

Articulating the Fall: Satan's Instrumental Rhetoric in *Paradise Lost*

by

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For Janice Kennedy

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Abstract

Milton's *Paradise Lost* establishes itself as a song from its first invocation of the muse. Approaching the poem as a musical composition, this paper examines the acoustic properties of Satan's rhetoric. Specifically, this paper examines Satan's use of the rhetorical device known as antimetabole, which repeats words in an inverted pattern to create a new meaning. Satan's contagious rhetoric transforms the setting into which he speaks. This acoustical reading argues that the physical properties of Satan's articulations, when embodied, constitute a metatextual moral test for an oral reader by threatening to infect the space around the physical text. Considering the plague of 1666, understanding rhetoric through its physicality literalizes its "contagious" elements. This paper fuses early modern interpretations of disease with a contemporary, secular reading of *Paradise Lost* to suggest that the poem's moral test remains vital in our current age, one also marked with crises of communicability and communication.

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Chapter 1: Introduction

Milton's blindness necessitated an oral writing process by the time he composed *Paradise Lost*. Hence, the epic establishes itself as a song from its first invocation of the muse in Book I (1.13). Approaching the poem as a musical composition, this paper examines the acoustic properties of *Paradise Lost*, paying attention to how the poem imitates and manifests the Fall through the body. In locating the conflict of the epic within the reader, this paper continues the basic assumption articulated by Stanley Fish that "the poem's centre of reference is its reader who is also its subject" (1), but with a greater focus on the physical actions of the body initiated by reading the poem. Specifically, I focus on the sounds that the body makes while reciting this composition. Beverly Sherry writes, "Very few scholars have explored the sound of the poem in relation to meaning" (226). My work considers the ways Satan's rhetoric acoustically maps spaces within and beyond the poem's diegesis. This type of reading argues implicitly for the poem's oral recitation; as I go on to show, the ways in which Satan's rhetoric reverberates through the reader's air transforms their atmosphere's physical quality in keeping with early modern medical concerns about airborne contagion. Brought to life through recitation, the poem's acoustics also draw attention to the moral precarity involved in reading this story.

Stressing the contagion of Satanic rhetoric, Milton implements metaphors of plague at a time of widespread illness. The spread of Satanic ideology through the air is akin to the spread of disease in accordance with early modern medical discourse. In demonstrating how Satan's rhetoric corrupts even the air around him, the argument that follows considers how Satan charts spaces such as Hell and Eden aurally, using the acoustics of those spaces to corrupt how his listeners characterize the settings. To complement this reading, I also offer a formal analysis of Satan's rhetoric, paying particular attention to the inverted form of the rhetorical figure known as

antimetabole, which lends itself particularly well to Satan's mapping process because its repetitive form creates an echoing effect when orated, while at the same time inverting the character of the settings to which it refers. This rhetorical device is characterized by an inverted repetition of the same words in a similar grammatical form. Satan's assertion that "The mind is its own place, and in itself/ Can make a Heav'n of Hell, a Hell of Heav'n" (1.254-55) serves as a critical example of mapping through antimetabole. Reading *Paradise Lost* aloud, I argue, thus restructures the reader's orientation in their fixed temporal and corporeal space by depicting through sound, and enacting through breath, the ways in which Satan's rhetoric reconfigures the atmosphere in which the poem is read.

The need to reconcile the poem's acoustical form with its content derives from the historical fact that Milton published *Paradise Lost* in a culture that was intensely preoccupied with rhetoric and with the communicative and communicable implications of the air. The first section of my argument thus establishes how the early modern person conceived of their own body's relationship to the air. Rebecca Totaro and Margaret Healy provide historical context to the prevalence of communicable disease that marked Milton's time, as well as the implications that the plague of 1666 had on the moral understanding of the air and the "pestiferous vapors" that could corrupt the body (Totaro 169). Early modern understandings of contagion derive primarily from miasma theory, which, in its most basic form, understands disease as bad air that infects the body. This corporeal danger manifests in the poem itself. When Satan enters Eden, "involv'd in rising mist" (9.75), his body recalls the "poisoned clouds and mists" Healy ascribes to early modern miasma theory (2). In the context of the early modern period's strong oral tradition, I also argue that the act of reading aloud carried with it enormous political significance because the idea of "contagion" at this point already had a strong metaphorical tradition, wherein

the spread of sinful ideas was often equated with the spread of illness. Satan's rhetoric, however, constitutes a contagion beyond its metaphorical connotation; when he transforms his body to mist, the state of matter that he becomes recalls the clouds of toxic vapour that early modern medical scientists saw as carriers of disease. The common theological explanations for plague in seventeenth century England underscore the importance of the image of Satan as mist. Though his body itself is dangerous and deceitful, the acoustics of his statements carry with them similar hazards.

The historical background of *Paradise Lost*, and the poem's treatment of diseased air, means that an analysis of the poem's sound in relation to its meaning must consider the physicality of sound. The word "acoustical" refers with equal importance to the physical vibrations in the air that constitute a sound and to how the mind eventually perceives that sound. The need for an acoustic analysis derives from the early modern conflation of social and literal contagion, and how orating the poem combines the two; the term "acoustic" grants equal significance to the physical attributes of a sound as it inhabits the air as it does its sensory perception, which allows this paper to reach its conclusion about the spoken word as communicative and contagious. To establish the relationship between sound and Milton's early modern reader, I rely on sound studies of Milton from scholars such as Sherry, Rebecca Rush, Katherine Cox, Matthew Steggle, and Richard Bradford. The second section of my argument outlines the instrumentality of Satan's contagious rhetoric, examining the numerous musical references that permeate Milton's Hell. From there, I conduct an acoustical analysis of Hell, arguing that Satan uses Hell's echoes to assert his own rhetorical dominance over the space. Antimetabole connects rhetoric with sound in the context of mapping; it is alliterative by its very nature, and therefore constitutes a textual form of echoing. The speaker's verbal repetition, as

well as Satan's deployment of the echoing form of antimetabole, establishes echoing as Satan's primary strategy for acoustical dominance: echoing shapes the spaces he inhabits by reverberating his descriptions of those spaces to and through them. When Eve mimics Satan's rhetorical forms in Book IX, for example, she echoes his speech patterns to describe the space she inhabits. In these ways, Milton's own composition uses the phenomenon of reverberation to showcase how Satan reconstitutes space for his listeners. Articulating Satanic rhetoric within the poem reflects and enacts an infection of the speaker's setting, with the spoken breath of Satanic rhetoric reconstituting a given space both literally and linguistically.

Finally, I conclude by focusing on the instrument subject to this composition: the human body, with specific attention given to the tongue. The image of the tongue returns continually as Milton writes the Fall, the tongue being the primary instrument of articulation in the body. The alliteration in Satan's antimetabole draws attention to the corporeal body of the epic's performer; the alliterated [s]¹ that the snake makes must be realized by an oral reader. Sounding this composition embodies Satanic thinking. When an oral reader speaks instances of Satanic antimetabole, their tongue inverts the very air within their bodies in the process of articulating the text, and so it reshapes the atmosphere in which they read the poem. Thus my argument is threefold: I first outline the stakes of air in the early modern period; following this, I determine how the acoustics in, and of, the poem, travel through space to determine how that space is subjectively perceived; finally, I outline how the literal breath of the poem articulated aloud literally shapes the air around the reader's body, risking a literal and metaphorical infection of

For the sake of phonetic precision, all speech sounds noted in square brackets, and their corresponding descriptions of articulation, derive from the 2023 edition of Cambridge University's online International Phonetics Alphabet (IPA) chart, which notes which portions of the mouth create each speech sound and how. For the purposes of this essay, though, no speech sound indicated throughout deviates in its IPA notation from its standard written English use.

the ways in which the reader conceives of their relationship to space. Ultimately, this paper argues that the acoustic demands of Satan's antimetabole carry a metatextual Fall into the oral reader's atmosphere within the temporal moment of their articulation, during which the act of reciting Satan's speech infects the subjective relationship of the reader to their fixed environment by reminding them of their own inherent fallenness.

Chapter 2: The Stakes of Atmosphere in Early Modern England

Analyzing Milton's form in acoustic terms can only be done with the guidance of the early modern understanding of the corporeal, fallen body and its fragile relationship with the air. Though this paper commits to a rather contemporary, secular reading of Milton's poem, understanding the social conditions of Milton's time, and how early modern readers might have read this poem, frames my own contemporary reading of the poem in relation to disease and atmosphere. Though fallenness will surely mean something different to the modern, secular reader, and though our own conceptions of disease have adapted since the seventeenth century, the underlying feeling of culpability for that we do feel, or perhaps ought to, for the precarity of our own communication culture and its relationship to disease, rings eerily relevant. In any case, understanding contagion in early modern terms allows for the slippery quality of Milton's illness metaphors to inform my own reading of the text. I contextualize the early modern body within its own atmosphere, seeking a historical framing for the two forms of "inspiration" in *Paradise Lost*: the divine, creative impulse that flows through his speaker, and the reality of human breath.

Thinking about the body in the early modern period meant thinking about moral and mortal precarity. Exhaling Milton's epic implicates one's body in the story of the Fall, with the reader breathing Satan's words alongside God's. Through exhalation, the early modern reader changes an atmosphere that they already understand to be dangerous, drawing attention to the precarity of the body and its health. Here, one dimension to Milton's topicality is revealed: *Paradise Lost* explores the health of the human body in keeping with the quality of its atmosphere, exploring the fraught relationship between communicability and communication. As Ernest B. Gilman writes, "Literary histories of the English seventeenth century seldom note that nearly every author in the period from Shakespeare to Milton lived through (or died from) a

major outbreak of the plague” (17). With plague at the forefront of the early modern cultural imagination, Milton explores the atmospheric precarities involved in Christian Fallenness, paying particular attention to how the physical and metaphorical quality of a person’s speech impacts broader communal health.

The cultural relevance of disease at the time *Paradise Lost* was published cannot be overstated. Appearing one year after the great plague of 1666, Milton’s poem depicted the Fall in an era where concerns about the end of the world were ubiquitous. Nicolas von Maltzahn writes that the epic “came at a time of economic, military, and public health crises; it echoed an apocalyptic feeling in the nation” (481). The apocalyptic conditions of Milton’s time, and the associations between illness and air that define early modern miasma theory, determine the stakes of *Paradise Lost*. The punitive connotation of the term “apocalyptic” clearly pertains to the spread of disease. The death toll that the plague claimed during and beyond Milton’s lifetime prompted early modern medical theorists to seek an explanation for contagion. Under early modern miasma theory, plague was understood as the spread of earthly “bad air,” which was often causally explained as a punishment from God on a morally bankrupt society. Totaro writes, “When plague visited England, from its first visitation to its last, people generally agreed that although God was its primary cause, the secondary cause was most often the air. The air could carry upon it pestiferous vapors harmful to the very life force of the body” (169). In early modern England, people understood plague to be a product of clouds in the atmosphere poisonous to the human body. The “apocalyptic” feeling that von Malzahn ascribes to the early modern period derived from a fear of the air itself. The very act of inhabiting England’s atmosphere was a threat to one’s own safety. Further, the belief that plague spread through clouds in the air followed the “primary cause” for disease that Healy outlines: acts of God.

To avoid making false connections between germ theory and miasma theory, it is important to distinguish between miasma theory and contemporary understandings of contagion. While understandings of infection in the early modern period seem to associate crowded gatherings with plague transmission, the proposed origins of “pestiferous clouds and mists” diverge from the germ-based transmission we now attribute to airborne viruses. As Gilman notes, “We know that an epidemic, or the fear of one, would close the theatres on the presumption that their densely packed audiences would turn the public playhouses into cesspits of contagion” (36). Physicians in Milton’s time grasped that dense groupings of people in one space would lead to the spread of disease. Gilman continues, writing, “Almost all physicians, seconded by civic authorities concerned to justify the necessity of quarantine, also insisted that the pestilence was undoubtedly ‘infectious’ or ‘contagious’” (138). However, the early modern consensus on the cause of transmission differs fundamentally from ours. Plague was thought to be “communicable (as indeed the plague is, in its pneumatic form), but not in our modern sense. ‘Infection’ was somehow (or, rather, *something*) spread through a miasmatic corruption of the air or water” (Gilman 138). When I argue for human breath contributing to a foul and diseased atmosphere, I am not invoking communicability as a product of direct body-to-body transmission, or as an airborne virus passing droplets through contagious subjects. Rather, I am arguing that the lack of distinction between literal and metaphorical “infection” allows an acoustical analysis of *Paradise Lost* to consider how the spoken breath of the text contributes to the broader “atmosphere” of its speaker’s community. The divine explanation for such contagion renders its transmission process as much a religious narrative as a medical phenomenon.

That Milton fixates on plague imagery reflects the early modern anxiety that plague was a large-scale punishment from God for widespread moral corruption. *Areopagitica* frames moral

standing as a product of intellectual fortitude, asking “Why should we then affect a rigor contrary to the manner of God and of nature” (733). Disease is where Milton’s beliefs about religious devotion and the vitality of rhetorical strength merge: if illness spreads through the air as a punishment on society from God, then God meets the “spread” of sinful ideas with rampant plague. Miasma allows us to invoke the long-standing metaphor of communicability and communication, with the former existing as a punishment, and simultaneously, a poisonous manifestation, of the latter. Healy writes that “both Lucretius and Milton expounded on their times’ medical orthodoxy of epidemic disease discharging itself onto humanity from poisoned clouds and mists (the theory of miasma); and both appropriated ‘truth and reason’ for their cause [...] to criticise the shape and ideological fabric of their societies” (2). The moral fabric of the larger social body, whose standing is determined by its ability to reason, determines its susceptibility to plague, which is itself a manifestation of broad moral corruption.

When Milton links ideology and illness, what he critiques is not any individual’s ability to reason, but instead broader cultural communication practices. For this reason, there is a collectivist philosophy that underscores his metaphor of communication as contagion. What is often missing in this metaphorical framework, though, is an explanation of how an individual’s moral health saves them from literal disease. Totaro and Healy understand early modern miasma theory’s religious connotation to be less discerning, punishing social unhealth in one fell swoop regardless of any individual’s moral standing. Only the social body is considered in early modern discussions of those indiscriminate clouds of mist that carry punitive disease through the corrupt society. There is a metaphorical unhealth in the nation, for which a literal plague follows. Communicability and communication can be understood in the context of early modern miasma

theory both as a threat to the body and mind, with the social body and mind considered as (not entirely divisible) units in themselves.

The early modern understanding of the social body as a singular receiver of punishment reflects the period's understanding of the Earth as one body whose health status reflects that of society. The spread of the plague had a clear moral dimension to it linked inseparably with (usually gendered) personifications of the Earth as a body. In keeping with the intensely gendered story of Genesis, and its many proceeding interpretations, this is no surprise. As Lucinda Cole notes, "Plague is the expression of a gendered earth cursed with and by human sin" (26). Realizing the Earth as both expressive and "gendered" imagines it as a human body. As an "expression" of a personified Earth, miasmatic plague was both a physiological and rhetorical event. If we are to associate the gendered, polluted Earth with Eve as the female-gendered culprit behind the Fall, then we might find a predictable explanation of disease and the Fall that lies in the flatly misogynistic narrative that the mother of humankind had plagued the Earth. But there is a creativity implied in Cole's use of the term "expression" that frames plague as uncannily literary, while at the same time inescapably bodily, in origin. The plague as an expression, if artistic, would be a response to the polluted rhetorical atmosphere in the community it infects, thereby implicating the broader community that allowed that atmosphere to fester. A community of two, Adam and Eve are a unit with equal responsibility for the rhetorical culture they foster. For this reason, each individual within a social body is equally responsible for the sickly expressions of illness in the Earth's body, since those expressions reflect the total moral standing of society's—presumably England's—rhetorical culture.

Referring to the emission of poison clouds, the term "expression" harkens more easily to basic bodily functions than it does literary sophistication. The gendered Earth, then, exists as an

expression of God's will through a toxic body. Framing disease as a response from God through the Earth's body renders the social body both culpable and helpless. Humans have the agency to understand how disease works in medical terms, while the ambiguity of why the plague analogizes Man's Sin remains. This ambiguity grants enormous literary potency to the plague. As Cole notes, "learned and popular writers alike during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries recognized that plague was spread through contact, including contact between humans and animals, but cast about for etiological explanations" (25). The spread of "bad air" existed and occurred between human beings, but the explanation for such a phenomenon was more broadly attributed to a personified Earth as a Godly punishment. However, imagining plague as an expression implicates the reader of a text in the spread of communication that constitutes rhetorical plague, and therefore frames harmful rhetoric as a disease that spreads through society. Plague is a response to a contaminated discursive "atmosphere." Orating Eve's speech in *Paradise Lost* perhaps also curses it "with and by human sin" (Cole 26), which frames the responsibility of the Fall in more collective terms than straightforward gendered scapegoating might allow. Orating the text places the stakes of expression within the social atmosphere; the moral health of the entire collective determines the outcomes of expression.

This conflation of communication with the spread of disease, though, does not imply that Milton viewed all rhetoric as a form of contagion. While it may seem at odds to argue for *Areopagitica*, for example, to argue for freedom of expression if expression is a contagion, Milton demonstrates that the spread of good ideas is immune from this disease metaphor. Milton frames books as living entities, arguing that "books are not absolutely dead things, but do contain a potency of life in them to be as active as that soul was whose progeny they are" (720). For Milton, books contain life in themselves that transcends those of their authors' bodies. Though

he does not ascribe the origin of that life solely to the reader, whose reading animates the book, the word “potency” implicitly argues for just that. Books are “potent” for life rather than independently alive because they require a human reader to render their meaning.

Communication becomes their lifeforce because the spread of a book, even to a singular, silent reader, is what makes it a living thing. Stephen Dobranski notes that in the seventeenth century, “while the notion of an autonomous author was emerging, an equally empowering concept of active readers was also taking shape” (5-6). An active reader had a great responsibility in interpreting a text to avoid bestowing a bad message upon a good book, and to risk spreading that message as one might spread a contagious disease. The concept of an active reader, and its implications on reader responsibility, frames social health as an activity, and reading and deciphering rhetoric as a deciding factor of a society’s health status. Reading Satan’s sections in *Paradise Lost* is not in itself a process of disease-spreading; the rigorous process of standing up to it tests the strength of the reader and listener. Milton’s statement from *Areopagitica*, “I cannot praise a fugitive and cloistered virtue,” (728) reflects in his prose his attitude to how literature can test its reader.

A good reader resists the infection that a bad book risks spreading. Of the potential harm that may come from reading, Milton implements the metaphor of contagion in *Areopagitica*, writing, “of the harm that may result hence... First is feared the infection that may spread” (729). Milton continues: “Nor boots it to say for these and all the heathen writers of greatest infection [...] who are both most able and most diligent to instil the poison they suck” (729). While the word “infection” surely carries a connotation of disease, describing the “spread” of bad literature begs the question of why the spread of good literature avoids Milton’s contagion metaphor. Milton points to unfamiliarity as one example of how bad literature is contagious, pointing to the

“contagion that foreign books can infuse...” (730). A “foreign” book might spread through society like a disease because readers who encounter it cannot recognize its intent, and therefore might miss its harmful elements. But unfamiliarity alone does not weaken one entirely to the ills of bad literature. Milton points to mental fortitude as the antidote to bad writing, arguing that “that infection which is from books of controversy in religion, is more doubtful and dangerous to the learned man than to the ignorant” (730). Perhaps the individual pursuit of education can save one from communicable rhetoric, if not literal communicable disease. In either case, what differentiates healthy and unhealthy readers is, in accordance with Dobranski’s identification of the active early modern reader, activity versus passivity. What Milton urges in his repetition of contagion as a metaphor for the spread of bad ideas, but not for the spread of good ideas, is the mental agility of the active readers who internalize those ideas. While considering the communal dimension to imagining miasmatic plague as a religious punishment, what Milton urges is a culture of active readership.

It is not just in Milton’s prose that he frames rhetoric as potentially contagious. The speaker in *Paradise Lost* implements the metaphor of communication as communicability as they recount the Fall. Raphael tells Adam that with Satan’s “perfidious fraud, contagion spread” (5.880). In Book X, Sin tells Death:

“The Sithe of Time mowes down, devour unspar’d,
Till I in Man residing through the Race,
His thoughts, his looks, words, actions all infect,
And season him thy last and sweetest prey.” (10.606-09)

Besides the term “actions,” there is a solely metaphorical meaning to the word “infect” that can be carried by the terms “looks” and “words.” Discussing the infection of sin throughout the human population through bad communication, Sin and Death personified echo von Maltzahn’s articulation of the apocalyptic feeling of the plague. During the war in Book VI, The Son sends down ten thousand thunders to defeat the demons, “such as in their Soules infix’d/ Plagues” (6.837-38). In this instance, plague is both a punishment and a metaphor for the ill morality of the rebel angels. After the Fall, Adam looks to Eve, “whose Eye darted contagious Fire” (9.1036). Milton’s speaker directly associates fallenness with infection, with Eve’s look echoing Sin’s articulation of contagious looking in Book I. Eventually, the snakes in Hell hiss at Satan upon his return, with the speaker stating, “the dire hiss renew’d, and the dire form/ Catcht by Contagion, like in punishment/ As in thir crime” (10.543-45). Sinful communication occurs within and between corporeal bodies, transferring toxic air from within the body to the air surrounding it. What results from this process is a tainted atmosphere, harmful to the social body unable to resist its ills.

Paradise Lost makes numerous references to Satan’s body becoming, or spreading, bad air, which renders his atmosphere sickly. Satan pollutes Eden, entering the space “Involv’d in rising mist” (9.75). To this end, Healy writes, “Satan has become a bane to the air of Paradise” (180). After entering Eden in that state of matter, Satan infects Adam and Eve’s faculties of reason. Satan’s amorphous state hints towards one dimension of his rhetoric’s instrumentality: the human breath that powers a wind instrument also propels meaning through the air. Katherine Cox’s musical analysis of Milton’s Hell is especially illuminating: “The demons,” she writes, “are surrounded by metal instruments as a consequence of their moving like a front of vaporous air through hell’s atmosphere” (239). Cox associates the demon’s bodies to the physical form of

the notes that emerge from these metal instruments, and thus associates music, in its physical and perceived qualities, with the possibility for deception. Demonic bodies being “vaporous” allows them to travel and to communicate simultaneously. If they are indeed infectious, this musical analysis obfuscates the distinction between communication and communicability even further. Satan’s often vaporous body allows him to frame spaces similar to the way musical air does: he fills the space in keeping with its physical dimensions yet alters his listener’s associations with the space.

Reading Milton’s poem aloud allows it to function the way Satan’s “musical” body does, associating the spread of bad, vaporous air with the spread of Satanic communication. The acoustic properties of the poem render it contagious because Milton’s alliterative form draws attention to the oral reader’s contributions to their atmosphere. Satan’s infamous declaration, “The mind is its own place, and in itself/ can make a Heav’n of Hell, a Hell of Heav’n” (1.254-55), alliterates the [h] sound twice across its two lines because of its use of antimetabole, which draws attention to how the body exhales the poem into its atmosphere. Because it contributes a foul message into the air that it speaks about and into, the sentiment being expressed becomes contagious. When recited aloud, this passage “breathes” this concept into the air, which briefly corrupts the space that *Paradise Lost* is being performed in. The sound of the poem carries meaning outside of its semantic definition, as much as the meaning behind those two aspects of speech can ever be separated, because the concerns about poisonous air the poem explores extend outside of the diegesis to the space that the reader occupies. Because concerns about the body in Milton’s time derived primarily from the fear of the air itself as morally corrupt, this passage plays into the political conditions of early modern England on a visceral, extra-diegetic

level when read aloud. The reader risks poisoning the atmosphere of their own community because of the quality of the vocal air that they are emitting as they read.

Returning to the early modern body, though, it is critical to recognize the temporal and spatial distance that my reading of the poem has from the epic's conception. The way that I recite this poem likely bears little resemblance to how a person in early modern England would. I do not speak with an early modern English accent, which constitutes a critical point of diversion between the acoustic outcomes of my own oral reading and Milton's. It is a longstanding phenomenon in British English, for example, to drop the [h] at word-initial occurrences of the sound, which would disrupt any historical basis for characterizing the H's as exhalations. Though John Wells calls the H-dropping phenomenon "the most powerful pronunciation shibboleth in England" (254), he concludes that the phenomenon was not likely commonplace in England until the seventeenth and eighteenth century (252). Though the contentious practice might bring a classed dimension to relatively contemporary recitations of the poem in England,² it was not likely ubiquitous when Milton was writing. In a more contemporary study of the history of the "H-drop," Heinrich Ramisch argues that "H-dropping only became widely used in British English after the establishment of English on the American continent in the 17th and 18th centuries" (177). All of this is to say that a contemporary, Canadian analysis of the acoustics of *Paradise Lost* must consider the temporal and spatial distance from the source material's inception and consider the early modern body's articulation processes to make a well-rounded case for how sound contributes to the poem's meaning. In the case of the consonants that I

² Wells and Ramisch point to the contention behind the H-drop as heavily classed, with the linguistic tendency often regarded as lower-class by more conservative speakers. Henry Cecil Wylde's 1935 *History of Modern Colloquial English*, while reaching the same historical conclusion that the practice emerged after England's colonization of North America, calls it a "present-day vulgarism" and asserts that though it "apparently did exist in Machyn's day in London, must have been confined to a limited class" (296).

attribute to the text's overall acoustic meaning, I have considered these forms of distance, not to diminish them, but to allow the articulative consistencies that the composition permits between myself and its first readers to bridge those distances.

In accordance with early modern English pronunciation, how disease raises the stakes of this poem must derive from an early modern perspective on contagion. The H's that "breathe" out the text of *Paradise Lost* are perhaps not a source for direct transmission of illness, but instead an alteration to broader social health as a result of what they contribute to their atmosphere. Hence, the scope of the term "atmosphere" is deliberately wide, as I attempt to reconcile the idea of air "quality" in both its medical and moral definitions. This lack of distinction, though, defines early modern perspectives on disease; the idea of plague as Earthly and airborne, as well as expressive and punitive, renders it simultaneously scientific and religious. The looser definition of contagion that miasma encompasses allows this conflation between the spread of information and the spread of disease, particularly as a result of the Fallen readers' (in)ability to "stand"³ in the face of potentially sinful rhetoric.

The sound of the poem, namely the Satanic [h], invites an acoustic analysis of Satan's contagious rhetoric because the physical presence of bodily sound makes this composition an instruction to literally reshape a reader's atmosphere, just as Satan's vaporous body would. The nature of the demons' bodies as vaporous leads into the idea of music and instrumentality, as Cox outlines in her own musical analysis. Cox writes, "The acoustical diction Milton uses to describe the constriction or penning in of the angels' vaporous bodies analogizes them to the air within musical instruments and represents their groans as the notes emitted by flutes or a pipe

³ The ability to "stand" refers here to the active connotation that Milton bestows upon the term in Sonnet XIX, which concludes, "They also serve who only stand and wait" (168).

organ” (248). The term “bodies” then becomes broader, with the acoustic entities that emerge from solid bodies becoming themselves bodies of sound: physical, living manifestations of the rhetorical practices of the speaker. An oral reading brings into sharp focus Milton’s assertion from *Areopagitica* that books are indeed living things. Satan’s rhetoric might be viewed as “instrumental” in both its deceitful intent and its acoustic status, with the two definitions merged by how his rhetoric contaminates the “quality” of the air. In Book VI, Milton’s speaker says,

“Some one intent on mischief, or inspir’d
With dev’lish machination might devise
Like instrument to plague the Sons of men
For sin, on warr and mutual slaughter bent.” (6.503-06)

Considering the exhalation that inevitably follows this “inspiration,” I argue for the human body as the instrument capable of spreading infection.

Chapter 3: Satan's Instrumental Rhetoric

This section explores how Satan maps interior and exterior spaces through echoing. For the fallen mind, the process of mapping a space is largely rhetorical. Satan uses rhetoric to shape not only the perceived physical qualities of spaces, but the perceived character of those spaces. This process obfuscates the difference between interior and exterior space in the poem; Satan initially corrupts Eve by whispering into her ear, which changes her perception of Eden by reconstructing a version of the space in her dreaming mind. His rhetorical devices map settings based on their shape, but also through how his voice reverberates within that shape. The inverted rhetorical form of antimetabole echoes Satan's ideological inversions of those two spaces; those alliterated, breathy H's in "Heav'n of Hell, a Hell of Heav'n" (l. 255) form a textual echo within the line. The textual echo here recalls the actual, acoustic echoing that takes place in the expansive cavern of Hell. The alliterative echoing that occurs through antimetabole creates a sonic repetition that articulates the nature of Hell through its geography. The echoes that characterize Hell then reverberate outside of it, with Eve eventually mimicking Satan's rhetorical forms in her consideration of eating the apple. Before the Fall occurs though, Milton establishes the principle that Satan maps spaces for the fallen subject through the acoustics of his inverted rhetorical forms. Satan's literal and rhetorical reverberations echo the idea that "The mind is its own place" (l. 254) because they muddle the distinction between interior and exterior space. Sounding this poem aloud constitutes a dangerous embodiment of its conflict regarding the body and its setting by acoustically realizing it in the corporeal world.

Reading sound in *Paradise Lost* is not as straightforward as other English poems in the seventeenth century because of Milton's famous rejection of the rhyme in his blank-verse epic. Sounds studies of early modern poetry, and particularly Milton's poetry, tend to focus on the

political implications of rhyme as a form of musicality, and of the role of poetry in stoking the passions or resting them. Rebecca Rush notes the controversy surrounding rhyme following the Civil War, writing, “Johnson had emphasized its role as a force of order in the poem, but it was also associated with the primitive passions and with the irrational pleasure of jingling sound” (127). Embodying the sound of the poem, especially when its sound excites the passions and makes the reader less reasonable, is risky considering the seemingly apocalyptic conditions Milton lived in. However, there is a critical difference between rhyme and antimetabole, even if both constitute echoes within the text; even if both techniques were heard by someone who did not understand English, the two devices would sound different. The end-rhymes that traditional pentameter demands create a more predictable repetition pattern than antimetabole, which arguably makes it more “musical.” Further, even in a perfect rhyme, word-initial sounds differ from one another. Rhyme plays on the association between two words that are often unrelated apart from their sound. Antimetabole, on the other hand, merely repeats the same words in a new arrangement. For this reason, antimetabole initially appears to lend itself sound studies less than rhyme does. However, the importance of oral reading in Milton’s time demands that this echoing technique be examined as an equal source of potential excitement for the oral reader, as well as the listener, whose aural experience of the poem, and the excitement it may bring about, are indeed a part of its meaning as a moral test.

The vitality of sound in the poem cannot be understated. As Richard Bradford argues, “The blank verse pentameter of *Paradise Lost* is not merely a concession to formal precedent; it is a token reminder of the control of oral form by the silent visual text” (80). The speaker’s request to the muse to aid his “adventurous Song” (1.13) implies a precarity of sound. There is also an ambiguity in the word “song” here: is the speaker the song’s composer, its player, or

both? Because the speaker is never heard in the diegesis, then the poem is only a song if we are to imagine or enact its musical embodiment. While there is certainly friction between the silent text and its demand for orality, the speaker's characterization of it frames the composition almost as sheet music; the text's meaning is incomplete any time it is not being played because it is part of an instructional mode of writing. The poem is an instruction for its own enactment, with the embodied processes of enacting the poem being a critical component to its meaning. The poem, consequently, is about locating the fallen human subject in their mortal body. When the poem characterizes itself as an instruction for its oration within its very content, it demands that the fallen reader not only understand the story of the Fall, but enact it by involving their bodies in the story.

The speaker's instruction for oration places the poem within the context of early modern reading as largely oral, and largely social. "Seventeenth-century reading," Dobranski writes, "was, like writing, associated with various social sites. In London coffee houses, even illiterate customers could hear the government *Gazette* read aloud, or listen to political tracts" (48). Adam Fox notes that in the only semi-literate early modern England, "Reading aloud helped to draw everyone into the ambit of the written word" (37). Besides the democratization of popular culture that these oral practices allowed, oral reading also provided urgent news of the day. Fox writes, "For the majority at this time, the communication of information on current affairs was primarily an oral business" (336). In Milton's time, the spoken word would commonly transmit pressing information on crises in the nation—the plague being one of the many national emergencies requiring constant updates. While silence is implicit to Milton's form (it is not as explicitly instructional as a stage play, and it is too long for most people to read aloud in one sitting), his characterization of the poem as music, as well as the fundamentally sonic aspects to the poem's

rhetorical refrains, frame the text within its author's deeply rhetorical and deeply oral culture. Milton himself writes orality into *Areopagitica*, describing the pamphlet as "the sounds I am about to utter" (718). Though this text was not written as a speech, Milton characterizes his argument through sound in keeping with his contemporary tradition of orality when discussing, and dissemination information on, immediate political issues.

In keeping with the oral tradition to which *Paradise Lost* belongs, the process of hearing bore critical importance on the meaning of a text for early modern listeners. In a study of church acoustics in early modern England, Laura Feitzinger Brown writes, "Early modern writers hammer home the importance to lay salvation of listening to the Word preached" (8). For a largely illiterate audience, the meaning of a sermon derives from its sound. A sermon's message, and in turn, its moral value, depends on how that sermon can physically be heard. As Brown notes: "Once in church, lay listeners encountered other barriers to hearing the sermon, including acoustic challenges. Contemporary comments about bad weather, leaking church roofs, and poorly designed church architecture and furniture all make clear that physically hearing sermons was sometimes difficult" (11). With the potential meaning of a religious text at stake, Brown's historical placing of the sermon's sound makes good acoustic conditions a moral imperative. The act of hearing, and of creating an environment in which hearing correctly is possible, carries with it the responsibility of completing the meaning of a text. In *Paradise Lost*, Milton explores the potential for mishearing not in the failure to perceive an uttered sound, but in how the spaces that sounds are uttered in warp their quality in both the moral and aural sense.

This critical importance of sound and hearing in Milton's time invites further comparison between this poem and music. Jason P. Rosenblatt observes that "Milton's poetry aspires to the condition of music" (325). Milton instills conflict within the sound of his poem, allowing the

semantic meaning of the composition to inform its sound as much as the sound reinforces the meaning. Rosenblatt calls music “the least representational of the arts,” and “the closest to pure form” (324). *Paradise Lost* is a poem about how the reality of its enactment through an oral reading implicates its listener and speaker simply because it is being said and heard.⁴ Its acoustics carry a moral dilemma in tandem with its content; the friction and consonance in Milton’s poetry sways the listener. If a listener is not paying close attention to the content, then perhaps what the poem represents through its acoustics differs from its intent. In a poem chronicling the Fall, any misunderstanding is of course disastrous. Cox writes that “the conditions of sonic production and the integrity of acoustical material define the potential of sound to corrupt more than, for example, its balance of semantic intelligibility and harmony” (235). The speaker’s characterization of the poem as a song carries with it a concern for potential misrepresentation due to the abstract open-endedness of music. Listening and understanding are not synonymous, and the sounds that this poem makes for the embodied listener carry with them the potential for moral corruption. Specifically, Milton explores the acoustic phenomenon of echoing as a source of representation of space through sound, and its metaphorical dimension as a lack of agency, a state of being infected with another person’s speech patterns.

Echoing carries with it a complex web of metaphors that must be at least partially unraveled before an analysis of how they function in this poem can be performed. In *Paradise Lost*, there are three forms of echoing: the acoustic phenomenon that usually occurs in Milton’s

⁴ It must be noted that the oral reader and the listener of the poem play two entirely different roles during the poem’s recitation: the reader is embodying the poem through articulation, while the listener receives, and perceives, the acoustic bodies that the reader emits. Though it is also important to note that the oral reader of the poem, presuming that they can themselves hear, is also necessarily a listener, though the sound of their own voice will sound different to them, reverberating in their own heads, than it will to other hearers. This disjunction between how one imagines one’s own voice and its real timbre constitutes yet another dimension to the topic of interior and exterior space, and how the two inevitably diverge.

cavernous Hell, a textual recurrence of key words that usually refer to the quality of a given space, and the tendency of characters or the speaker to repeat the words or speech patterns of other characters. The second form is often a consequence of the first: the words that repeat as the speaker describes Hell tend to reverberate throughout the text—words such as “deep” and “abyss” would occur repeatedly in an oral reading of *Paradise Lost* as the performer articulates the sections of the poem about the deep, cavernous Hell, thereby mimicking Hell’s echoing landscape. The third form of echoing exists because of Satanic rhetoric; Eve begins imitating, or echoing, Satan’s rhetorical forms as she becomes corrupted, as her vision of the space of Eden begins to turn. Just as Satan asserts that “Which way I fly is Hell; myself am Hell” (4.75), the speaker imitates the acoustic properties of Hell in other characters’ bodies by writing echoes into the body of the text. An oral reading turns Satan’s possession of Eve into an acoustic reality by embodying through one voice the process of Satan’s rhetoric entering Eve’s body. Echoes demonstrate the acoustic manifestation of humanity’s potential to lack agency, and to be corrupted by the ways in which speech sounds enter their ear.

A key form of corruption in *Paradise Lost* is seen in Satan’s subversion of how characters understand spaces. Milton’s blindness might be helpful to remember here, considering that many of the spaces in *Paradise Lost* are mapped through sound more than sight. The most common visual descriptor in Book II is “dark,” which appears 25 times. With darkness prevailing, the process of mapping Hell rests in how sound travels through it. The speaker characterizes Hell by how it echoes, and the space becomes personified by how its acoustics cause it to reiterate the words of others. In her conversation with Satan, Sin recalls Death’s origin: “I fled, and cry’d out *Death*;/ Hell trembl’d at the hideous Name, and sigh’d/ From all her Caves, and back resounded *Death*” (2.787-89). The echoes of Hell name Death here, with Sin’s

agency presumably involved in uttering the word turning to passive hearing as her own words are reverberated and distorted throughout Hell. When Hell takes over the meaning of the word during the reverberation process, the space becomes personified; Sin genders Hell as “she,” trembling and sighing in her place. The speaker continues their emphasis on exhalation and atmosphere. The atmosphere that reinforces the nature of *Death* through its acoustics also exhales its meaning. The distortion of meaning contained within a corrupted atmosphere carries into a distortion of meaning through the acoustics of that atmosphere.

In Hell, sound reveals spatial dimensions, though indirectly. When the demons stand following Satan’s speech, the speaker writes, “Thir rising all at once was as the sound/ Of thunder heard remote” (2.476-77). What this passage provides is not a direct representation of a sound, but instead a textual recreation of an echo, which is itself a reoccurrence of a sound temporally distanced from the initial sonic event. The echo of thunder is among the most common methods of gauging distance from a storm. We as readers are placed at a distance from the primary action, and we map out where an action takes place through its echo. We are always at a “remote” distance from direct information because all information we receive in Hell is distorted. If Hell is a body, then its sighed exhalations, “heard remote” from their original sonic event, distort the meanings of the sounds that it emits.

Milton imitates Hell’s echoing properties through the speaker’s textual echoing in Book II. As with the imitation of sounds that an echoing space produces, the diction in Satan’s speeches repeats when describing Hell’s geography. Satan asks, “What could be worse/ Then to dwell here, driv’n out from bliss, condemn’d/ In this abhorred deep to utter woe” (2.85-86). The ideology behind this sentence carries through its sound, with the alliterated [d] reverberating

through “dwell,” “driv’n,” and “deep.” The voiced alveolar plosive⁵ emphasizes contempt for the space that the demons are confined in, while reiterating the sonic properties that a “deep,” cavernous space would have.⁶ Just as Hell reiterates the word “Death” to Sin, it reverberates the speech sound [d] throughout its space. However, these textual echoes differ from acoustic ones because they display a greater agency in the speaker; it is not the acoustics of the space imitating the speech sound, but the speech sound imitating the acoustics of the space. While alliterated textual echoes might display some agency for their speaker, they also refer to the phenomenon that space defines the quality of the utterances contained within it. Hell becomes the ultimate echo chamber for Satan’s rhetoric because his descriptions of the space reflect and perpetuate how his legions perceive it. Despite Satan’s supposed agency in his echoing descriptions of Hell, the acoustic reverberations within the space highlight a fundamental lack of agency because they reduce all sentiment expressed within Hell to a series of speech sounds, whose meanings distort well beyond the speaker’s initial intent. Fish asserts that “Once the fallen angels defy God, they are committed to a moral and linguistic anarchy” (95). The echoes in Hell reflect this linguistic anarchy as they remove the agency of creating meaning from the bodies speaking and allow meaning to be defined as much by the external setting.

As mere combinations of speech sounds, words lose their meaning the more they are uttered in Hell. In Book II, the words echoed in Hell are the very words that define Hell. The word “deep,” for example, appears 22 times, while the word “abyss” appears 7 times. “Deep” in particular loses its definition the more it appears throughout Book II because its semantic effect

⁵ This phonetic description describes the voicing of the speech sound [d] (voiced), the part of the body primarily responsible for producing the sound (the alveolus), and the type of speech sound (plosive).

⁶ A key diversion between textual echoes and literal echoes is the weakening of the sound over time. Though perhaps the meaning of a word might weaken the more it becomes repeated, the sonic repetition of the [d] sound in this instance gives the passage an increasing momentum via its repetition.

lessens with each repetition. The word becomes more akin to a sonic refrain, or a key note in a composition, with its semantic meaning losing precedence to its constancy as a physical, acoustic presence. Along with “abyss,” the word itself describes the state of Hell: open, expansive, dark, and cavernous. The sounds that reverberate throughout Hell are the very sounds whose semantic definitions pertain to it. Hell’s echo chamber determines Satan’s rhetorical dominance over the space because his value judgments of it embody themselves through their own acoustic manifestation.

Hell is Satan’s echo chamber because it echoes the attributes that he ascribes to it through its very form. What he “breathes” into the space of Hell, displayed by his alliterative assertion in Book I, defines its physical and figurative nature simultaneously. Matthew Steggle defines Milton’s Hell as “a place where all you can hear is yourself” (17). Book II carries on Satan’s assertion from Book I by displaying how Satan manifests Hell through his speech. The perceived spatiality of this cavernous prison becomes *a priori* truth because Satan designs the space through the sounds of his speech, as well as how he frames those sounds alongside the phenomenon of reverberation. Echoing becomes not only an acoustic event that occurs in Hell, defining the space through itself, but a metaphor for the passive imitators of Satanic ideology. Satan declares that Hell is not a space relegated to its own geography when he says, “Which way I fly is Hell; Myself am Hell” (4.75). The echoing repetition of “Hell” in this very statement argues as much. The echoes of Hell escape its cavernous space not acoustically, but textually. Outside of the poem’s diegesis, however, the rhetorical structures that the oral reader reiterates carry Satan’s echoing rhetoric from Hell into the remainder of the text, and into their own fallen setting.

The acoustics of spoken antimetabole define how the form aids Satan's mapping process. The rhetorical figure of antimetabole is alliterative by its very form because it echoes the same speech sounds in an inverted pattern. Satan's assertion that the mind can make "a Heav'n of Hell, a Hell of Heav'n" (1.254-55) distorts the idea of the two spaces rhetorically partly by inverting the order in which they are heard. The alliterated [h] sound implies a continuity between the two spaces, subverting the idea of Heaven and Hell as opposite. However, like the ways in which words lose their meaning the more they are echoed in Hell, the inverted form of this device destabilizes the security of language. In this way, Satan's repetition unfixes the idea of fixity itself. In his deception of Uriel, Satan asks the archangel to "tell/ In which of all these shining Orbes hath Man/ His fixed seat, or fixed seat hath none" (3.667-69). The reversal of "hath his fixed seat" and "fixed seat hath" again shows Satan manipulating his sentence structures through antimetabole. The content of these phrases echoes the idea of fixity to subliminally draw attention to the term's double meaning: Satan assures Uriel that Man's seat is "fixed" in that it is secure, while imagining the (presumably broken) space becoming "fixed" upon his entrance. Eventually, Man will become "fixed," stuck in his temporally defined mortality after the Fall. The original intent of the word "fixed" in the order of the sentence—Eden as "fixed" because it is secure—is blurred the more the word repeats, taking on multiple definitions that pertain to one space. When Satan unfixes the nature of the orbs to locate Eden, he "maps" his way there as he unfixes it ideologically. Mapping is once again primarily a rhetorical process, even at its most practical.

Satan's dissembling of his own body through shapeshifting mirrors his manipulation of how bodies map themselves within their inhabited spaces. When Satan whispers into Eve's sleeping ear (4.800), he renders her an unwitting collaborator in creating a new vision of Eden.

Whether or not the physical attributes of the new, internal Eden contrast with its external referent, its “quality” has shifted because it is a Satanic echo of a space created by God. The fact that Satan whispers this version of Eden shows the demon constructing spaces through sound. Later, Eve echoes Satan’s antimetabole, arguing that “For good unknown, sure is not had, or had/ And yet unknown, is as not had at all” (9.756-57). The reversal in this passage shows Eve’s new relationship to the space. To return to the idea of vocal sound as contagious, it might be said that Eve is “infected” with Satanic rhetoric, and that she now echoes its echoing properties. The sonic quality of Hell now manifests in her articulations. In Book VIII, Satan questions “Whether the Sun predominant in Heav’n/ Rise on the Earth, or Earth rise on the Sun” (8.160-61). His inversions of spaces, which function to cast doubt on the reality of God’s creation, infect Eve’s relationship to Eden, which eventually lead her to sin.

Looking towards rhetoric and agency though, I must note that antimetabole is used by God and the Son as well as Satan. When reacting to God’s proclamation of mercy as a guiding principle, the Son says that, of any opposing tendency, “that be from thee far,/ That far be from thee, Father” (3.153-54) In this reordering, the Son almost mirrors the syntactic reversals that Satan uses in his speeches. The Son’s rhetoric appears to be doing the same thing as Satan’s. However, as Ryan J. Stark notes, “The devil represents the apex of false wit in the epic, and so Milton creates for Satan a rhetoric incapable of engaging in sincere conversation” (23). We might say that sincerity is what differentiates good and bad rhetoric, both morally and persuasively, because Satan’s rhetoric solely functions to convince those around him of something. Ned O’Gorman writes, “in Milton’s Hell, which is Satan’s Hell, freedom is understood exclusively in terms of status” (169). By contrast, the Son’s rhetoric is an affirmation of what is already true in accordance with God. God is all-seeing and therefore cannot be

manipulated; the two clauses in “that be from thee far” and “that far be from thee” do not mean different things, while “Heaven of Hell” and “Hell of Heav’n” do. The Son is not attempting to persuade God of anything. Further, if God perceives past, present, and future at once, then rearranging a sentence’s temporality would not risk altering God’s perception of that sentence. Echoing after all is a phenomenon rooted in linear time. Linear temporality makes the human tongue capable of articulating Satanic rhetoric.

Relaying the story of Satan’s revolt to Adam, Raphael engages in antimetabole with the phrase, “So spake th’ Omnipotent, and with his words/ All seem’d well pleas’d, all seem’d, but were not all” (5.616-17). As with the Son’s usage of the device in Book IV, Milton brings into question rhetoric itself and the problem of sincerity. The line “All seem’d well pleas’d, all seem’d, but were not all” carries in it a story, one complete with a twist ending that upsets expectations developed by the first, ambiguous “seem’d.” Further, the line disrupts the notion of linguistic stability by putting into place multiple uses of the word “all”: the demons were not all satisfied with God’s word, and therefore were fragmented, no longer a cohesive “all.” Unlike the Son’s use of the rhetorical device, Raphael is certainly trying to convince Adam of something here—namely, he is relaying this story to dissuade Adam from sinning. What makes his use of antimetabole different from that of Satan’s if antimetabole should be taken as a form of deception because it destabilizes language? With *Areopagitica* as a demonstration of Milton’s faith in the power of good rhetoric, surely he is not condemning the practice altogether. However, the speaker questions the power of morally upstanding rhetoric as good in itself as Raphael’s plea to Adam ultimately fails. Because Raphael was sent by God to deliver this message, God knows that Raphael’s rhetoric will fail to convince Adam not to sin. It is difficult not to assume that the text is depicting God as insincere if he sends a message to Eden that he

knows will go unheard. Though perhaps the text is making a point about “hearing” this language in the first place, and how different hearing processes establish the body’s potential to exercise free will to a righteous end. The message is not insincere, but instead, the way that it is heard is. Though its articulation risks insincerity in its rhetorical style, the message is, like the epic itself, ultimately a moral test for its hearer. The “freedom” that God insists Man possesses comes from hearing rhetoric, good or bad, and acting on it based on its truth as the word of God, rather than on its artful construction.

However, sincerity itself cannot explain the moral quality of rhetoric in the context of communicating with the divine. To resolve this problem, I return to the acoustic demands of the text, which manifest insincerity throughout any oral reading specifically because the poem is required to be articulated by an insincere human tongue. Its instrumental form makes its animation process one that reveals a fundamental instability in the reader. The instance of antimetabole from the Son brings into question the problem of sincerity when conversing with, or even about, the divine. The problem with arguing that sincerity constitutes the difference between good antimetabole and sinful antimetabole is that having a sincere conversation with a divine being is surely impossible; if God already knows everything, including the Son’s destiny on Earth, then why does the Son bother speaking to God at all? While this problem is admittedly beyond the scope of this, and in fact most arguments, the problem of the Son’s sincerity in his conversation with God offers an opportunity to explore Satan’s rhetorical deception further. While the theological problem cannot be remedied by this admittedly hyper-literal reading of the text, I argue that in understanding the poem as a composition, the question of the Son’s sincerity is less theological than one might expect simply because the Son is not in fact speaking at all. The speaker, and more importantly, the oral reader of *Paradise Lost*, is articulating these words.

My acoustical analysis naturally leads to an argument about who actually embodies God's rhetoric, which is the fallible reader of the text on Earth. The question of a reader's sincerity might be answered by interrogating whether that reader sees themselves as closer to God or to Satan. Considering the preference for Satan's passages in the epic that many readers, including myself, espouse, I argue that orating the Son's conversations with God highlights an insincerity within the fallen reader by reminding them of their affinity for that which deceives them within their own flawed systems of communication.

The space that a reader occupies is defined by Satan as they recite his speeches during a performance of Milton's composition. Echoes are deceptive and distortive to the fallen human body specifically because we experience time linearly; we are trapped in a temporal state of being, which renders us susceptible to Satan's rhetorical definitions of spaces. The division between the body and exterior space is fundamentally unstable. When Satan speaks into Eve's ear as she sleeps, he reconfigures her definition of space by introducing sound to her dreaming mind. John Gillies writes that "[p]lace" in *Paradise Lost* "is an epiphenomenon of room, less a permanent datum of nature than the face reflected by physical nature in response to human inhabitation" (45). When Satan speaks through the text, he does the same to us as he does to Eve: he creates an image in our mind that is fundamentally different from the world that God created, preying on our subjective internalization and imagination of spaces. Satan's echo chamber utilizes the physical attributes of sounds themselves to define the spaces into which he speaks them. Because the mind is its own place for the fallen reader, Satan uses the "space" in Eve's mind to construct an alternative, defiled Eden. Antimetabole draws attention to the fixed positions of words within a sentence, and in their repetition, reveals the fluidity of language.

Because language defines the body's relationship to its fixed space, Satan's rhetoric unseats the fixity of both the body and its atmosphere.

Chapter 4: Articulating the Fall

The acoustics of Satan's instrumental rhetoric demand a closer inspection of the processes of embodying the poem, since the human body is ultimately the "instrument" the composition is written for. Specifically, I look at how the sonic prompts in the text shape and alter the reader's body during the recitation process. Ross Lerner points to the ways in which the meter of the poem slows down the reader after the Fall occurs. Lerner suggests that "Eve's fall sends out a disharmonizing shock wave that affects Adam, the Earth, and the verse by way of the 'falt'ring measure'" (453). In keeping with the alliterative demands of antimetabole, I examine how the rhetorical form grounds the reader's fallen body within their fixed environment. Air becomes crucial to understanding the body's relationship to space in the context of articulation: breath constitutes the output of the human body into the atmosphere, which alters the quality of that air. Whitney B. Taylor writes that in *Paradise Lost*, "Breath is not just the biological counterpart for air, but becomes air, just as air becomes breath in the space of an exchange" (621). The organ of the tongue functions as the primary device of articulation, organizing how the human voice manifests within the air by shaping its breath into words. As with the musical nature of the poem as a work of representation, as it is characterized by Jason Rosenblatt, the temporal placement of words as they are articulated through the mouth bears critical significance on what they contribute to the air. The tongue plays a critical role in determining if the "impulse of vocal air" (9.530) within the human subject is good or infectious.

The crux of this argument about the political stakes of the air, and the wind that exits the mouth during speech, lies naturally in an analysis of the image of the tongue. The speaker describes Satan approaching Eve to commence his rhetorical corruption: "he glad/ Of her attention gain'd, with Serpent Tongue/ Organic, or impulse of vocal Air,/ His fraudulent

temptation thus began” (9.528-31). Keeping in mind the acoustic and contagious elements of air outlined in the two previous sections, I am interested in the recurring image of the tongue in Book IX’s climactic depiction of the Fall, and how tongues in *Paradise Lost* articulate the sounds that comprise Satanic rhetoric. Milton’s speaker returns to the word “tongue” four times throughout Book IX (which ties it with Book VI for most occurrences), often to consider how different bodies articulate thoughts in Eden. The echoing of the tongue image, unsurprisingly, coincides with the introduction of the snake, with Milton inviting structural comparisons between the two corrupting bodies.

Milton’s speaker composes Satan’s instrumental rhetoric with the tongue in mind as its instrument. The continuation of the term “instrument” to the human body has its bearings in the early modern period. As Cox points out, “As early as the sixteenth century, a wind instrument called the serpent was being used in France to accompany church choirs” (250). With Satan’s rhetoric corrupting Eve’s body and mind, the fatal composition that the oral reader recites here sounds the text into their atmosphere through the ways in which their tongue carves the air within their bodies into acoustic units. The tongue acts as the meeting point between sinful thought and infectious action, the median between interior and exterior space, with the poem itself forcing its reader to enact this embodied, instructed corruption. The tongue lifts the text from a two-dimensional, silent entity into a series of three-dimensional acoustic bodies that alter the physical and ideological fabric of the space that they enter.

Continuing my analysis of instrumentation and composition, I argue that reading this poem aloud frames the tongue as a musical instrument, and language as music. Angela Esterhammer argues that “*Paradise Lost* emphasizes more heavily than does *Genesis* the way each newly articulated element is incorporated not only into a physical but into a linguistic

order” (274). The order of articulated sound bears critical weight in the poem’s meaning. Throughout Book IX, Milton chronicles the Fall with numerous references to tongues, both of humans and serpents, and the noises that those tongues make. In this section, I argue that readers of *Paradise Lost* embody Satan’s instrumental rhetoric when they orate the poem because the process of articulating Satan’s words enacts his rhetoric conspicuously through the body. The acoustic properties of the poem situate its conflict within the corporeal as much as the temporal; Milton’s musical form prompts us to read the poem aloud, which makes us vulnerable to its moral test. Rachel Trubowitz writes that in *Paradise Lost*, “Natural bodies, anatomical and political, corrupt the spirit, debase the mind, and as a result thwart liberty of conscience” (391). I argue that the natural body, vulnerable to the very air that surrounds it, is tested by the poem when its articulation processes demand embodying poisonous rhetoric.

The reshaping of language that Satan’s rhetoric entails correspond with his deceptive bodily transformations. The active articulation processes that the tongue enacts reshape the air within Satan’s body, which goes on to reshape others’ perception of the spaces he disfigures. The speaker concludes Satan’s request to Uriel with, “So spake the false dissembler unperceiv’d” (3.681). The term “false dissembler” may refer to the dissembling of truth or of the body, in that he disguises both his intent and appearance simultaneously.⁷ As Satan is “unperceiv’d,” though Uriel does indeed see him, Milton refers to the disjunction between Uriel’s perception of Satan and to the intent, or sound, of his speech. The content of both his speech and body are primarily deceptive because they are malleable and ordered with the intent to trick. Over the course of *Paradise Lost*, Satan becomes a cormorant (4.196), a toad (4.800), a snake (9.161), and pure mist

⁷ The term “false dissembler” is, importantly, ambiguous: Satan does in fact dissemble his own image as well as the idea of the orbs’ fixity here, though the term “false” would suggest that he does not (is he really a dissembler?). The term “false” in this context should refer to the idea that Satan’s very essence is that of falseness, though the ambiguity of the term places doubt even on this idea, which in turn highlights the idea of ultimate uncertainty.

(9.75) to enter, and alter, various minds and spaces. His reconfiguring of his bodily image mirrors the reconstitution of linguistic material in his uses of antimetabole: he reshapes the structure of the same material with the intent of making it seem different. In this case, “material” refers to the semantic and physical content of speech sounds.

Milton’s alliteration draws attention to the sounds his speaker’s words make. If the echoing that occurs during an alliterated passage reduces semantic meaning, it perhaps draws attention to the sound-meaning of the acoustic bodies it produces. Though the meaning of a word and its sound may never be truly separated, Milton’s focus on speech noises and the bodily processes they reflect demand a careful approach to the sound symbolism at play. Milton reaches his narrative crux in Book IX, wherein Eve finally eats the apple, which initiates the Fall. The act of eating is the sin, with Eve’s lack of self-restraint being teased out by Satan’s rhetorical prowess. Before she eats the apple, Eve says “In the day we eate/ Of this fair Fruit” (9.762-63). The alliterative flourish of “fair Fruit” bares the oral reader’s teeth as they articulate the unvoiced labiodental fricative [f]⁸. In Book X, Sin discusses Death’s all-consuming appetite after the fall, saying, “Thou therefore on these Herbs, and Fruits, and Flours/ Feed first, on each Beast next, and Fish, and Fowle” (10.603-04). Once again, the prospect of eating, and in this case, fallen eating, is conspicuously articulated through the alliterated [f]. The attention to articulation, sin, and their tendency to corrupt continues, as Sin promises, “Till I in Man residing through the Race,/ His thoughts, his looks, words, actions all infect” (10.607-08). Milton concludes the clause here, with the predigesting [f] sound returning in the stressed portion of the line’s contagion referent: “infect.” The sound of this alliteration utilizes and showcases the first stage

⁸ This phonetic description describes the voicing of the speech sound [f] (unvoiced), the parts of the body primarily responsible for producing the sound (the lips and teeth), and the type of speech sound (fricative).

of digestion just as the sin of eating is being discussed. Embodying this poem grounds us in our own fallible, corruptible bodies because the process of reciting it utilizes parts of our fallen bodies to tell its story.

That the poem's central crux deals with eating and digestion means that the articulation process of the poem enmeshes its reader in the early modern politics of eating and self-restraint. As Healy writes, "Freedom, at both the individual and social levels, is, paradoxically, self-restraint, and particularly dietary restraint, which enables reason— God in man— to be paramount" (221). With each sound that Milton alliterates, the reader digests the inevitable Fall as they speak it, with the location of speech coinciding with the organ that first digested the forbidden fruit. The mouth is not a place of agency, but, as it must follow the fatal composition through to its conclusion, is instead a continual echo of the Fall. When Adam tells Raphael, "But who I was, or where, or from what cause,/ Knew not; to speak I tri'd, and forthwith spake,/ My Tongue obey'd and readily could name/ What e'er I saw" (8.270-73), he disentangles himself from his own tongue with the verb "obey," as though his own tongue has the agency to do anything else. He imagines his rational mind as constantly at risk of being betrayed by utterances that emerge on their own from his unreasoned body. Through denial, Adam expresses the fear that tongues are, inseparably, an extension of their unreasoned minds, and that therefore, the sinful actions that tongues perform are conceived of in the mind.

The tongue represents the limits of the body, with Satan's rhetorical shapeshifting transcending the reality of species itself. When Satan, presenting as a snake, speaks to Eve, the first thing she notices is not the content of his speech, but the fact that human sound is emerging from an animal. When Eve refers to the snake, she constantly describes its tongue. In free-indirect discourse, the speaker writes, "Language of Man pronounc'd/ By Tongue of Brute"

(9.553-54). When speaking to the snake, Eve later remarks on “The Tongue not made for Speech to speak thy praise” (9.749). Milton gives us an uncanny disjunction between the types of sound that should come from a body recognizable as nonhuman and the equally deceptive speech sounds that it produces. When Satan returns to Hell, only to have the demons, all turned to snakes, hiss at him, the speaker reminds us of the types of sounds that should emerge from different bodies. The speaker writes: “Thus was th’ applause they meant/ Turn’d to exploding hiss, triumph to shame/ Cast on themselves from thir own mouths” (10.545-47). Their intent to applaud, only to have the sounds that their snake bodies produce shame in them because of the limits to their own faculties of articulation, displays an essentialism to the sonic roles that different bodily shapes possess in keeping with the nature of species as created by God. Simply put: this passage reminds us that a human body should speak, and a snake body should hiss. If God created all animals, and in turn, determined the sounds that they can produce, then this passage serves as an acoustic reminder of Satan’s snake body as a “false dissembler.”

The snake’s speech forces the oral reader of *Paradise Lost* to embody the sounds that a snake body naturally makes, acoustically merging the snake’s body with their own. Milton formally recreates the sound of the snake in the text, which implicates the reader’s tongue. The speaker describes the “spirited sly Snake, and Eve” (9.613). The dramatic sibilance of “spirited sly Snake” forces the tongue to replicate the sound of a snake, which aligns with the spoken words of Satan “entering” Eve’s body. The first reason behind this alliteration is obvious: the voiceless alveolar fricative [s]⁹ imitates what a snake sounds like, and so Milton merges form with content. However, there is more going on here than Milton imitating the sound of a snake

⁹ This phonetic description describes the voicing of the speech sound [s] (unvoiced), the part of the body primarily responsible for producing the sound (the alveolus), and the type of speech sound (fricative).

through alliteration: Milton is implicating the morality of the reader who speaks the text by forcing them to embody the Satanic sound linguistically. The tongue constitutes the fallibility of the human mind in and outside of the text.

Articulating Satan's rhetoric means embodying the Fall. Satan's antimetabole in the phrase "beauty, not approacht by stronger hate,/ Hate stronger, under show of love well feign'd" (9.491-92) exhales the text with the alliterated [h] sound while introducing the snaky sibilance in the [s] sound that becomes a recurring motif in Book IX. The line also inverts the stress on "hate" in the meter by reconfiguring its placement, providing momentum in the body to mimic the concept of a growing hate, which increases in emphasis as the word is articulated. The order of speech sounds, how they are temporally organized by the poem's speaker, dictates how the reader embodies their moral conflict at a given point within a reading. Bruce Smith writes that "at every step in the process that transforms a manuscript into a printed text, a body of some sort interposes itself between the act of speaking and the act of reading" (125). The act of speaking the text has the fallen reader contend with their own embodiment of Satanic rhetoric, while placing them at a temporally linear understanding of their own body. This composition is a test of both the body and mind, literalizing the process of "standing" as an act of (active) religious devotion. As Fish asserts, "Milton's purpose is to educate the reader to an awareness of his position and responsibilities as a fallen man" (1). The linear process of embodying Satan's words imagines the mind as limited within its spatial context, and vice-versa. An active, living, "breathing" reading process must continually understand the unfixed reason that the fallen person possesses, and therefore must understand the Fall in *Paradise Lost* as a perpetual activity.

Chapter 5: Conclusion

Satan's rhetoric is instrumental because it represents through its sound the conditions of the atmosphere into which *Paradise Lost* is read. When Rosenblatt argues that "Milton's poetry aspires to the condition of music" (325), he implies a form of representation which all music carries: a representation of the space that contains it. Even if we listen through headphones, music still represents the shape of the space of our ear canals, and, simultaneously, the imagined space within our minds. The poem might echo when delivered in an empty room, inviting comparisons between that room and Milton's Hell, or it might travel muffled through a wall as someone sleeps, rendering it an unconscious influencer of thought akin to Satan's whispered dream to Eve. The conditions of its given space carry meaning to this song as much as its notes do. Those notes, then, reconstitute the space that they consciously describe. Sounds, of course, do not often reshape spaces in a permanent, structural sense. However, if "The mind is its own place" (1.254), then the associations we as readers have to our setting inform how we perceive its physical qualities; a dark basement might feel neutral until we hear it described as claustrophobic; we may not be aware of how large a space is until we hear our own voice echoed back to us. The act of articulating this poem reveals the fundamental and contagious unreason that Milton sees the potential for, and tendency towards, in the fallen subject. Though the use of the broad term "space" that dominates here might often refer more readily to early modern England, I argue that Milton's explorations of Hell, Heaven, and Eden through the ways in which those spaces are defined by sound reflect an attempt at a timeless representation. Space is contained within any body that recites the text, and therefore carries itself into whatever setting that the body inhabits. With due respect paid to the distances between my acoustic rendition of Milton's poetry and its first readers, I argue that what the epic tests regarding speech and

infection rings true today. In our contemporary age, one marked by crises of communicability and communication, I hope that this paper articulates the enduring resonance of the Fall in *Paradise Lost* as a continual, embodied process.

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