

Antaeus and the Sphinx: *Vanitas and Natura* in *Paradise Regained*

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1. Moral Literature

Benedetto Croce proposed to draw a line between rhetoric and arts so as to deprive poetry of morals.¹ Today most of us take his proposal as legitimate, since we are familiar with the independence of the modern twentieth-century poetry from morality. The case was, however, quite the reverse in the Renaissance. Poets and readers in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries shared the view that poetry should illustrate moral principles that men should follow. In fact, Renaissance humanists such as Piccolomini argued again and again that man could improve his ability to resist temptations and other worldly notions by reading poetry.² Milton follows in their footsteps, strongly conscious of his obligation to set forth the moral basis of our behavior.

In this paper I will show at first how closely morals in the temptation scenes in *Paradise Regained* correspond to those in Dutch still life paintings. After indicating that these similarities in morality come both from economic growth and Calvinist idea of divine favor, I will argue that the poem teaches us commitment to God more thoroughly than the Dutch paintings, in the sense that it demands of us to go further than the mere awareness of *vanitas*, a key moral characterizing the Dutch painting. Recollection of *vanitas* is not considered in the poem sufficient enough to justify man's attitude toward wealth as well as the world, because the poem demands man's not momentary but continual genuine appreciation for what he is given on earth. In the end I will suggest that the repressive moral imperatives in the poem could work as a counterproductive force, once we notice Jesus' erasure and cancellation of Satan's magical acts expose *natura*, a ceaseless flow of energy manifesting itself in enormous variety of patterns.

Jesus' responses to Satan's temptations in *Paradise Regained* represent an ideal

way toward which moral men should strive. The poem teaches us that man should learn what is indispensable for his salvation with the help of light from above, which he has not yet completely lost (IV. 352). It also teaches us that we should behave in accordance with Reason, another name for the light implanted in man by God: we should govern the inner part of us against whatever needs and desires the outward part of us might be obsessed with (II. 477). These religious tenets and moral obligations become branded on our memory when we read the series of fierce but poetical battles between Satan and Jesus. Most of the metaphors and imageries in the poem are so arranged to guide us to those teachings. The similes employed by Milton in describing the fall of Satan in terms of Antaeus and the Sphinx in the last part of the poem vividly represent some aspects of Christian morality.

The moment that Jesus tells Satan that one should not tempt God, Satan falls from the top of the tower. His fall is first compared to that of the strangled Antaeus (IV. 563–68: Fig. 1). One of the symbolic meanings of Antaeus' defeat by Hercules was that a man who fortifies himself with right reason can succeed in overcoming the desires of human beings enthralled by earthly things. This idea is indicated in the inscriptions of Fig. 1, “*deboli, carnis, & mundi typum*” (a type of devil, flesh and the earth) under Antaeus and “*Christianus miles*” (a Christian soldier) just below Hercules: these two Biblical Latin captions refer to the Ephesians 2:2–3 and 6:11–13 respectively. Since Satan in the poem is identified with Antaeus, it seems that Milton considered him to be an incarnation of immoderate attachment to this world.³

Following the fall of Antaeus comes the Sphinx's throwing herself into a gorge (IV. 572–75). The motto in one of the most popular emblems of the Sphinx (Fig. 2) says that ignorance should be removed: *submouendam ignorantiam*. Satan in the poem is so represented in the poem as to be ignorant of the true significance of the birth of the Son of God and the beginning of his new reign to replace Satan's flamboyant dominance over the world.⁴ Actually, he is not sure that the man baptized in Jordan is the Son of God he knew in Heaven until the last moment of the tower scene. Throughout the poem his ignorance makes him obstinately refuse to admit that each of his hypotheses based upon the Son of God is wrong.

An awareness of contemporary visual materials will enrich our responses to the descriptive passages in the poem. Especially when we try to grasp the poem's moral connotations, it is useful to find examples of visual arts which correspond to the metaphors and the imageries within the text. As a sister art of poetry, painting was

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Antaeus doli-
catris & mundi
typus est.

Hercules Chris-
tianus miles
est.

Mufa remunera-
trix uirtutū & for-
titudinis uincēdi.

Fig. 1 Nicolaus Wynman, *The Allegory of Hercule's Battle with Antaeus*, 1537.

Submouendam ignorantiam.

EMBLEMA CLXXXVIII.



QVOD monstrum idē Sphinx est. Cur candida virginū ora,
Et volucrum pennas, crura leonis habet?
Hanc faciem assumpsit rerum ignorantia: tantis
Scilicet est triplex causa & origo mali.
Sunt quos ingenium leue, sunt quos blanda voluptas,
Sunt & quos faciunt corda superba rudes.
At quibus est notum, quid Delphica littera possit,
Præcipitis monstri guttura dira secant.
Namq; vir ipse bipesq; tripesq; & quadrupes idem est,
Primæq; prudentis laurea, uisq; virum.

Fig. 2 Andrea Alciato, *Emblemata*, 1531.

also supposed to teach moral lessons with delight. We find this requisite for painting is most strongly put forward in the Renaissance and the Baroque periods. In the seventeenth century, Dutch still life painting inherited its technique of “disguised symbolism” of morality from the preceding fifteenth and sixteenth-century Netherlandish painting.⁵ In this genre, familiar inanimate objects such as food, stationery and daily commodities are represented in minute details. We cannot regard them solely as records of daily life. The conventionality and the artifice of the painting provoke in the viewer meditative engagement. Dutch still lifes remind the spectator of the allegorical significance embedded in them. The painter alludes to concepts or ideas by subtly introducing a metaphoric dimension which functions as a moral lesson. The surprising similarity in the moral tone between *Paradise Regained* and Dutch painting will emerge when we parallel the temptation scenes in the poem with those daily scenes of the genre-paintings.

2. Iconography of Temptation

The action in the poem begins when Satan hears the divine pronouncement at the baptism of Jesus. Satan decides to carry out his mission of seduction to forestall Christ's regime, though he is not sure of his true identity. While Christ is wandering alone and fasting, Satan appears disguised as an old man in “rural weeds”. Since he knows that Jesus has been fasting for forty days, he seeks to test him by urging him to make bread from the stones. He insists that Christ could easily perform such a miracle if he is the Son of God (the first temptation of hunger: I. 314–500). Jesus, quoting a text from the Scripture (*Deuteronomy* 8:3), refuses to do this and declares that henceforth an inner oracle will enable man to free himself from his blind commitment to Satan's words. After this first temptation failed, the devil returns to the mid air for further deliberation with his legions over what sly artifices to use to discredit Jesus' ability as the Son of God. Belial's proposal to “set women in his way and in his path” is scornfully dismissed by Satan, who perceives that the allurements of sexual desire will be of no avail. He shows off his superior intelligence by proposing more attractive baits like honor, glory and praise. However, when he departs for his second encounter with Jesus, who is now suffering from sharper pangs of hunger, he first implements the stratagem to appeal to his appetite and natural desires by bringing into existence in front of him a banquet

and a group of alluring women (a continuation of the first temptation of hunger: II. 302–403). These two temptations constitute the first part of the tripartite series of temptations.

The use of fowl, fish, and game spread out in lavish abundance is a frequent device in Dutch still life painting of the seventeenth century. Jan Brühgel's painting, *Sense of Taste*, (Fig. 3) is a typical example. The dazzling image of the countless earthly delights simply serves to satisfy the corporeal pleasures. The lustful Satyr is engagingly smiling at the Lady as he pours wine into the bowl. A dish of oysters which were commonly held to be an aphrodisiac is shown close by the bowl. The Lady's thoughts seem to be completely captivated by mundane matters. In other similar genre paintings (Fig. 4 and Fig. 5), various kinds of food like delicious bread, succulent fruits, and sugared confectionery are lavishly laid out on the table. At first sight these numerous delicacies spilling out over the edge of the bowl and the plate strengthen the impression of luxury. At this level, the realistically represented material details of food even arouse new cravings in the viewer. But these paintings are more than meet the eye. On another level, they have a religious dimension. The half-torn pomegranate in Fig. 4 is a symbol of Resurrection while the bunches of grapes stand for the Eucharistic wine. Actually, in Flegel's painting, the sugared fruit have been cut up in the shape of the letter A and O, the symbols of the First and Second Persons in Trinity (*Revelation* 22:13). Thus, a merging of profane and sacred themes occurs within the paintings. They admonish us against losing ourselves in luxuries and remind us of who is the ultimate giver of those bounties. Their admonishment is like Christ's reply in answer to Satan's question about whether he would enjoy the feast set before him: "Thereafter as [=according as] I like /the giver" (II. 321–322). It would depend, he says, on who provided the feast.

In the second part of the tripartite temptations, the temptation of kingdom, the fiend does not appeal to the physical needs of hunger any longer, but takes advantage of that enthusiasm for accomplishing great deeds on earth which he thought was the underlying desire in Christ. Premising his temptation on the notion to undertake great enterprises on earth requires large monetary funds, which he believes that he possesses as the lord of the earth. He entices Jesus by offering gold without any charge except for Jesus' willing consent to his offer (the temptation of wealth: II. 411–486). In reply Jesus disparages the idea of riches without virtue. The sovereignty which wealth can buy is not completely independent true kingship. To achieve



Fig. 3 Jan Bruegel the Elder, *Sense of Taste*, 1618.



Fig. 4 Joris van Son, *Still Life Painting with Fruit*, undated.



Fig. 5 Georg Flegel, *Still Life with Bread and Confectionery*, undated.



Fig. 6 Quentin Massys' *Money-changer and his Wife* (1514).

true sovereignty, self-government of man over himself must first be established.

Since Quentin Massys' *Money-changer and his Wife* (Fig. 6), where the wife's attention to recite liturgical texts was distracted by her husband's weighing of the coins, it became a common idea that wealth can have an overpowering allurement even at the time of daily prayer. In the seventeenth century, which was a time of high economic growth in the northern parts of Europe, the immoderate concern for worldly riches was sharply criticized by the moralists of the age. One of the emblems of Jacob Cats (Fig. 7) shows how alluring money is: *pecuniae obediunt omnia* (*Everything is obedient to money*). The liege subjects in the emblem smile complacently as they expect to receive a large sum of money from Lady *Pecunia* (*Money*), a figure who appears repeatedly in the engravings of time. Cats successfully put an expression of unholy delight on the subjects' wicked faces to generate a great deal of moral discomfort. The picture reminds us that we need ascetic temperance to control our desire to earn more. Without it, we are easily prone to be a slave of money.

In Satan's next temptation, he attempts to arouse in Christ a desire for glory. He tells him that it is high time for him to succeed in obtaining the glory that all the great men aspire to. The devil tries cunningly to persuade Jesus not to miss this golden opportunity (the temptation of glory: III. 25–145). However, Jesus replies that the glories and honors which are bestowed by men are transient whereas those we receive from God are permanent. In the Renaissance period, the counterparts of those distinguished classical heroes whom Satan mentions might possibly include, to name the few, Queen Elizabeth I of England, François I of France, and Charles V of Germany. In Fig. 8, *Fame* holding a cameo of Charles V on one hand and points to a globe with the other, intends to show the vast realm of his empire. The inscription *Nil omne* (*Everything is nothing*) written above the sand-glass, together with various items associated with the king, suggests the eventual overthrow of the achievements he made. Even *Fame*, who commands the whole scene, might vanish in the future.

Since Jesus is not moved by the examples of Greek and Roman rulers, the devil resorts to the Old Testament, claiming that Jesus could be a glorious liberator of Israel which has been suffering from the oppressive reign of the pagan Rome (III. 152–203). Sticking to the God-centered point of view, Christ retorts that he could sense behind his suggestion a scheme to subvert God who has the initiative in liberating people: it is God who appoints the time for action. Satan, perplexed at Jesus'



Fig. 7 Jacob Cats, *The Mirror of the World and the New Age*, 1655.



Fig. 8 Antonia de Pereda, *Allegory of Transience*, c.1640.

steadfastness, conceives that he would not change his mind unless he has had some practical experience. Therefore, he suddenly takes him out of the desert to the pinnacle of a mountain which provides a breathtaking telescoped panorama of various historical scenes within its vista (III. 263–385).

The rise of Calvinism and the Dutch Reformed Church in the seventeenth century encouraged the emergence of secular art forms, one of which is landscape art (Fig. 9).⁶ Landscape was one of the subjects Calvinists were permitted to depict and enjoy. The high demand for landscape painting in seventeenth century Holland was not simply a reaction against the ban of Catholic religious art. Relish for the landscape painting was based upon the idea that God's immanence and benevolence was revealed through nature. Instead of appreciating Divine creation, Satan makes Christ behold a number of magnificent cities from various ages which he causes to appear before him. He makes an effort to instill in Jesus a respect for strategies to win the rule of this world. Even after he is shown many rulers who have left behind them names remembered long in history, Christ replies that all human desire for temporal power is vanity. Jesus invalidates Satan's assumptions by saying that Israel, having brought its troubles on its own head, is not worth ruling, and that the prophesy of his rule would be fulfilled only when God finds the time is ripe for it. He discloses that God's rule to intervene in human history comes first before man's will to change the course of history.

Like the globe in Preda's *Allegory of Transcience* (Fig. 8), the crown and the scepter left behind the banner in Poorter's *Still Life with Weapons and Banners* (Fig. 10) is a clear reference to the potentate's power. The individual piece of armor worn by rulers and privileged noblemen are scattered on the sarcophagus. These parts of a coat of mail together with a skull in the right-hand corner are symbols of an existence doomed to death. For Christ, whose weapons are spiritual, the armor and weapons are "that cumbersome/luggage of war" (III. 400–401).

Satan is now more frustrated by Jesus' unwavering obedience to God's way. At the same time he has become distressed by his failure in his consecutive temptations. In desperation he takes him to the other side of the mountain to show off the Roman Empire, the epitome of the supreme human society for the Renaissance man. He offers to hand over the whole empire to Jesus (IV. 44–108). Against this offer Jesus points out that the grandeur and magnificence of Rome are merely vain ostentations of men who are deceived by Satan. He sees that Satan has self-consciously deceived himself into believing that he has the right to transfer anything



Fig. 9 Hercules Seghers, *Plateau in Rocky Mountains*, c.1630–5.



Fig. 10 Willem de Poorter, *Still Life with Weapons and Banners*, 1636.

to him. He is like the Satan in *Paradise Lost* (IV. 43–44; V. 860–861), who insisted in public that he was self-begot, but deep down inside reluctantly admitted that any right of possession lies in God the creator.

At this point Satan changes his strategy to attract Jesus with social and political allurements. He brings forth an idea of the inner man which Jesus has been paying so much tribute to. He suggests that Jesus should learn philosophy for the cultivation of his intellect and become well versed in classical poetry and music for exercising his mind (the temptation of classical learning: IV. 196–284). However, Jesus sets no value on knowledge abounding with misconceptions against God and lacking in the idea of man facing toward God. The only thing which is important for him is Scripture, the source of all knowledge.

Classical musical instruments such as the lute, recorder, and virginal frequently appear in still life painting, but there they are no longer a symbol of harmony as they were in Giorgione's *Concerto in the Country* (Fig. 11). In *Still Life with Musical Instruments* (Fig. 12), a dim candlelight is cast upon the instruments to create a melancholy mood. The large scorpion on the celestial globe, which directly faces us, is associated with death, because the insect was believed to stand at the gates of Hades.⁷ Music might give relief to a somber soul, but we know it may stop at any moment and that the musicians are destined to pass away. In Jan Davidsz' *Still Life with Sculptures and Books* (Fig. 13) there silently lies a violin with a bow which nobody uses. A wild jumble of half-torn books and documents, which are bent out of shape by the damp, proclaims that death would reduce the achievements of learning to nothing. The futility of learning is also detected in the ink bottle whose quill for writing books has disappeared. Books are piled up in more disarray in *Still Life of Books* (Fig. 14), where we identify the works of Suetonius and Livy. These paintings might well have the inscription of Christ's reply: "Deep versed in books, and shallow in himself/ Crude or intoxicate, collecting toys/ And trifles for choice matters, worth a sponge" (IV. 327–329). In the seventeenth century, the enormous increase in the production of books made it possible for many people to buy books at a low price. We can hear contemporary commentators lamenting from Barnaby Rich and Robert Burton that the superabundant supply of books is the greatest malady of the age.⁸ Books were regarded as useless junk, and in still life painting the book was a symbol of futility. Naturally, Jesus exalts Hebrew above classical literature, since it was inspired with true illumination. Reading many books, of which there is no end, does not guarantee the acquisition of wisdom.



Fig. 11 Giorgione's *Concerto in the Country*.



Fig. 12 Evaristo Baschenis's *Studio, Still Life with Musical Instruments*, undated.



Fig. 13 Jan Davidsz Heem, *Still Life with Sculptures and Books*, 1621.



Fig. 14 Leiden Master, *Still Life of Books*, 1628.

Finally, Satan brings Jesus back from the mountain to leave him in the desert. He brings on a terrible storm and eerie apparitions to inspire Jesus with distrust toward God's protection (the temptation of the storm: IV. 393–483). This is the end of the second part of the temptations. But in no time Satan shows himself again in front of Jesus. He demands that he stand on the top of a temple in order to ascertain whether the name Son of God simply refers to a person born out of God, the creator of all things on the earth, or has a special connotation as was prophesied in Paradise by the Son of God (IV. 499–559).

Almost all the temptation scenes in the poem find their corresponding illustrations in the paintings and engravings of contemporary Dutch still lifes. The allegories of these works of art subtly admonish us for our foolishness: for the indulgence in luxury above our means, for our preoccupation with glory and power on the earth rather than for the devotion to God, and for the futility of the avid accumulation of wealth and knowledge in terms of the soul's salvation. Those degraded aspects of human nature are sharply contrasted with an everlasting faith in God.

3. Prosperity and Moral Depravity

One of the reasons why Milton's poem and these paintings bear such striking similarities both in visual form and moral precepts is the readily recognized influence of rapid economic growth upon religio-ethical ideas. In the historical backdrop of the still lifes of the period lies the material wealth which resulted from prosperous commerce. With the successful independence from the exploitation of Spain, Holland became the commercial center of European economy in the seventeenth century. It was by far the largest financial market swaying the monetary trend in Europe, and the Dutch people were enjoying their riches. Even commoners made a large amount of investments in paintings and the phenomenally fashionable tulips.⁹

The independence from Spain meant Holland's separation from Catholicism. The Calvinist theory of predestination was widely believed in Holland, and it drove people to measure personal salvation in terms of amount of material wealth or possessions. One of the most popular themes of the sermons of Calvinist priests was that the accumulation of wealth through industry would ensure God's salvation. Wealth was considered as a sign for those whom God has eternally chosen for sal-

vation: Abraham and Job were rich, because they were God's chosen people. Unfortunately, the result of this doctrine was that people tended to worship wealth instead of God. Satan in the poem is right as long as he insists that money should not be an end in itself, nor a separate aim of life. Contemporary preachers always warned their audience of the danger of wealth, since it could so easily lead to an indulgent luxurious life. They repeatedly quoted the strongest warnings found in *1 Timothy* 6:10: "The love of money is the root of all evil; it is through this craving that some have wandered away from the faith and pierced their hearts with many pangs." Under Calvinism, temperance against the seductively enticing lure of objects had become an indispensable virtue. Wealth had acquired a double nature as the sign of God's favor and as the temptation to moral depravity.

The Netherlands' commercial success caused resentment in England: Sir Thomas Overbury observed that the Dutch "gives us the law at sea, and eat us out of all trade."¹⁰ Thomas Munn, a well-known economist, issued a call for competition with the Dutch. Some economic historians pointed out that England had suffered depressions for forty years prior to the Civil War.¹¹ But around 1640, the economy in England began to enjoy rapid growth. The national reserves of gold, for example, had risen to a level three times higher than that in the reign of Elizabeth. During Cromwell's government the deregulatory measures for the limitation of enclosures and the enforcement of the Navigation Act encouraged more economic activity.¹² By this time, metalworking had advanced from an artisan basis to large-scale production. The commercialization of agricultural products had been rapidly going on, because the enclosure movement drove the farmers away from small peasant plots and communal lands. Thus the enjoyment of riches was not a privilege monopolized by the Dutch. English people like their continental neighbors began to feel "the embarrassment of riches."

In *Paradise Regained* Satan produces various objects out of nature. All of a sudden, he brings forth luxurious food and charming ladies in the desert. He also conjures up many kingdoms before Jesus' eyes to show off their glory, splendor and force of arms. By using a kind of magical telescope he exhibits the vast wealth of the sophisticated Roman world. Moreover, his continuous display of exemplary incidences and heroes from the classical and Biblical worlds underscores his assertion concerning to what great extent acquiring land and wealth is indispensable for accomplishing Jesus' mission. Those things that are ordinarily so hard to come by, can be obtained quite easily, if only Jesus would consent to kneel down to Satan:

“All these, which in a moment thou behold’st, /The kingdoms of the world, to thee I give” (IV. 162–63). Satan, like a great conjurer, spins objects one after another out of nature seemingly without labor. Satan, like a glib salesman, knows how to handle the orator’s techniques with consummate ease so that he never stops eloquently tempting Jesus with a variety of alternative plans, even though he is repeatedly disturbed by Jesus’ refutations. Satan, like a busy merchant, is restless with going to and from between the earth and the mid air, resourceful in ideas without paying much attention to plagiarism or thievery, and active in putting those ideas into practice and spending all his energies to overwhelm Jesus. As a result, even the third temptation, traditionally interpreted as a trial of presumption to take advantage of God’s power for his own profit, takes place at a luxurious golden temple, “far off appearing like a mount/Of alabaster, top’t with golden spires” (IV. 547–48). When we put this view in mind, Satan turns out to be an evaluator who ascertains the real value of Jesus by extricating Jesus’ talent hidden in himself. Naturally, like a shrewd merchant who watches vigilantly for changes, he even persuades Jesus to trust in the economy of time: “on Occasion’s forelock watchful wait” (III. 173).

The rapid growth of the economy in Holland and England during the seventeenth century enabled people to pursue money as a reliable indicator of divine favor. Wealth is, however, a web of temptation spun by Satan in which only the spiritual hero will not be entrapped. Both still life painting and *Paradise Regained* teach favorable but sinful riches.

4. Satan as a Prompter of *Vanitas*

There is, however, a decisive difference between these two forms of arts, whatever similarity in their representations and their moral contents they might share with each other. A clue to the difference is apparent when we consider from whence the moral message comes in each case. In the case of the Dutch still life, it is the presence of *memento mori* in the composition which represents the clear recollection of *vanitas*, a key word characterizing the transience of earthly pleasures and achievements. Man’s closest attention to *vanitas* works as a counteractive force to restrain unbridled indulgence. On the other hand, in *Paradise Regained*, it is Satan who instigates Jesus to take *vanitas* into consideration. Referring to the kingdoms

of the world, he tells Jesus to let them pass, “as they are transitory” (IV. 209).

Satan, after his consecutive failures with using things of the *vita activa* to tempt Jesus, dismisses them as a form of vanity and symbols of the transitoriness of all things. Satan’s dismissal might possibly be a rhetorical device to make Jesus flattered that he has made right choice. It might also work as a shock absorber to admit that his previous offers are not worth biting. In this way Satan persuades Jesus more convincingly than ever before that his next offer is the right choice. Therefore, we cannot take his dismissal at a face value, but the most prominent moral message in Dutch still life painting is so inserted as to imply that further temptation is waiting even after the observance of that moral. In still life paintings man’s strong instinctive desire for earthly things and his obliviousness for their transitoriness will prove his weakness in his nature. The keen awareness of vanity is enough to justify and support the way of man’s life. But in *Paradise Regained*, readers as well as Jesus, both of whom face Satan’s admonition, are expected to go further than the mere awareness of vanity.

The creation of wealth by means of Satan’s never-stopping speeches and dexterous conjuring skills does not necessarily arouse pleasure in the reader’s mind, nor admiration. Satan’s true character as an opponent to God’s rule and man’s welfare has been unmasked from the beginning of the poem. Our empathy with Satan is checked from the start, though not in the way it is in *Paradise Lost*. In that grand epic, the narrator described enchanting scenes and made the characters present convincing speeches so that the readers began to feel committed to them. Immediately after the readers felt strong sympathy, the epic narrator intervened to give warnings to them and to restrict their sympathy. This sympathy-checking narrative method was used by Milton’s contemporary preachers in their sermons as “good temptations.”¹³ In this brief poem, however, the narrator is supervising the story so forcibly right from the beginning of the poem that no sympathy with Satan and his fallen colleagues is aroused in the reader’s mind.

Moreover, Jesus plays the role of a competent prosecutor to point out what tricks are hidden behind Satan’s plausible speeches. Jesus’ eminence proceeds from a series of identifications of the Biblical texts with their definitive correct explications. The Bible itself is a book of innumerable contradictions, which in one way of reading affords a body of systematic views and in another also provides a range of contradictory views. This characteristic, however logical an argument on any texts from the Scripture might be, may leave room for totally different explanations. But, in

this poem, since the speaker is Jesus, the ultimate authority over the text, the message of the Bible is always solidified with a particular meaning within a determined structure. Jesus in the poem levels off many variegated layers of connotations in the Biblical texts through his own authority. In the whole process of the confrontation with Satan, he never lets the meaning of a passage remain hanging in the air. His authoritative propositions are all in line with the absolute frames of reference that man's value is dependent upon the inner man, not the outer man, and that God appoints the time, and that God's grace constantly circulates through his creatures' gratitude toward this Creator. Jesus thrusts under Satan's nose the immovable fact that the storm and the phantoms are all conjured up by Satan. He opposes against Satan that the qualification of hero lies in accomplishing missions assigned by God with his total submission to God's will. He asserts that the reign of Kingdom referred to in the Scripture means to govern the soul of the people, not to forcibly exercise outward political power over people. In this way, he immediately corrects each twist devised by Satan into the original correct order.

The poem led us to convey to God, not momentary but continual genuine appreciation for what we are given on earth. The emblems of Antaeus and the Sphinx, used as a metaphor to show Satan's defeat, points to man's fatal misunderstanding of the real source of wealth, and man's requirement of a deep appreciation for God's munificence.

5. Satan as an Agent of *Natura*

In this way, the poem seems to successfully set God up as the ultimate creator, guarantor, and evaluator of material wealth. But Satan's temporary defeat does not necessarily justify that idea of God even at the end of the poem. Jesus' self-assertiveness creates a high voltage of morality to erase any laxity and laughter out of the religious poem. Good and evil are clearly separated from each other. Evil is there as if it would provide the ground for the existence of good. There is no room for reconciling these two opposing forces. In this case, there exists no "coupling between heterogeneous systems, from which is derived an internal resonance within the system."¹⁴ A series of collision between essentially different things does not bring forth any breathtaking transformation nor a harmonious balance, but simply emphasize the supremacy of the good over the evil. Jesus' definitive responses and

conclusive solutions, according to which truth and falsehood are always determined beforehand, deprives us of the act of thinking otherwise. Any further questions to those solutions are left out of account in the process of his responses. The one-sided victory of Jesus in the right/positive part over Satan in the wrong/negative side works as a control mechanism of repression to canalize and bind all kinds of the reader's reactions and emotions.

It seems that there would be no way to make an end to the repression. However, the repression is subverted, once we notice the singularities and discontinuities hidden in nature, which Satan revealed in the process of his temptation. At first sight, the fiend seems to exercise his will to intervene in the "natural" world, to disturb the "natural" run of things, to make himself a master and possessor of Nature.¹⁵ Satan, who has seen "beneath/Th' originals of Nature in thir crude/Conception" (*Paradise Lost*, VI. 510–12), seems to merely take advantage of a segment of nature deprived of God's continual supervision. Since God, who is constantly engaged in preserving the cosmic order, has absolute jurisdiction over every aspect of creation, Satan looks like behaving himself *contra naturam* (*against nature*).

But the disturbance and intervention of Satan shows us that there is another way of looking at nature, nature as elusive, inestimable, and immeasurable. Nature's obedient responsiveness and adaptation to Satan's maneuverings represent the ability of an organism to change in various ways. Instead of seeing in nature a harmonious order, Satan confronts nature as a ceaseless flow of energy manifesting itself in enormous variety of patterns.¹⁶ For him, nature is like a diaphanous multiplicity conceiving irregularities and differences within itself.¹⁷ Satan conjuring of "super-natural" products out of nature might be called a technique of *ars mechanica*, but he does not intervene in nature to produce the feast and the telescope *contra naturam*. He is simply using his power *secundam naturam*. The instantaneous disappearance of his products might suggest that they are mirage and illusion, but the narrator himself insisted that they are "no dream" (II. 337).

This alternative aspect of nature liberates us both from the clear-cut dichotomy between the good and the evil and from our obligatory commitment of the good, for it shifts the emphasis from the realm of theological truth, to that of productive nature as outside of the categories of reasonable understanding. Despite Christ's tenacious refutations and the narrator's forcible manipulation of the reader's consciousness, the magical acts of Satan, who takes advantage of nature, so work as to temporarily leave us free from repression. His magic shakes and twists our logical

reasoning so that the gap between the realm of necessity and that of magical phenomena might possibly even cause our innocent laughter. In a magic show, the spectators are willing to be cheated for a while to forget their daily value system, though they are aware that the conjurers make the most of the tricks that we cannot detect. This alternative figure of nature does not simply indicate that Satan's voluminous energy has not yet been canalized by rationalized economic ideas and systems, but that his energy comes from something other than God: *Natura*. Self-productive *Natura* (*natura naturans*), a reservoir of indeterminate power free from the reins of God, subconsciously suspends our discernment of morality through the series of Satan's miraculous creations, so that *Natura* would unpredictably plunge us into the ecstasy devoid of moral consciousness. The untamed dynamic force of *Natura* poses a menace to destabilize the equilibrium between *vanitas* and desire in Dutch painting, and to diminish the central status of God in Milton's poem. Satan as an agent representing this force of *Natura* obsessively recurs to human memory, even though like Antaeus and the Sphinx he was represented to be destroyed by the religious moral hero.

Notes

- ¹ E. H. Gombrich, *Symbolic Images* (Oxford: Phaidon, 1972), 129.
- ² Paul Alpers makes some very suggestive remarks on Sidney's practical and persuasive conceptions of reading in *The Poetry of "The Faerie Queene"* (Princeton: Princeton Univ. Press, 1967), 20–22, 280–84, and 283: "It is worth inquiring whether moral action is a model for what occurs within the reader of a didactic poem.....Even when Sidney seems to speak of poetry as knowledge, virtuous action is his model for knowing." Victoria Kahn, *Rhetoric, Prudence, and Skepticism in the Renaissance* (Ithaca: Cornell Univ. Press, 1985), 194.
- ³ "3. A covetous man is like Antaeus, the more that his affections touch earthly things, the stronger is his covetousness; and then covetous thoughts die. 4. Satan is like *Antaeus*; for the more he is beat down by the Herculean strength of God's Word, the more violent and fierce he groweth: But being squeezed by the Brest-plate of Justice, he loseth his force. 5. Satan deals with good men, as *Hercules* with *Antaeus*; he flings them down by oppression and persecution; but when he perceiveth, that by this means they grow stronger and more resolute, he lifreth them up by pride and prosperity, by which many are overthrown, which grew stronger by adversity." Alexander Ross, *Mystagogus Poeticus or the Muses Interpreter* (London, 1648), 21–22.
- ⁴ "Satan is the true *Sphinx*, who hath the face of a woman to entice and deceive, the claws of a Lion to tear us, and the wings of a bird to show how nimble he is to assault us; he lives upon the spoil of souls, as *sphinx* did upon the bodies; he did for many ages abuse and delude the Gentiles

- by his Priests and Wizards, with riddles and ambiguous oracles: there is no way to overcome him, but by hearkening to the counsel of *Minerva*, as *Oedipus* did; that is, by following the counsel of Christ, who is the wisdom of the Father; by this he shall be destroyed, and we undeceived.” Alexander Ross, *Mystagogus Poeticus*, 393.
- ⁵ Jane Iandola Watkins, ed., *Masters of Seventeenth-Century Dutch Genre Painting* (Philadelphia: Philadelphia Museum of Art, 1984), xxi; Erwin Panofsky, *Early Netherlandish Paintings* (1953; New York: Harper and Row, 1971), I:142–143.
- ⁶ Christopher Brown, *Dutch Landscape: The Early Years* (London: The National Gallery, 1986), 24–25.
- ⁷ Norbert Schneider, *The Art of The Still Life: Still Life Painting in the Early Modern Period*, trans. Hugh Beyer (Köln: Taschen, 1990), 173
- ⁸ *Ibid.*, 188, 192.
- ⁹ Michael North, *Art and Commerce in the Dutch Golden Age*, trans. Catherine Hill (New Haven: Yale Univ. Press, 1997), 107–116; Stanford M. Lyman, *The Seven Deadly Sins: Society and Evil* (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 1978), 250–252; Anna Pavord, *The Tulip* (New York: Bloomsbury Pub Plc, 2001), 129–161.
- ¹⁰ Watkins, ed., *Masters of Seventeenth-Century Dutch Genre Painting*, Ixix.
- ¹¹ B. E. Supple, *Commercial Crisis and Change in England 1600-1642: A Study in the Instability of a Mercantile Economy* (Cambridge: Harvard Univ. Press, 1959), 120–125; E. E. Rich and C. H. Wilson, eds., *The Cambridge Economic History of Europe Vol.4: The Economy of Expanding Europe in the Sixteenth and Seventeenth Centuries* (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1967), 516–20.
- ¹² Christopher Hill, *The Century of Revolution 1603–1714* (New York: W. W. Norton, 1961), 124–131, 133–136.
- ¹³ Stanley E. Fish, *Surprised by Sin: The Reader in Paradise Lost* (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 1967), 38–56.
- ¹⁴ Gilles Deleuze, *Difference and Repetition*, trans. Paul Patton (New York: Columbia University Press, 1994), 117.
- ¹⁵ About Bacon’s familiar distinction between *natura libera* and *natura vexata*, see Don Garrett, ed., *The Cambridge Companion to Spinoza* (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1996), 180.
- ¹⁶ We cannot prove whether he is a vitalist believing matter has a capacity for self-motion, power, and perhaps reason, but his way of dealing with nature would be in good chemistry with vitalism. Cf. John Rogers, *The Matter of Revolution: Science, Poetry, and Politics in the Age of Milton* (Ithaca: Cornell Univ. Press, 1996), 9.
- ¹⁷ Raphael tells Adam, “Earth hath this variety from Heav’n/ Of pleasure situate in Hill and Dale” (6: 640–641) Cf. Stephen M. Fallon, *Milton among the Philosophers: Poetry and Materialism in Seventeenth-century England* (Ithaca: Cornell Univ. Press, 1992), 81.