant us to imagine a roaring fire ejecting sparks: and that is *too* fiery an image for even supernatural eyes. The fact that the lake was burning somewhat diminishes the effect of the fiery eyes; and it is difficult to imagine a burning lake in a scene where there was only darkness visible. (327)

Alastair Fowler, in turn, would fault Eliot for his literalism (63). But perhaps Eliot is inadvertently drawing attention to an aspect of Satan's eyes that does need explaining. Satan's eyes "sparkle" because they reflect what he sees – the fiery surge of hell; simultaneously, they emit rays of their own and so "blaze." This active, "extramissive" conceptualisation of the eye and seeing, what Michael Squire has termed "the embodied eye" (19-30), prevailed from antiquity until the seventeenth century. It is consistent with Satan's first highly subjective act of looking in the poem: "round he throws his baleful eyes / That witnessed huge affliction and dismay / Mixed with obdurate pride and steadfast hate" (I.56-58).

What of the rest of Satan's body? "[H]is other parts besides / Prone on the flood extended long and large / Lay floating many a rood" (I. 194-96). We must be content with the highly unspecific "other parts" and a shift in emphasis to dimension. Extended – a long word – introduces the alliteration of "long and large / Lay floating," the sense of Satan's length reinforced through the enjambment. As for "rood" this was a unit of measurement for land equal to 40 square rods or a quarter of an acre (Oxford English Dictionary 7.a.). But our narrator is careful to remain suggestively imprecise: Satan lay "many a rood" long.

It is now that the narrator resorts to a series of "icons" or similes linked by "or":

in bulk as huge
 As whom the fables name of monstrous size,
 Titanian, or Earth-born, that warred on Jove,
 Briarios or Typhon, whom the den
 By ancient Tarsus held, or that sea-beast
 Leviathan, which God of all his works
 Created hugest that swim the ocean stream: (I. 196-202)

The narrator is at pains to convey the magnitude of Satan's body, his "bulk," and this prompts him to compare Satan with a series of prodigiously, monstrously large beings from classical myth and from the Word of God. We might say much about the correspondences between

the Titans and the Giants who warred on Jove, and Satan and the rebel angels who warred on God. We might pause when remembering that according to Hesiod's *Theogony*, Briareos was one of 3 children born of Earth and Heaven who were “[154] hated by their own father from the beginning” (15) and were hidden in the Earth away from the light, or that Typhon stole Zeus's thunder and was punished by being buried beneath Etna.¹⁵ While these myths pose fascinating questions about theodicy, it is the huge dimensions of these beings that the narrator insists upon. Hesiod's Briareos and brothers were all “[147] great and strong, unspeakable . . . A hundred arms sprang forth from their shoulders, unapproachable, and upon their massive limbs grew fifty heads out of each one's shoulders” (15). The description of Thypheus (Thyphoeus) is more detailed: “[820] and from his shoulders there were a hundred heads of a snake, a terrible dragon's, licking with their dark tongues; and on his prodigious heads fire sparkled from his eyes under the eyebrows, and from all of his heads fire burned as he glared” (69; 71). There were many other versions of these myths and various pictorial traditions; once again our narrator fails to specify.

What of leviathan? Here the narrator turns to the most authoritative book of all, the Word of God, but the biblical leviathan turns out to be somewhat slippery too. Isaiah 27:1 reads “In that day the Lord with his sore and great and strong sword shall punish leviathan the piercing serpent, even leviathan that crooked serpent; and he shall slay the dragon that is in the sea.” Some early modern commentators understood there to be three distinct animals in this verse: a crocodile, a snake, and a whale.¹⁶ Job 41: 1-34 provided the most detailed description of leviathan but it too left room for speculation. Was this huge, fire- and smoke-emitting being who “laugheth at the shaking of a spear” (29), “who is made without fear” (33), a crocodile as suggested by “His scales are his pride, shut up together as with a close seal” (15)? Or, given that “He maketh the deep to boil like a pot: he maketh the sea like a pot of ointment. / He maketh a path to shine after him; one would think the deep to be hoary” (31-32), was he not a whale after all? But here our narrator is specific: “that sea-beast / Leviathan, which God of all his works /

¹⁵ For a discussion of Milton's deployment of the various classical versions of the Typhon and Briareos myths, see Forsyth (30-35), and Herman (189-90).

¹⁶ Calvin's commentary on this verse reads “The word *Leviathan* is diuerslie expounded, but generallie it signifies a serpent, or the whales and fishes of the sea, which are as monsters in regard of their excessive greatness . . . by way of Allegorie he speakes here of Satan” (260).

Created hugest that swim the ocean stream" (I.200-02). The principle subtext would seem to be:

O Lord, how manifold are thy works! in wisdom hast thou made them all: the earth is full of thy riches. / *So is* this great and wide sea, wherein *are* things creeping innumerable, both small and great beasts. / There go the ships: *there* is that leviathan, *whom* thou hast made to play therein. (Psalm 104 24-26)

Satan is wondrously huge but, like the great beast leviathan that plays alongside ships in the great wide sea, he is God's creature.

The long-tailed simile continues for one last twist:

Him haply slumbering on the Norway foam
 The pilot of some small night-foundered skiff,
 Deeming some island, oft, as seamen tell,
 With fixèd anchor in his scaly rind
 Moors by his side under the lee, while night
 Invests the sea, and wishèd morn delays. (I.203-08)

It is these 6 lines that have attracted most critical attention. Richard Bentley, the editor whom Miltonists love to hate, is predictably irritated, objecting to "foam" as inadequate support for a whale and amending "night-foundered" to "nigh-foundered" (11 and Leonard 331-32). T. S. Eliot will praise and damn them simultaneously:

What I wish to call to your attention is the happy introduction of so much extraneous matter. Any writer, *straining* for images of hugeness, might have thought of the whale, but only Milton could have included the anecdote of the deluded seamen without our wanting to put a blue pencil through it. We *nearly* forget Satan in attending to the story of the whale; Milton recalls us just in time . . . I find in such passages a kind of inspired *frivolity*. . . . (327-28)

Yet, the story of the whale so large as to be mistaken for an island by seamen, and understood to be an allegory of the devil, was found in the *Physiologus* and in Latin and English bestiaries (J. H. Pitman; Silver 262-63). For James Whaler this was the classic example of a simile that was both relevant to its immediate narrative context and proleptic of future episodes, namely the fall. The leviathan simile, according to Whaler, conveys three things: Satan's "enormousness," his "beastliness," and his "deadly untrustworthiness" (1050). "Hugest that swim the ocean

stream" draws attention to Satan's greater size relative to his compeers; the "scaly rind" perhaps suggests "A quasi-serpentine hide must be imagined on Satan's body," while the deception of the pilot anticipates Satan's deception of first his fellow fiends and then of Adam and Eve. Whaler concludes that, like the biblical leviathan as interpreted by Gregory the Great, Rabanus Maurus, and popular bestiaries such as the *Physiologus*, the simile casts Satan as "An intentional deceiver" (1050).

But what if we add another book of knowledge to the narrator's library? The *Historia animalium*, an encyclopaedic study of the animal kingdom by one of Zurich's most famous early modern polymaths, the philologist and physician Conrad Gessner. The 4-volume *Historia animalium* was published in Zurich by Froschauer between 1551 and 1558 and in the course of over 3,500 folio pages Gessner aimed to collect everything written about animals by authors ancient and modern, and to include woodcut illustrations where possible. This image appears in Volume IV, the volume dedicated to fish and aquatic animals:



Figure 1: Detail of the Teuffelwal. Conradi Gesneri medici Tigurini Historiae animalium liber IIII. qui est de piscium & aquatilium animantium natura: cum iconibus singulorum ad vivum expressis fere omnib. DCCVI. Zürich, 1558, p. 138. Zentralbibliothek Zürich NNN 43. Reproduced with kind permission.

Here we see a ship having dropped anchor on a large aquatic animal with a snout and tusks more reminiscent of a boar than a whale. Its skin is distinctly scaly and two water-spouts protrude from the top of the

head. Two seamen wearing warm clothes have built a fire on the animal's back and are warming themselves and looking forward to supper. We are clearly in a cold climate. Indeed, the accompanying text explains that such whales are found off the coast of Norway. This animal is very awake, captured by the illustrator presumably just prior to dragging the mariners and ship down to the depths. The caption tells us that this whale is known as "Trolual" or "Teüffelwal" in German.¹⁷

The title page of the *historia animalium* promises us "iconibus singulorum ad vivum," but, as Sachiko Kusukawa has shown, the concept of "drawn from life" was complex (307-22). Gessner's *Historia animalium* does include much information about animal physiology and behaviour based on observation and the accompanying woodcuts are often intended to be zoologically accurate. But the *Historia animalium* was also, perhaps predominantly, a philological endeavour. Gessner's publisher Christopher Froschauer advertised it as a work of grammar and rhetoric, and its bulk was largely due to its inclusion of all things known or believed about the animal in question, including ancient and modern descriptions, etymologies, names in different languages, as well as proverbial and emblematic wisdom. It was a humanist history of animals and included descriptions and pictures of the observed world alongside accounts from the ancients as well as medieval bestiaries, accounts that were beginning to be questioned by the new science. Gessner's woodcut illustrations were similarly eclectic and included images commissioned by himself or received from trusted friends, taken from life or from dried specimens or compiled from animal parts, as well as copies of pictures of real or fabulous animals from broadsides, books, and manuscripts. "Direct observation of the original was not yet a strict requirement for . . . images to be 'ad vivum'" (Kusukawa 322). In fact the Teüffelwal appears beneath a woodcut of a much more naturalistic, what we would recognise as "ad vivum," depiction of a whale being axed and carved into pieces ready for human consumption by a band of whalers.

¹⁷ The 2016 exhibition (and conference) commemorating the quincentenary of Gessner's birth at the Landesmuseum, Zurich, curated by Urs Leu, alerted me to the possible link between Gessner's Teüffelwal and Milton's leviathan. Subsequently, I discovered that Amy Lee Turner in an unpublished PhD of 1955 references Gessner's *Historia animalium* as a book containing woodcuts of animals that Milton may have known (110-12). She even reproduces the image of the Teüffelwal as a possible gloss for the leviathan simile but makes nothing of its larger significance for *Paradise Lost*.



Figure 2: Conradi Gesneri medici Tigurini *Historiae animalium* liber IIII. qui est de piscium & aquatilium animantium natura : cum iconibus singulorum ad vivum expressis fere omnib. DCCVI. Zürich, 1558, p. 138. Zentralbibliothek Zürich NNN 43. Reproduced with kind permission.

Gessner was meticulous in citing the sources and provenance of his woodcuts, especially for the more exotic species, and he tells us that he had recycled the Teüffelwal from Olaus Magnus's map of the northern

lands.¹⁸ The 1532 *Carta Marina* was printed in Venice and, some 4 foot high by 5 foot wide, was expensive to produce. The original print run is not known, but by the early 1570s it seems to have gone out of circulation. A much smaller amended copy was printed in 1572. While it is conceivable that Milton's leviathan simile is evoking Olaus Magnus's map, it is much more likely to be referring to Gessner's *Historia animalium*. Olaus Magnus does not link the island-whale to the devil, neither in the legend on the map itself nor in his description in *Historia de gentibus septentrionalibus* published in Rome in 1555 (Book 21, esp. chapters 25 and 26), whereas Gessner's caption to the image specifies that it is known as "Trolual" or "Teüffelwal." Besides, Gessner's *Historia animalium* was revered across Europe, not least in Cambridge. Two Cambridge men, William Turner the reformer and naturalist, and John Caius the physician and naturalist, both met Gessner in Zurich and would maintain collaborative friendships with him through letters and gifts.¹⁹ Matthew Parker, Archbishop of Canterbury, gave a copy of the *Historia animalium* to Cambridge University Library in 1574.²⁰ Edward Topsell (1572-1625), whose *The History of Four-Footed Beasts* (1607) was a translation-cum-adaptation of *Historia animalium* Liber I was an alumnus of Christ's College, Milton's alma mater.²¹

Gessner's printed image and accompanying text would have given Milton "Norway," "scaly rind," and the association with the devil. "Norway" foretells Satan's affiliation with the northerly regions of heaven when he tells Beëlzebub of his intent to go "Homeward with flying march where we possess / The quarters of the north" (V.688-89). The "scaly rind," meanwhile, foretells Satan's reptilian disguise in Book IX and the devils' being turned into serpents in punishment in Book X. But I would like to suggest that Gessner's *Historia animalium* is of relevance to *Paradise Lost* more generally, that in invoking the great Zurich pandect Milton is proffering an encyclopaedic model of knowledge based on a Protestant reading of the natural world, God's second book.

¹⁸ See https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Carta_marina#/media/File:Carta_Marina.jpeg. When we look closely at Magnus's map, we see that its many sea-beasts are shown in dangerous proximity to ships and that each ship is given a nationality. The island-whale is perilously close to a ship full of "Angli." See Chet Van Duzer (81-87), for the map in general, and Nigg (108-11) for the island whale).

¹⁹ For Gessner's pan-European network of correspondents, see Urs Leu, *Conrad Gessner* (208-18), and "Conrad Gessner's Netzwerk." For Caius's gifts see Leu, *Conrad Gessner* (179; 192; 202; 213; 215; 227). For Turner, see Raven (49-134) and Jones.

²⁰ Cambridge University Library, Shelfmark N*.1.19 (A).

²¹ For Topsell, see Ley.

The leviathan simile is one of many references to the beasts of the natural world in *Paradise Lost*, and, as such, is part of the heated debate over the extent of Milton's endorsement of the new science. Kester Svendsen's thesis that Milton favoured the old emblematic natural history over the new experimental philosophy has recently been challenged.²² In *Milton and the Natural World*, Karen Edwards argues with great subtlety that

Milton would have considered it the duty of a writer of epic to embrace *all* the learning of his day, even if some of it was in the process of being discredited and some of it was highly speculative . . . The old emblematic natural history is indeed present in *Paradise Lost*; Svendsen is not mistaken to point to it. But it is not given the poem's representational endorsement. The old science is invariably invoked for the less interesting . . . interpretative option . . . often marked by sly humour, . . . incorporat[ing] an acknowledgement of its unreliability. At the same time, the poem consistently makes available new representational possibilities suggested by the experimental philosophy, and it does so with excitement, wit, and creative relish. (10)

Edwards thus suggests that the old animal lore is used for Satan in hell, and points to the griffin simile of II.943-50 and the leviathan simile of I.200-08 to conclude that "the poem draws upon and refashions the traditional symbolic richness of fabulous creatures while denying their actual bodily existence" (100; 99-114).

I would like to propose a different reading which, rather than aligning Milton with or against the new science, seeks to celebrate the encyclopaedic model of knowledge represented by the *Historia animalium*. As we saw above, Gessner juxtaposed ancient animal lore with descriptions based on observation. Kusukawa writes:

[It] was . . . an "inventory" of knowledge about animals throughout history – Gessner did not distil or reduce similar descriptions, but rather juxtaposed them; nor did he eliminate contradictory or false descriptions of existing animals, or omit descriptions of animals whose existence was uncertain. (306)²³

In this light, the "or" which links the different icons that make up our chain of similes is not asking us to choose between incompatible things,

²² For a warning that Milton should not be aligned with the new science in the absence of hard evidence, see William Poole.

²³ Gessner did doubt the veracity of some of the accounts he included, questioning the existence of 21 out of 25 "fabulous" creatures. See Leu, *Conrad Gesner als Theologe* (97).

it is not “either . . . or . . .” In this simile “or” links comparable things and functions more like “and.”²⁴ The narrator’s *prosopographia* of Satan, which evolves into our long-tailed simile, presents us with a chain of descriptions from disparate books of knowledge, and, like Gessner’s encyclopaedia collated from different sources and media, each description proffers an aspect of truth. Thus, Satan has a material form, a heavy head, eyes that blaze and sparkle. His other parts are not specified neither is his exact length. But we know he is enormous, as huge, strong, and terrifying as the monsters of classical myth as described by an unspecified ancient poet, as vast as the leviathan of Job 41 and Psalm 102. But he is also somehow like that Teüffelwal seen, or reportedly seen, off the coast of Norway that Gessner preserved in graphic form.

In his prefatory letter to the *Historia animalium*, after a measured account of the utility animals, Gessner’s enthusiasm for the apparently useless emmet gets the better of him:

And what man withall his witte, can sufficiently declare and proclame the wonderful industrious minds of the little Emmets and Bees . . . so that I might conclude, that there is not any beast which hath not onely somthing in it which is rare, glorious, and peculiar to himselfe, but also something that is deuine . . . not set before vs like sports & pastimes to reioyce at, but as honorable emblems of Diuine and supernaturall wisedome. (Topsell 1607 2^v-3^r)

Gessner is here paying tribute to the belief that God revealed himself in the natural world, his second book. All God’s creatures, from the seemingly insignificant emmet to the monstrous Teüffelwal, signified God’s original creative act as well as his on-going providential intervention in the world. This was an ancient commonplace but had been given new emphasis by the first generation of reformers, particularly Luther, Zwingli, and Bucer, and would become a trope in Milton’s England (Leu, *Conrad Gesner als Theologe* 31-48; Walsham 328-57; Edwards 40-63). Milton would of course pay tribute to “The parsimonious emmet” (VII.485) in Raphael’s account of Creation. “Nature was an emblem rather than a photograph of the divine” (Walsham 333) but this image of the almighty far surpassed any made by human hand. By referencing Gessner’s image, the narrator powerfully reinforces his message:

²⁴ For a reading which highlights the ubiquity of “or” in *Paradise Lost*, but argues that it fills the poem “with larger and smaller instances of unresolved, aporetic choices that reflect Milton’s own . . . state” (203) after the Restoration, see Peter Herman.

So stretched out huge in length the arch-fiend lay
 Chained on the burning lake, nor ever thence
 Had risen or heaved his head, but that the will
 And high permission of all-ruling heaven
 Left him at large to his own dark designs (I.209-13)

Satan, like the leviathan, is God's creature, a wonder to behold and a sign of his maker's omnipotence, but still "at large" – free to swim away or sink the skiff as it were.

By juxtaposing the narrator's representation of the Son of God in heaven and Adam and Eve as *imago dei* in Eden with the famous opening chain of similes describing Satan in hell, this essay has brought God the Maker into dialogue with the poet maker and emphasised their preoccupation with images. In *Paradise Lost* an image is emphatically visual and embodied: the Son of God is the "conspicuous countenance" of the Father while in Adam and Eve's "looks divine / The image of their glorious maker shone." Meanwhile, the chain of similes which compares Satan to the monsters of the fables, to that sea beast leviathan and, ultimately, to a printed image on the page of a famous Protestant natural history invites us to visualise Satan both as a material body of wondrous dimensions and as the pre-eminent emblem of God's creative powers. More broadly, this emphasis on embodied visuality in *Paradise Lost* validates the natural, material world and the sense of sight as possible ways to apprehend God. This valorisation may come as something of a surprise from a poet so routinely dubbed "Puritan."

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