Essay

Simile for the Devil: *Paradise Regained* and the Secularization of Satan

RAPHAEL MAGARIK

> Someone asked Rabbi Mendel of Kotzk, "Maimonides in *The Guide to the Perplexed* denies the existence of demons and magic, but it is written in scripture, 'and they shall no longer offer their sacrifices to goat demons' [Leviticus 17:7]? Also, how can the words of Rashi be understood, that Noah was commanded by God to bring demons to the ark [Rashi to Genesis 6:19]?" The Kotzker Rebbe answered, "These and these are words of truth. In the past, demons and magic existed. But, from the time that Maimonides came and said that they did not exist, behold, Maimonides is a legal authority, and they followed his opinion in heaven, and they established his words as practical law, and demons disappeared from the earth."[1]
>
> — פרחי רש"י (*Pirḥei Rashi*; *Flowers of Rashi*)

Attempting to reconcile the extensive Jewish traditions about demons[2] and the great Maimonides's stalwart denial of their existence,[3] the Kotzker Rebbe imagines a process of disenchantment: there used to be demons, but not since Maimonides declared that they did not exist. Is the Kotzker Rebbe telling a secularization story? It happens that he is accurately summarizing the process by which medieval scholastic philosophy gradually purged Judaism of its most enchanted aspects.[4] In particular, Maimonides understood his coreligionists to be possessed by the demon of divine corporealism, and although his rationalist denial that God has a body was initially derided as heretical (Silver; Schweid), it is now so normative that post-Maimonidean Jews often have trouble recognizing the embodied God in biblical and rabbinic sources (Sommer 1–12). The banishing of demons in the Kotzker Rebbe's story might thus be read as

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allegorically encoding the banishing of the deity: no spirits, no (corporeal) God.[5] (Such a message, however heretical, would hardly have been too radical for the Kotzker Rebbe, who is rumored to have retreated into seclusion after shouting, "There is no judge and no judgment!" [qtd. in Buber 42].) Furthermore, the story implies that demons are just imaginative projections, which exist only to the extent that humans believe they do.

And yet it seems willfully perverse to call this a secularization story, since its hero is a magus legislating to the heavens and its plot comes straight from Jewish demonological literature. That is, the Kotzker Rebbe ironically imagines Maimonides's rationalist declaration as an exorcism. The irony is sharpened because the great rabbi banishing demons is a recurring trope *within* Jewish demonology. "If I am important in Heaven," Rabbi Ḥanina ben Dosa tells the demon Agrat in one Talmudic story, "I decree upon you that you should never pass through inhabited places." He eventually concedes to Agrat visitation rights of two nights a week, but the later sage Abaye eliminates them (Goldwurm et al., BT Pesahim 112b; see also Bar-Ilan). Even within the story, one of the questioner's proofs that demons exist, Leviticus 17.7, is a verse about their waning in significance.[6] Thus, the gesture of imagining that supernatural powers deferred to Maimonides's judgment, though apparently reverent to the medieval philosopher, nonetheless assimilates him into stories he means to dismiss.

This anecdote dramatizes with particular intensity a critique of secularization narratives, a critique to which this essay responds. Histories of secularization vary widely, but they often attempt to tell stories explaining how modernity, which is associated with rationality, worldliness, humanism, or skepticism, emerged from a premodern past, defined by some mixture of enchantment, transcendence, religiosity, and credulity.[7] The criticism I am concerned with is that, because the secularization narratives themselves seem to recapitulate metaphorically the stories or myths of the premodern past, the end state they delineate is not really secular. Rather, it is secretly indebted to a particular presecular tradition. Talal Asad, for instance, argues that Western European secularization narratives like Marcel Gauchet's, which imagine Christianity as a paradoxically secularizing religion, "mimic . . . the sacred Christian narrative" in its evocation of "a divine parent metamorphosing into its human offspring (modernity)" and of "transcendence embodying itself in worldly life (secularity)." In such narratives, Asad suggests, Christianity sacrifices itself to redeem the world ("Free Speech" 23). Similarly, in his study of the emerging social-scientific consensus of the late nineteenth century that modernity could be characterized by a disenchantment of nature and the decline of belief in spirits and demons, Jason A. Josephson-Storm argues that this disenchantment narrative is "part of the trope of magic itself" (311). He shows how the disappearance of the fairies is itself a stock of fairy lore, which reached intellectuals like Max Weber and James Frazer by way of a nineteenth-century revival of occultism and spiritualism.

While Asad uses the cultural specificity of secularization stories to provincialize the apparently universal narratives of the West, Josephson-Storm goes further, suggesting that disenchantment never happened—that it is just a ghost story. In this way, the argument that secularization narratives take their shape from religious, mythical, or fantastic traditions is a sophisticated form of generalized skepticism about, in Hans Blumenberg's phrase, "the legitimacy of the modern age" (*Legitimacy*). In the recent turn to religion in the humanities, a substantial subgroup of work concerns the purported inescapability or permanence of religious tropes, stories, and modes of thought in secular modernity.[8] Often, as in Walter Benjamin's famous allegory of the chess automaton, religion is imagined as modernity's repressed secret, which is "small and ugly and has to keep out of sight" (389). Work in political theology, when influenced by the Nazi jurist and philosopher Carl Schmitt, frequently attempts to unmask secular modernity as merely a show, inverting classic Feuerbachian or materialist accounts of religion to disillusion the secular purveyors of disillusionment.[9]

Of course, I do not mean to conflate the various currents and streams within what is sometimes

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loosely called postsecularism:[10] the postcolonial concerns that motivate scholars like Asad, Josephson-Storm, and, in her recent work, Joan Wallach Scott (*Sex* and *Politics*)[11]—and, say, the attempt to make space for theological modes of reading and religious questions (Shuger; Jackson and Marotti)—reflect quite disparate scholarly agendas.[12] And yet, I am drawing attention to the common use, within many strains of postsecularism, of the analogies between apparently secular concepts and stories and earlier, religious doctrines and myths—analogies that call into question the autonomy of the secular. Where rationalist analyses of religion commonly used likeness to domesticate the apparently supernatural (demons as a metaphor for anxieties,[13] gods as Feuerbachian projections of human kingship), postsecularism flips the directionality, using the same resemblances to suggest that secular thought requires religion as its condition of possibility (the sovereign is like God; secularization is like the incarnation). Asad ("Free Speech") and Josephson-Storm, for instance, challenge historians of secularization either to distinguish tenor from vehicle, secular from religious, and Maimonides from Abaye or to give up on their narratives of intellectual transformation.

I respond to this critique through a reading of one particular secularization story, John Milton's *Paradise Regained*. Scholars have previously read the poem as centrally concerned with disenchantment, or even secularization.[14] For David Quint, "the casting out of devils is a central action" of the poem, an action that "reflects the shift of Renaissance thought itself toward the objectivity of science," which "destroyed an older cosmos of inborn spiritual forces and magical sympathies" ("Disenchanted World" 182).[15] Victoria Kahn goes further, arguing that the Son is a model of secular, ironic critique and that the "implication of *Paradise Regained* . . . is that there are no privileged sacred texts" and thus no "difference between scripture and literature" ("Job's Complaint" 649). I extend these compelling readings by arguing that a central, secularizing plot of the poem is the dissolution of Satan. This secularization—which pertains not to magic or poetry but to the theological question of evil—aligns the secularity of *Paradise Regained* not with Renaissance philosophy or poetry but with a heretical fringe in seventeenth-century England (Walker), one that would not enter the mainstream until the emergence of a demythologized, liberal Christianity in the nineteenth century.

Following Barbara Lewalski, many critics have found in Milton's brief epic an identity plot, in which, as Lewalski puts it, "Christ's action of overcoming the satanic temptations in the wilderness is inextricably linked with his emerging understanding of his nature and his mission" (133; see also Rogers 594, 609).[16] I argue that as the Son passes from scriptural figure to reality, Satan in turn vanishes in a puff of simile. Both the disappearance of Satan and the form it takes—the reduction of mythological character to metaphor—have long histories as central examples of secularization and the liberalization of religion.[17] Particularly in conservative accounts, secular modernity is often defined by its skepticism of real, intransigent evil (that is, of the devil) and by its rationalist rewriting of mythic narrative as metaphors amenable to naturalistic science (Blumenberg, *Paradigms* 77–81).

My argument proceeds in several steps. First, I explain Milton's doctrine of the nonexistence of evil, showing how his theodicy derives from Augustine and yet is radicalized by his monism. Second, I argue that the poem traces the gradual eviction of Satan from the natural world over which he rules, and I demonstrate how Milton's philosophical commitments register in the poem's imagery, particularly its focus on figuration and simile. Third, I turn to the epic similes of book 4, which, while they make Satan's dissolution explicit, also return us to the larger problem of metaphor and secularization narrative.

For if *Paradise Regained* reduces Satan to a metaphor—that is, if it secularizes evil—then it raises this basic question: How secular is myth made metaphor? Like Kahn's and Quint's, my argument is susceptible to the questions that I asked about the Kotzker Rebbe (and that Asad asked of Gauchet, and Josephson-Storm of Weber). As William Madsen long ago argued, the suspension of miracles and other supernatural forces, as well as revelation's replacement by interpretation, is itself not just provided

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for but actually demanded by Christian salvation history; these transformations *are* the shift between the ages of law and spirit (107–08).

Paradise Regained—like other secularization stories—confronts its readers with its metaphors and thus "lays bare the device" (Shklovsky, "Novel" 147).[18] The idea of secularity at play here—that is, irony or self-awareness about the stories that one holds sacred—is a philosophical concept, which does not correspond to a singular event or process in Western European history but instead describes how particular texts treat particular themes. Many supposed secularization stories will fail this test of secularity. In that sense, and because of my interest in how religious myths become secularization stories, I am building on the work of Asad and Josephson-Storm. But I disagree with their suggestion that the secular is indistinguishable from, or merely ideologically repackages, the religious.[19] Secularization stories can be distinguished, albeit not for their naturalism, their liberalism, their rationalism, or other doctrinal content. Rather, they force us to face the constructed, literary quality of religious and mythological narrative.

To understand what happens to Satan in *Paradise Regained*, we have to start with Milton's theory of evil. As Stephen Fallon argues, Milton inherits his theodicy largely from Augustine.[20] Milton believes that evil does not and cannot exist metaphysically, writing in *De doctrina Christiana*, "All entity is good: nonentity, not good" ("Selections" 1202). I examine two key Augustinian features of *Paradise Regained*'s theodicy: its commitment to the ultimate nonexistence of evil and its narrative of how the Son retakes material nature from Satanic usurpation. (This transformation is not complete until the Second Coming: the poem foreshadows that Second Coming, the effects of which are in principle anticipated in the first.) The nuances in the Augustinian and Miltonic systems help explain how Milton drew a conclusion more radical than Augustine's about Satan's eventual evaporation. But Augustinian orthodoxy's anticipation of Milton's radicalism also foregrounds the difficulty of cleanly distinguishing modern innovation from late antique orthodoxy in doctrinal terms.

Although Augustine posits that evil is fundamentally a negative accident or absence (*privatio boni*), never an actually existing substance, he complicates this picture in two ways. First, corruptibility and thus the capacity for evil exist providentially, fulfilling a divine role in creation. For things to exist at all, they must be material and corruptible. Second, original sin gives evil a particular material stronghold in the world through Adam's physical seed, one that is undone *in potentia* by Christ's incarnation, and specifically his miraculous birth.

In the *Confessions*, Augustine argues that, although evil exists only as a *privatio boni*, the potential for evil (corruptibility) is essential to matter's existence. Claiming that "whatsoever are, are good, and that evil which I sought, whence it should be, is not any substance," Augustine nevertheless concludes by writing, "because all which thou has made are not equal, therefore are all things; for each is good, and at the same time all together very good" (376–77; bk. 7, sec. 12). Corruptibility, or "inequality"—that is, the differing degrees to which things exist (7.11) and thus to which they may be corrupted—is therefore the precondition of things existing at all. There is a constitutive tension in Augustine's theodicy between the nonexistence of evil and matter's essential corruptibility.

This tension reproduces itself in Augustine's Christian history of human evil. Ironically, the theoretician of nonexistent evil locates enduring human evil in a deeply material form. Although "God, the author of natures, not of vices, created man upright," human beings beget "corrupted and condemned children":

> For we all were in that one man, since we all were that one man, who fell into sin by the woman who was made from him before the sin. For . . . already the seminal nature was there from which we were to be propagated; and this being vitiated by sin, and bound by the chain of death, and justly condemned, man could not be born of man in any other state. And thus . . . there originated the whole train of

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> evil, which . . . conveys the human race from its depraved origin, as from a corrupt root.
>
> (Augustine, *City*, bk. 13, ch. 14)

Original sin takes a physical form, being literally our miniscule seminal particles (*natura seminalis*) present in Adam when he sinned. Adam's sin is ours, insofar as each of our bodies was present in his. Abrahamic circumcision, which Augustine reads as a "sign of regeneration" and thus a type of Christ (*City*, bk. 16, ch. 27) appears on the organ of generation to symbolize its relation to Adamic semen. Thus, the uncircumcised Israelite baby "on account of the original sin . . . was not undeservedly to lose his generation unless delivered by regeneration"; regeneration—that is, nonnatural modification of the genitals—symbolically undoes the generative link between Adam's penis and the baby's (bk. 16, ch. 27).

The tension here—that evil is not in God-created nature but is nonetheless an inevitable, physical part of human beings—can be seen in Augustine's analogy of the wild olive, which explains why good Christian parents beget fallen children. He asks

> how those who have been themselves delivered by grace from the bondage of sin, should still beget those who are tied and bound by the self-same chain. . . . But that the embryo of wild olive trees should latently exist in the germs of true olives, who would deem credible, if it were not proved true by experiment and observation? . . . [S]o what is born in the flesh, either of a sinner or of a just man, is in both instances a sinner, notwithstanding the vast distinction which exists between the sinner and the righteous man.
>
> (*On Marriage*, bk. 1, ch. 19)

The "wild olive" is our corrupted, human-altered position, yet it is the material, physical nature to which the seed reverts without human tending. Corruption has achieved a naturalized, permanent purchase on humanity.

Christ's regenerating power derives from his interruption of this chain of material generation. For Augustine, the virgin birth signifies not only Jesus's freedom from his parents' carnal desire, which would anyway not have been his own sin, but also his literal freedom from Adam's original sin: "He was begotten and conceived in no pleasure of carnal appetite—and therefore bore no trace of original sin . . . . [*H*]*e himself committed no sin*" (*Enchiridion*, bk. 2, ch. 13; my emphasis). This stress on Christ's rupture of materiality explains why Augustine is so committed to the virgin *birth* (Augustine does not distinguish virginity from an intact hymen), and not merely to Christ's virgin conception:

> But [Christ's] was a nature entirely free from the bonds of all sin. It was not a nature born of both sexes with fleshly desires, with the burden of sin, the guilt of which is washed away in regeneration. Instead, it was the kind of nature that would be fittingly born of a virgin, conceived by His mother's faith and not her fleshly desires. Now *if in his being born, her virginity had been destroyed, he would not then have been born of a virgin*.
>
> (2.10; my emphasis)

"Fleshly desires" here are not merely a feature of sinful concupiscence, which is irrelevant to whether Mary's hymen was ruptured during childbirth (Brown, *Body*, e.g., 273–74; see also Rosenberg 182–207). Rather, the point is that the Augustinian Christ breaks the line of material generation, inserting in its place a spiritual regeneration.

Christ supplements physical birth with spiritual rebirth: "For by [the Devil] must they be necessarily possessed, as vessels of wrath, since they are born of Adam, unless they be born again in Christ" (Augustine, *On Marriage*, bk. 2, ch. 33). Before Christ's entrance into the world, Augustine writes in "The Freedom of the Will," "[t]he human race is the Devil's fruit tree, his own property, from which he may pick his fruit. It is a plaything of demons" (qtd. in Brown, *Augustine* 245). Even though the trees (Adam's sin is figured as the *root* of corruption) are metaphoric, the image, which grows from the literal Edenic tree, suggests that human sin and the devil's empire form a coherent, metonymically related whole. Inaugurating a figural shift from literal to spiritual, Christ's spiritual birth uproots the tree of physical human corruption.[21]

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Christ overthrows Satan's temporary dominion over the earth, diminishing evil from an inescapable natural fact to an ever-present but avoidable threat, reintroducing the radical promise of nonexistence theodicy.

Milton's materialism complicates the way in which Augustinian theodicy informs *Paradise Regained*, since Augustine's equation of materiality and corruptibility, as well as the physical location of original sin in Adam's semen, derives from a decidedly non-Miltonic dualism. But crucial aspects of the Augustinian account do remain in Milton's poetry—two commitments in particular, at once complementary and contradictory: that evil proper does not exist and that, narratively and dynamically, Christ causes evil to disappear.[22] Tracing the poem's Augustinianism, I show how this narrative unfolds. Jesus at first refuses to participate in nature but gradually reveals a deeper underlying order over which he rules. Satan is squeezed out of nature and ultimately exists only figuratively.

Strong evidence commits *Paradise Regained* to nonexistence theodicy. For instance, although Satan means to deceive when he tells the Son that he has "not lost" the ability "To love, at least contemplate and admire / What I see excellent in good, or fair, / Or virtuous" and that he "should so have lost all sense" (Milton, *PR* 1.379–82),[23] he is also recapitulating Augustine's account of how a person who has lost all appreciation for beauty and virtue would cease entirely to sense (*Against the Epistle* 149). Nonexistence theodicy may underlie the consistent dramatic irony that attends Satan. Though he is "composed of lies" (Milton, *PR* 1.407), much of what he says is unintentionally true. Insofar as Satan speaks reasonably and substantively, he cannot help telling the truth.

Similarly, the images of darkness and light in the poem indicate that evil does not exist. After the temptation of poetry fails, Satan

> . . . to the Wilderness
> Brought back the Son of God, and left him there,
> Feigning to disappear. Darkness now rose,
> As daylight sunk, and brought in louring night
> Her shadowy offspring, unsubstantial both,
> Privation mere of light and absent day.
> (4.395–400)

Exit Satan, enter darkness, whose "shadowy offspring" blurs with the "ugly dreams" with which Satan "disturb'd [Jesus's] sleep" (4.408, 409). The link between Satan and darkness, familiar from *Paradise Lost*,[24] is emphasized here when Satan returns with sunrise and is called the "Prince of darkness" (4.441). Moreover, both "privation," a technical term of nonexistence theodicy, and the insistence on darkness's insubstantiality allude to Augustine's ongoing theodical polemic against the Manicheans,[25] who held that darkness was an independent realm ruled by an evil deity. Against that position, in passages that lurk behind Milton's lines, Augustine insists that "no nature at all is evil, and this is a name for nothing but the want [*privatio*] of good" and, relatedly, that "darkness, indeed, is not a real substance, and means no more than the absence of light" (*City*, bk. 11, ch. 22; *Against the Epistle*, ch. 30). While Milton's Satan cleverly feigns his disappearance, by disguising himself in darkness, he ironically anticipates his real disappearance. The illusion has mistaken itself for the magician.

The subsequent passage from night to dawn denies the existence of evil, and it frames that denial within the poem's broader concerns with letter and figure. Satan pretends to disappear only after declaring his bafflement at the signs surrounding Jesus:

> Now contrary, if I read aught in Heaven,
> Or Heav'n write aught of Fate, by what the Stars
> Voluminous, or single characters,
> In their conjunction met, give me to spell,
> Sorrows, and labors, opposition, hate,
> Attends thee, scorns, reproaches, injuries,
> Violence and stripes, and lastly cruel death,
> A Kingdom they portend thee, but what Kingdom,
> Real or Allegoric I discern not,
> Nor when, eternal sure, as without end,
> Without beginning; for no date prefixt
> Directs me in the Starry Rubric set.
> (Milton, *PR* 4.382–93)

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Satan's inability to understand figures pervades the poem, beginning with his confusion of the "likeness of a Dove" in which the Holy Spirit descends at Christ's baptism for "a perfect Dove . . . whate'er it meant" (1.30, 83). This passage clarifies Satan's mistaken hermeneutic. Satan is an atomistic interpreter, whose reading of the "voluminous" stars, to borrow the Son's later critique of the undiscerning reader, ultimately amounts to "collecting toys, / And trifles for choice matters, worth a sponge; / As Children gathering pebbles on the shore" (4.328–30)[26]—sand and stars being paired signifiers of endlessness in Genesis 22.17 (Alt et al.). Satan is literally a literalist. He can "spell" individual stars, or "characters"—the poem puns on Genesis 1.14, "and let [the celestial bodies] be for signs," which uses the Hebrew for signs, אתת (*ʾotot*), which also means "letters"—correctly into a paratactic sequence of unconnected events (Alt et al.). But he cannot understand what they "portend"—that is, correctly gloss the whole. He resembles the sophistic angels in *Paradise Lost* who also, roaming through a catalog of subjects, "*found no end*, in wand'ring mazes lost" (2.561; my emphasis). Ironically, Satan cannot correctly locate himself in the Augustinian allegory of light and darkness.

The very fact that darkness and light metaphorically represent good and evil signals a defeat for Satan. "Air," which Satan calls at the poem's start "This our old Conquest," is transformed from Satan's physical domain to a neutral medium; hermeneutically, an astrological oracle legible to him shifts into a Christian figure that he cannot read (1.45–46). Though Satan cannot understand it, the metaphor denies Satan's real inherence in material nature. And while both evil and darkness are *privationes*, there is nothing truly evil in darkness. The connection is just resemblance.

The practical complement to this figural shift is the loosening of Satan's purchase on the physical world. Satan and evil begin to be expunged from nature, enacting the dynamic and mythological movement of Augustine's theodicy. Of course, were the Son to retake nature fully, disease, infirmity, and so on would cease. That transformation, though not completed, is begun in *Paradise Regained*: in book 1, oracles cease (456) and wild animals are tamed, the latter fulfilling Isaiah's messianic prophecy and undoing the natural disruption of the Fall (310–13). A fuller, more detailed example occurs after Satan's retreat into darkness, during a storm. Jesus has a terrible night, assailed by "rain with lightning mixt, water with fire" and "Infernal Ghosts, and Hellish Furies" (4.412, 422). Critics have generally assumed that Satan controls the weather (Lewalski 307–09; Stein, *Heroic Knowledge* 119; Hughes and MacKellar 525). By contrast, Quint argues that Milton is carefully ambiguous: "In this reformed Christian poem a storm may just be a storm" ("Disenchanted World" 192). While classical epic personifies meteorological violence, here Jesus faces two parallel phenomena: a natural storm and the supernatural spirits. I would add that the agential nouns in the storm sequence are the dispassionate geographic locators—"either Tropic," "both ends of Heav'n," "the four hinges of the world" (Milton, *PR* 4.409, 410, 415)—rather than (as in Milton's sources)[27] mythological spirits or personified winds. Further, the "Infernal Ghosts, and Hellish Furies" that separately attempt to frighten the Son are clearly marked as otherworldly, a recognizable blow to Satan, who says at the poem's outset, "For much more willingly I mention Air / . . . than remember Hell" (1.45–46).

The episode marks Satan's retreat from tangible nature into illusory night, as can be illustrated by a comparison with an earlier episode. The pattern here of Satanic dreams dispelled by day inverts a similar pattern in book 2, in which, like the reality principle, dawn interrupts pious, nourishing dreams: "Fasting he went to sleep, and fasting wak'd" (2.284). In book 2, natural hunger belongs to Satan, miraculous satiation to Jesus. But in book 4, Satan relies on night's "insubstantial" dreams and illusions, which Jesus patiently outwaits, confident in the expectation of dawn's sober realities. The Son, who is after all the creator, has begun to rule nature in Satan's place. Attacking by night, Satan concedes that his powers are newly temporally bounded, distinguished from the Son's kingdom, which his own words admit to be "eternal sure, as without end, / Without beginning" (4.391–92).

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For even if Quint is wrong and Satan has induced the storm, the shift in nature's status would only be more pronounced. Whatever its origins, the storm definitely ends naturally, like clockwork, with dawn:

> Thus passed the night so foul till morning fair
> Came forth with Pilgrim steps in amice gray;
> Who with her radiant finger still'd the roar
> Of thunder, chas'd the clouds, and laid the winds,
> And grisly Specters, which the Fiend had rais'd
> To tempt the Son of God with terrors dire.
> And now the Sun with more effectual beams
> Had cheered the face of Earth. . . . (4.426–33)

Jesus lies down in Satan's nature, but he wakes in his own. The rosy-fingered Aurora familiar from Homeric epithet has been baptized and initiated into a religious order: hence her "amice," a liturgical garment. This personified dawn, which repulses Satan's assault, performs the active, martial work from which the Son so strikingly abstains, complicating the pattern of Satan's action and Jesus's passive resistance. The transitive "stilled" is telling, since it contrasts sharply with the word's adjectival and adverbial uses for Satan's and the Son's repeated respective temptations and refusals, as when the narrator writes of Satan that "still he knew his power / Not yet expir'd" (4.394–95) or that he "[s]till will be tempting him who foils him still" (4.13). Further, when morning and the Sun are read against the mother-child duo of Darkness and Night, the "Son"/"Sun" pun seems inevitable, and it is reinforced by their metrically identical placement in adjacent lines: "To tempt the Son" and "And now the Sun" (331–32). Because the Sun's rising is also the Son's, it marks a moment of mythic transformation, the dawning of a new chapter in sacred history.

Darkness and night thus signify evil in two contradictory ways (neither exist, yet both eventually disappear), which correspond to Augustine's philosophical account of evil as *privatio* and his dynamic narrative of its dissolution. The morning in book 4 functions in the second way, echoing the "Morn" that, at the beginning of book 6 of *Paradise Lost*, relieves Abdiel, who has, like the Son, spent the night tormented by fallen angels:

> Morn,
> Wak't by the circling hours, with rosy hand
> Unbarr'd the gates of light. There is a Cave
> Within the Mount of God, fast by his Throne,
> Where light and darkness in perpetual round
> Lodge and dislodge by turns, which makes through Heav'n
> Grateful vicissitude, like Day and Night;
> Light issues forth, and at the other door
> Obsequious darkness enters, till her hour
> To veil the Heav'n. (6.2–11)

Details reinforce the correspondence. Abdiel is described as a type of Christ tempted ("one / That of so many Myriads fall'n . . . / Returned not lost" [6.23–25]). The "Sunny hill" (4.447) on which Satan finds Christ suggests the "sacred hill" (6.25) surrounded with "a Golden Cloud" (28) that Abdiel is taken to and that subsequently burns with God's presence (56–60). Milton made much of the "Son"/"Sun" pun in "On the Morning of Christ's Nativity," which cements the poetic complex in which morning symbolizes a cosmological revolution:

> The Sun himself withheld his wonted speed,
> And hid his head for shame,
> As his inferior flame,
> The new-enlight'n'd world no more should need;
> He saw a greater Sun appear
> Than his bright Throne, or burning Axletree could bear. (79–84)

This pattern elevates the morning after the storm to a cosmic defeat of Satan.

If the "greater Sun" in the Nativity ode can be read as merely a similitude or resemblance, in Milton's later poetry, the pun is meant somehow literally. The coming of the Son will physically displace the sun and reshape the cosmos. This becomes clear in the light of John Rogers's argument that *Paradise Regained* hinges on the recovery of "the pre-existent Son's glorious participation in the War in Heaven" and the discovery of the association of the "Seed of Eve" prophesied to crush Satan with the Son who

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already did so (609). Rogers provides a crucial link between the two epics that clarifies how dramatic the shift enacted in *Paradise Regained* is. When Satan discusses the protevangelium, he uses the same image of "circling hours":

> . . . [L]ong the decrees of Heav'n
> Delay, for longest time to him is short;
> And now too soon for us the circling hours
> This dreaded time have compast, wherein we
> Must bide the stroke of that long threat'n'd wound.
> (Milton, *PR* 1.55–59)

Narrowly, the "circling hours" underscore the radical difference between divine and ordinary time. The "many Ages, as the years of men" of Satan's empire pass as quickly as a single night (1.48). More broadly, the hours offer a radical alternative to the allegorical association of darkness with evil. For in *Paradise Lost*, Milton is drawing on the fact that light and darkness are created before the sun, moon, and stars to imagine a wholly positive, prior account of light and darkness. The latter, imagined as definitely substantive, "veil[s]" heaven and "lodge[s]" in the cave. "Obsequious darkness" is a trilingual pun, playing on the literal action of following and the parallel to Abdiel, whose name in Hebrew means "Servant of God" (6.29).[28] We peek at a cosmos purged of Satan and evil, in which darkness plays its role in a harmonious hierarchy.

This transformation of the heavens is also hermeneutically transformative. When Satan, reminding the Son of "what I foretold thee," reiterates his appeal to nighttime signs and oracles in the morning ("this ominous night that clos'd thee round, / So many terrors, voices, prodigies / May warn thee, as a sure foregoing sign"), the Son rejects them: "what they can do as signs / Betok'ning or ill-boding I contemn / As false portents, not sent from God, but thee" (*PR* 4.481–83, 89–91). The dispensation under which the physical heavens can be interpreted is over. It belonged to the sun, moon, and stars, about which God says, "and let them be for signs" (Alt et al.), and that Geneva glosses as "things belonging to natural and political orders and seasons," allowing the slide between calendric and oracular reading (Genesis 1.14 [*Geneva Bible*]). But in the realm of light and darkness proper, no such reading is possible. Neither night's demons nor its astronomical bodies signify anymore; a new day has begun.

The question of figures and similes has been crucial here, from Christ's figural shift to Satan's inability to understand figures to the delicate playing on the literal and figurative senses of darkness and light. And indeed, Satan disintegrates most explicitly and powerfully in a series of epic similes in book 4 of *Paradise Regained*. The plot of Satan's disappearance culminates with these similes, and they represent him not merely as weakened but as absent. Furthermore, they highlight the centrality of metaphor itself to this plot. These similes answer the question with which I began—Are secularization stories genuinely secular if they draw their forms from religious materials?—because they suggest a way in which *Paradise Regained* is genuinely a story of secularization, and not just Augustinianism in modern clothing. Looking at how the similes foreground the arbitrary nature of poetic creativity, and thus Milton's poetic role in imagining Satan, I suggest that a key characteristic of true secularization stories is their authors' self-reflexivity: the ability to see and present one's narrative as itself constructed, artificial, and poetic.

The first such simile occurs at the start of book 4, by which point Satan is already beginning to dissolve:

> But as a man who had been matchless held
> In cunning, overreach't where least he thought,
> To salve his credit, and for very spite
> Still will be tempting him who foils him still,
> And never cease, though to his shame the more;
> Or as a swarm of flies in vintage time,
> About the wine-press where sweet must is pour'd,
> Beat off, returns as oft with humming sound;
> Or surging waves against a solid rock,
> Though all to shivers dash't, th'assault renew,
> Vain batt'ry, and in froth or bubbles end;
> So Satan, whom repulse upon repulse
> Met ever, and to shameful silence brought,
> Yet gives not o'er though desperate of success,
> And his vain importunity pursues. (10–24)

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The similes themselves multiply around Satan like flies around a winepress, and the verse thus performs the futile repetition it describes, aligning the poet with the flailing Satan. In fact, comparisons accumulate syntactically as well as in parallel. The first simile includes a nested metaphor with a vehicle that is either medical or, in the 1680 edition, which turns "salve" to "save," ironically economic rather than soteriological.[29] Within the second, the swarm "returns as oft" as it is "beat off," which states a literal fact about the uniformity with which the swarm returns but sounds like a simile; also, because of the "Christ in the winepress" tradition of reading Isaiah 63.3, the scent of Christ's metaphoric blood lingers over the "sweet must." Similarly, the rock simile plays on the image of Christ as water-giving rock in 1 Corinthians 10.4, which is activated by the nested figuration of the already figurative water as "shivers," here used to mean "a flake or splinter of stone (e.g., one knocked off in stone-dressing)," through which the stone yields water ("Shiver").

Each of these similes, with Satan as their initial intended subject, finally yields only the Son. The vehicles gradually progress from human, through animal, to inanimate, dropping down (and eventually out of) the Aristotelian hierarchy of souls. As they do, Satan gradually disappears into a frenzy of personified, unconscious motion and Christological typology. Lewalski's characterization of the passage—"Satan's steady disintegration and loss of control" (336)—needs to be expanded, both because of the heavy emphasis placed on simile in this passage (as she notes, it contains fully half of the poem's epic similes) and because of the way in which Satan seems to disintegrate into Jesus. The shifting antecedent of "him"—which first refers to Jesus, then to Satan—in "still will be tempting him who foils him still" works as the "who" did in line 7. Both anticipate the famous trick of "Who on their plumy Vans receiv'd him soft" (Milton, *PR* 4.483), in which readers expect the pronoun to refer to Satan but then must correct themselves; the two *him*s suggest that just as the impassive, still Son thwarts Satan's willful, "vain importunity," so too, at least here, the attempt to describe Satan inevitably leads the poetry back to the Son. Milton's repetitions ("still," "repulse upon repulse," "success") end in froth and bubbles, and his last four lines falsely stop five times, at "Satan," "ever," "brought," "o'er," and "success."

By the end of the passage, Satan no longer exists as a personal, willful agent. Even as the poem reasserts his individuality ("So Satan"), it characterizes his actions as increasingly mechanical. Reduced to "shameful silence," he seems not only no longer to speak but also no longer to think; his reactions are as automatic as the repulses with which they are met. Even as the final image of Satan pursuing his "vain importunity" seems fully to repersonify him, imagining him almost as a thwarted suitor in a Restoration drama, the etymological pun in "im*port*unity" reactivates the tidal metaphor. That metaphor is exact: Satan's disappearance means not the erasure or elimination of his matter—anathema to Milton's monism—but its loss of unifying form and structure. Moreover, the wave figures the secularizing work of the poem itself: cyclically and asymptotically, Satan is broken into metaphoric froth and then reassembled, disillusioned and half-heartedly reconstituted.

If this passage stages Satan's disappearance, it is important to notice how deeply Milton's poetry entangles itself in its character's nonexistence. The uncanny resemblance between Satan and Milton, of course, is a problem familiar from *Paradise Lost*, early in which Milton announces that his poem "with no middle flight intends to soar / Above th' *Aonian* Mount, while it pursues / Things unattempted yet in Prose or Rhyme," anticipating Satan's "vain attempt" on Heaven mere lines later (1.14–16, 44), as well as his flight toward Heaven, during which he "springs upward like a pyramid of fire / Into the wild expanse" (2.1013–14). This similitude is intensified in the narrator's introduction to the similes at the start of book 4 of *Paradise Regained*:

> Perplex'd and troubl'd at his bad success
> The tempter stood, nor had what to reply,
> Discover'd in his fraud, thrown from his hope,
> So oft, and the persuasive Rhetoric
> That sleek't his tongue, and won so much on *Eve*,
> So little here, nay lost; but *Eve* was *Eve*,

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> This far his over-match, who self-deceiv'd
> And rash, beforehand had no better weigh'd
> The strength he was to cope with, or his own.
> (4.1–9)

By framing Satan's temptations of the Son with the temptation of Eve in Genesis, the poem hearkens back to Eve's fall in Milton's earlier epic and to his announced intention at the beginning of *Paradise Regained* to surpass his previous achievement. This latter echo is emphasized by the epithet "the tempter" for Satan, whom the Son figuratively "foils" several lines later—uncoiling the *ab urbe condita* ("tempter foiled") construction Milton initially promised as his subject (1.5). "Tempter" is also aurally associated with "attempt," a pun that Milton is fond of and that aligns Satan's tempting of the Son with Milton's attempt to represent Satan (*PL* 1.640, 2.607–10).

Whatever the similarity between Satan and Milton means in *Paradise Lost*, here it has a simple, clear rationale. To the extent Satan does not exist, Milton must lie to invent him, such that Satan's failure to be implies and necessitates Milton's failure to be truthful. The analogy stands out because poetry is especially central to Satan's failure. It is Satan's "persuasive Rhetoric" that is frustrated when he is "discovered in his fraud," another word for which would be "fiction." Ironically, Satan's rhetoric fools only the "self-deceiv'd" Satan. The paradoxical description echoes the contrast God draws between angels and men in *Paradise Lost*, when He says the angels are "Self-tempted, self-deprav'd" but "Man falls deceiv'd," so that human error is correctible (3.130). Here that plays out grammatically: *This far his overmatch, who self-deceiv'd*—we misread the relative pronoun and then correct ourselves. Even the rash reader will only momentarily mistake "overmatch" (the Son) for the antecedent of "who." Only Satan remains under his own spell, having misjudged the outcome of his first encounter with humanity (as the "*Eve*"/"deceiv'd" rhyme hints), and now missing the obvious fact that "the strength he was to cope with" dwarfs, even metrically, "his own." By linking himself to Satan, Milton foregrounds his own, necessary use of an unstable, unreliable rhetoric in imagining a fictional Satan.

What makes *Paradise Regained* ultimately secular, then, is Milton's awareness of its construction, which is partly arbitrary. The striking point about similes, as opposed to Christian types or neo-Platonic symbols, is that the vehicles might always have been different. They require their author to choose, and if Satan is, by the end of the poem, all vehicle and no tenor, the logical implication is that his character is itself no longer the given of religious myth but rather the chosen, constructed product of Milton's choices: Satan as artistic fiction. This point is made clear in the remaining epic similes in *Paradise Regained*, which occur in the second half of book 4. The first, in which Satan likens the Son to a "rock / of Adamant," reprises the third simile from the opening of the book, and the famous final pair, clustered immediately after the poem's crisis, also refer back to the simile at the beginning of the book:

> But Satan smitten with amazement fell
> As when Earth's Son *Antaeus* (to compare
> Small things with greatest) in *Irassa* strove
> With *Jove's Alcides* and oft foil'd still rose,
> Receiving from his mother Earth new strength,
> Fresh from his fall, and fiercer grapple join'd,
> Throttl'd at length in th'Air, expir'd and fell;
> So after many a foil the Tempter proud,
> Renewing fresh assaults, amidst his pride
> Fell whence he stood to see his Victor fall.
> And as that *Theban* Monster that propos'd
> Her riddle, and him, who solv'd it not, devour'd;
> That once found out and solv'd, for grief and spite
> Cast herself headlong from th' *Ismenian* steep,
> So struck with dread and anguish fell the Fiend.
> (4.562–76)

These similes are patterned after the earlier sequence, since both passages stress Satan's repetitive action and failure. The earlier similes implied the embarrassment to Satan of simile itself, comparing him to "a man who had been matchless held"; here, that is made explicit with the parenthetical, "(to compare / Small things with greatest)." And, as in the earlier similes, the dual logic of comparison overlaps with that of contest or struggle: small Satan and the greatest Son are truly "matchless."

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Moreover, they also purport to describe Satan while in fact centering the Son as the hero of the respective cited stories. Indeed, the confusing language simulates the physical wrangling the plot refuses. On first reading, you might think "Earth's Son" would figure the Son; similarly, it comes as a minor shock that the "him" in 559 who "solv'd it not" is thus not the Son; and certainly it is surprising to discover that the "he" of "Fell whence he stood" refers to Satan, not the Son, requiring as it does a major revision of what "stood" means.

But for all that, one major difference separates the two passages. The climactic sequence puzzlingly compares Satan to *two* individual heroes. The effect is quite strange. Although the host of generic vehicles that opened book 4 render the futility of Satan's iterated attempts to corrupt the Son, they also naturalize that temptation as an everlasting force. Satan may be "composed of lies" from very early in *Paradise Regained*, but those lies seem, to repurpose a phrase of Stanley Cavell's, to be "illusions that belong to the nature of human life itself" (qtd. in Putnam 20). By contrast, the pairing of Antaeus and the Sphinx simultaneously attributes to and denies Satan individual personhood, reducing him to a likeness, a family resemblance, a type.

Satan is reduced from a character to something like a Proppian "actant," from having a personal syntagma and identity to being just a paradigm of a particular idea or function—and, as Frank Kermode remarks, "an actant has no being except in relation to a plot" (80–81; see also Propp). The point is driven home by the yoking of "temptation and the Tempter" and "Tempter and temptation" in the praises of the Son (Milton, *PR* 4.595, 4.617). Both phrases rewrite the poem's opening promise to portray the Son's "obedience fully tried / Through all temptation, and the Tempter foil'd" (1.4–5), but at the poem's end, for the first time, person and process are equated. In fact, as the two forms indicate, they are interchangeable. Satan is finally just a pattern of temptation, a simile and not a reality. Evil has not been utterly purged and will not be until the Second Coming. But the personal Satan, with a material foothold in the natural world, has all but disappeared.

But the doubling of similes tells us not only that Satan is really nothing but also that Milton is really something. The technique represents a formalist "baring the device" *avant la lettre*, because it foregrounds the work of making similes and confronts the reader with Milton's choices. Satan is not really like Antaeus or the Sphinx, since he is not really anything at all. Because no single simile can claim mimetic purchase on a nonexistent object, the artist creates likenesses not to represent a character but to summon one up from nowhere. That is, even as Satan is deconstructed, we are made to see how Milton has constructed him. Satan's dissolution implies that Milton is not chronicling the past but inventing it. These similes have long bothered critics, because they introduce a lavish, neoclassical richness into a poem famous for its restrained, bare style.[30] To me, the poem's momentary burst of ornate, showy figuration underscores the tight connection between Satan's nonexistence and Milton's license in creating him.

Milton differs from Augustine, then, not just over doctrinal questions. *Paradise Regained* is a genuinely secularizing story not because of its doctrines but because it takes seriously their consequences for its own status as a literary artifact. In claiming that Satan would cease to exist, Milton was voicing a moderate heresy, albeit one clearly implied by currents in orthodox thought. But by drawing the inference that Satan was thus a fictional character, who could be variously created and reimagined by poets, Milton was doing something far more radical. He was, as Andrew Marvell worried he would, ruining the sacred truths to fable and old song. His secularization story does recapitulate religious material, but in doing so it evacuates that material of its given, transcendently known truth. In *Paradise Regained*, Satan is longer authoritative fact; he is an authorial invention.

Does *Paradise Regained* tell a secularization story about the Son? In these similes, the Son too becomes a typified, constructed likeness. In foregrounding its own figuration, does the poem suggest that the Son is illusory or insubstantial? If so, that would be profound heresy. The poem's formal

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machinery of secularization (its eruptions of literariness) would far exceed its apparent doctrinal commitments.

I conclude by answering this question, because doing so illuminates a distinctive feature of my proposed account of secularization. The problem bothered Milton, for he worked to minimize these similes' involvement of the Son. The ten lines of the two similes refer to the Son's figural analog exactly once. That instance, the epithet "*Jove's Alcides*," draws attention to both the Son's and (supposedly) Hercules's divine-human hybridity and thus to the natural, stable meaning shared by tenor and vehicle. The Son, unlike Satan, is precisely not given to arbitrary signification. The similes do not mention Oedipus, who cannot be described as divine and whose tragic story clashes with the Son's, either by name or pronoun. The poem even plays with this abstention. When we read "as that *Theban* Monster that propos'd / Her riddle, and him," we expect that Oedipus is being introduced (on whose struggle with the sphinx the simile logically ought to focus); "who solv'd it not, devour'd," clarifies the deliberate refusal to name Oedipus. This avoidance induces the considerable poetic awkwardness of the misplaced modifier, "That once found out and solv'd, for grief and spite / Cast herself headlong from th' *Ismenian* steep"—how much simpler it would have been grammatically for Oedipus to do the solving. As best it can, *Paradise Regained* insulates the Son from the leveling effect of comparison.

A given poem can secularize only certain things. The defamiliarizing recognition of a particular object as invested with poetic, literary effort takes place against a background of familiarity. The artistic, as Viktor Shklovsky writes, "is 'artificially' created by an artist in such a way that the perceiver, pausing in his reading, dwells on the text" ("Art" 12). But one cannot pause forever. "Impeded, distorted speech," as Shklovsky defines poetry, is recognizable as such only when it distorts a prosaic norm; a "disruption of rhythm" requires the establishment of a rhythm to be disrupted (13, 14). If Milton's choice to render Satan's literariness explicit and avoid doing so with the Son seems arbitrary, that gets to the arbitrary element in literary construction: you choose something to estrange, you do not estrange the whole. And Milton does so because of his utopian designs on his readers. He hopes that they, or their descendants, will live in a world without Satan, and so he tells a story emphasizing Satan's dispensability.

You cannot, on this account, secularize full-stop—you can only secularize this, as opposed to that. A formalist account of secularity thus has its natural home in pragmatism, because it encourages us to stop asking which social arrangements are contingent, artificial, and subjective and which are necessary, natural, and objective. Neopragmatists like Richard Rorty think this distinction has not proved useful, and they suggest instead that we only call something contingent when we have an alternate, future arrangement in mind. "Instead of appealing from the transitory current appearances to the permanent reality," Rorty writes, "appeal to a still only dimly imagined future practice." Though the poem's formal machinery would allow it to tell a secularizing story about the Son, Milton did not want to imagine such a future. Contingency is cheap: given a good enough reason, you can make anything seem contingent. Doing so does not reveal an ultimate truth; rather, it proposes an alteration. And this, in turn, solves the poem's riddle of a simultaneously illusory and intensely material evil. Given our present-day beliefs and practices, Satan exists, but were we to adopt new, better ways of speaking and acting, the utopian prolepsis of imagining his disappearance would become a self-fulfilling prophecy.

In this essay, I have defended the validity of certain secularization stories by redirecting attention from their truth claims to their literary form. Whether, say, the Hasidic anecdote with which I began is a secularization story depends not only on its attitude toward demons but also on its attitude, so to speak, toward itself: Does it foreground or conceal its own contingent construction? If to answer that question requires more careful, particular attention to Jewish literature than this essay can afford, that merely underscores the methodological point: literary tools and theory are indispensible to arguments about the religious and the secular.

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Yet an emphasis on the literary also eviscerates the philosophical absolutism of secularization stories, for to secularize does not reveal a disillusioned, objective truth. Rather, it recognizes and rearranges an ever-shifting pattern of illusions into a self-consciously artificial, poetic form. In that sense, nothing could be further from my intention than to place the secularizing Milton in a triumphal history of movement toward an ever more clear-eyed modernity. For one thing, his reimagining of the given as contingent is always partial—as all secularizing must be—always dialectically paired with a stabilizing, firmly held truth: every Satan has his Son. But, more important, what it means for the poem to secularize is precisely what would be lost in writing such a Whig history, what is lost when artistic refashioning calcifies into doctrinal content. A history of such secularizations would resemble not an ever-brightening sunrise but rather a series of exploding fireworks, whose importance would lie, not in their contributions to a coherent project, but in the transitory brilliance of their human craftsmanship.

Notes

I would like to thank Keith Budner, Victoria Kahn, Joanna Picciotto, Maya Rosen, Sarah Wolf, and anonymous readers for their comments. I would like to thank Akiva Mattenson for his bibliographic assistance.

1. It is unlikely this story about Rabbi Mendel is authentic. See Levinger.

2. On these traditions, see Trachtenberg 25–61.

3. See Maimonides, *Guide* 518–19; bk. 3, ch. 29, and 585–87; bk. 3, ch. 46. See also Maimonides, *Hilkot ʿAbodah Zarah*, ch. 11, halakhah 16, and *Peruš Ha-Mišnayot*, ch. 4, mishnah 7; Shapiro 105–08; Slifkin.

4. See Strauss, "Some Remarks" and *Leo Strauss*; see also Green 42 and Lorderbaum 35–92.

5. See Faur, who writes, "By denying belief in demons and the realm of the spiritistic," Nachmanides claims that "the Maimonideans were in fact rejecting the grounds of religion. . . . [T]heir teaching represents the rankest of all heresies" (47).

6. Milgrom argues that the biblical source P attempts both to disenchant inherited sacrificial rituals and to cleanse the cult of pagan influences—that is, to banish demons—writing that "[t]he paradigmatic example of the evisceration of the demonic from Israel's cult is . . . Azazel" (44).

7. Examples of theses narratives are found in Taylor; Burkhardt; Thomas; Sommerville.

8. For examples of this work, see Gillespie; Lefort. See also Kahn, *Future* 3–10, to which this essay is obviously indebted.

9. For recent literary studies in political theology, see Hammill; Lupton, *Citizen-Saints*.

10. For overviews of postsecularism and early modern literature, see Lupton, "Religion"; Mohamed 1–19.

11. See also Asad, *Formations*; Josephson.

12. Sometimes they come together. See, e.g., Mahmood.

13. See Rosen-Zvi 127–34 for a critical discussion of anachronistic psychologizing of demons.

14. Others who read *Paradise Regained* as secular make the (controversial) claim that the poem repudiates Milton's earlier millenarianism, thus secularizing his politics (e.g., Guibbory; Fixler; see also Revard, as well as the other essays in Cummins, which maintain that the poem remains decidedly millenarian).

15. Quint makes a parallel argument about Milton's "Nativity Ode" ("Expectation").

16. Both Rogers and Lewalski respond to Fish, "Things" and "Inaction."

17. On Satan's disappearance as an example of secularization, see, e.g., Kołakowski. For a recent revisionist history of the modernization of the devil, see Kotsko.

18. The argument that *Paradise Regained* confronts its readers with its metaphors parallels a theoretical tradition, starting with Hegel, that associates modernity with the self-consciousness of fiction. For influential discussions of this idea, see Lukács; Benjamin. I am skeptical of this tradition's claim that self-conscious fiction is either distinctively modern or antireligious; secularization, rather, is always necessarily partial, locatable in premodern texts, and compatible with religious commitment.

19. There is no neutral, objective definition of the secular, any more than there is one of religion. However, the conclusion is neither that we should abandon our study of the secular (or the religious) nor, as Asad (*Formations* 1–8), Josephson-Storm, and Scott suggest, that we should turn from "treating secularism as a fixed category of analysis" to treating it "as a discursive operation of power" and analyze "the ways in which the term has been variously deployed, and with what effects" (Scott, *Sex* 4). Why should recognizing the construction of our terms prevent us from constructing them? A better approach is that of Jonathan Z. Smith, who argues that *religion* "is a term created by scholars for their intellectual purposes and therefore is theirs to define. . . . There can be no disciplined study of religion without such a horizon" (194; see also Lewis).

20. See particularly Fallon's account of the allegory of Sin and Death (168–94).

21. This idea seems ultimately Pauline. See Boyarin 86–106.

22. Levinson argues that this dynamic theodicy is the Hebrew Bible's.

23. Unless otherwise indicated, all quotations from *Paradise Regained* are from the Merritt Hughes edition.

24. For examples of this link in book 1 of *Paradise Lost*, see 1.71–73, 213, 343, 391, and 456.

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25. For these lines' source in Augustinian theodicy, see Mayor 292. For Milton and Augustinian privation theology generally, see Fallon; Ferry; Stein, *Answerable Style* 157–58.

26. The expression "worth a sponge" is a pun meaning both "worthless" (because sponges are cheap) and "worthy of being expunged."

27. Hughes and MacKellar cite "Homer, *Od.* 5.291.6; Aeschylus, *Agam.* 644–57; Virgil, *A.* 1.82–123; Lucan 5.597–677; Tasso, *Jerusalem* 7.115–17; Spenser, *F.Q.* 1.8.9" (228). Of these sources, the most telling is Spenser, a "modern" who attributes his storm to "almightie Ioue in wrathfull mood."

28. Milton puns on the etymology of *obsequious*, which derives from the Latin *sequi*, "to follow," and the Hebrew עבדיאל (ʿAbdiēl; "servant of God").

29. John Milton, *Paradise Regain'd* 4.12.

30. For discussion of *Paradise Regained*'s style, see Guss 223; Major 700; Martz 223–24; Swaim.

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Abstract: A central, secularizing plot of John Milton's *Paradise Regained* is the dissolution of Satan. As the Son passes from scriptural figure to reality, Satan is gradually reduced from mythological character to metaphor. While both the demythologization of evil and the explanation of religious concepts as metaphor have long histories as central examples of secularization and of the liberalization of religion, theorists from the political-theological right (e.g., Carl Schmitt) and postsecularist left (e.g., Talal Asad) have called attention to the analogies that can be drawn between apparently secular concepts and stories and earlier, religious doctrines and myths, claiming that such analogies call into question the legitimacy and distinctiveness of the secular. Against those critiques, I argue that secularization stories can be distinguished from religious narrative, albeit not for their naturalism, their liberalism, their rationalism, or other doctrinal content. Rather, they force us to face their own constructed, literary qualities.

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