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“[Y]et this will prayer, or one short sigh of human breath”: Examining the Expiration of Breath

After the Fall in John Milton’s *Paradise Lost*

Book Ten of John Milton’s *Paradise Lost* ends with Adam and Eve repenting for their sin against God, confessing “their faults” (X. 1101) with their “tears / Watering the ground” (1101-02) and their “sighs / Frequenting [the air]” (X. 1102-03). This elemental language, so to speak, of sighing and of watering the earth with tears continues into Book Eleven, making readers aware of the significance of the natural world to Milton’s Postlapsarian world and, more specifically, of how the natural world suffers at the hands of mankind. Inspired by Whitney B. Taylor’s reading of *Paradise Lost* as an ‘inspired ecosystem’ of Prelapsarian creation, a ‘*breathing into*’ of sorts to manifest the connection between Adam, Eve, and God, I will comparatively explore how *Postlapsarian Paradise* conveys breath differently, namely, less as a breathing into than a breathing *out* bodily phenomenon. I do not mean to suggest that the two exist independent of one another, for breathing involves an inherent inspiration and expiration of air. Rather, my interest here is in how breath is conveyed after the Fall of Adam and Eve and how breath becomes, consequentially, situated more as an outward expression of emotion than the intake of air to create or inspire life. In Book Eleven, the act of breathing functions as the expelling of painful sighs and groans from the body, as a response to and reflection of the Original Sin. In doing so, the language of breathing in Milton’s Postlapsarian world becomes less an act of creating than of *re-creating*, of needing to *first* expel the despair and sorrow produced by the fall before trying to regenerate a new vision for mankind. Mankind’s regeneration only comes out of this cathartic process I suggest is integral to Milton’s approach to justifying the ways of God to man in *Paradise Lost*. To examine Milton’s view of catharsis I will be drawing from the preface to his dramatic work, *Samson Agonistes*.

The sighs and groans of *both* the natural world and mankind suggest not only the inherent relation between nature and mankind but also the degree to which the temperaments of the earthly body and the human body become imbalanced because of the fall; sighing functions as

the product and release of the spirits in the body as a result of sorrow or melancholy, and only by expelling these spirits outward can the body restore balance. I argue that Book Eleven conveys this imbalance of the humoral body as a “temporary circumstance,” to use Naya Tsentourou’s terminology (264), Earth and particularly mankind must endure for balance to be restored and for the day to come where the “world shall go on [and] appear of respiration to the just, / And vengeance to the wicked” (XII. 539-40). Book Eleven specifically works to restore balance between mankind and “all ... creatures” (XI. 873), thereby inspiring mankind’s rebirth.

At the end of Book Ten and into the beginning of Book Eleven, Milton describes Adam and Eve as “[w]atering the ground” (X. 1102) with their tears and praying to God for forgiveness of their sins. Praying seems to be synonymous with sighing, here, as prayers are described as “sighs / ... which the spirit of prayer / Inspired” (XI. 5-7). The line, “[Y]et this will prayer, or one short sigh of human breath” (XI. 146), reinforces this conflation of sighing with praying, as sighing conveys a feeling of remorse or sorrow that is beyond words; arguably, sighing is the bodily response of the recognition of pain and, subsequently, wanting to take that pain away. Tsentourou quotes René Descartes to shed light on the physiological removal of pain from the body, saying, “when the spirits cannot expel the thing that hurteth, in their strife to do it, by motion of consent, they expel the voice” (qtd. in T 266), or in this case, simply the breath. Thus, as Milton suggests, their sighing functions as a symbol of and catalyst for their humility.

John Milton’s preface to *Samson Agonistes* provides the context of Milton’s perspective of Aristotelian catharsis that I will use to examine *Paradise Lost*. Although we cannot know when Milton’s *Samson Agonistes* was written and, thus, whether it was written before or after *Paradise Lost*, Milton clearly had his own views about Aristotle’s theory of catharsis that I suggest can inform how we interpret and understand the consequences of Adam and Eve’s fall in *Paradise Lost*. Given the nature of the fall as the turning point of mankind’s existence and one that brings about despair and sorrow, it is clear that *Paradise Lost* reinforces, as Richard DuRocher suggests, “emotions proper to Aristotelian tragedy” (94). There has been some scholarly debate regarding Milton’s perception of Aristotelian catharsis, and most of these

conversations erupted during the 1960s and 1970s. Not many scholars since have engaged with this issue, so my paper functions as somewhat of a resurgence and expansion of this conversation. Scholars, such as Martin Mueller and Paul Sellin, argued that Milton's ideas about catharsis derived from seventeenth-century Italian critics' interpretations of Aristotle's catharsis. Yet, both scholars debated which critics directly influenced Milton. What remains standard among scholars, however, has been this assertion that Milton was unique in taking "catharsis" to be, as Ingram Bywater suggests, a pathological process deriving from "medicine rather than religion" (qtd. in Parker 68). Paul Sellin similarly describes Milton's catharsis as using a "homeopathic analogy" (716). I am less concerned with the *origins* of Milton's view of catharsis that some scholars have taken up than I am with how his pathological view of catharsis conveys how we may interpret catharsis within his major works.

That Milton's view of catharsis takes a pathological approach makes its application to my approach to *Paradise Lost* all the more plausible, since the expiration of breath through sighing is itself an entirely bodily phenomenon. One of the physiological responses to the fall is that the characters – and even the environment – sigh. I argue that this is not merely Milton conveying a mere reaction but, rather, a *cathartic* response to the fall of mankind. Sighing outward as a result of the fall is arguably an act of catharsis, wherein breathing out a sigh of grief, in fact, becomes a sigh of *relief*, purging the body of its sorrow by letting the body feel sorrow. At the same time, Milton also offers the Latin term *lustratio* in his preface, which, according to Russ Leo, defines catharsis as a kind of purification "central to human salvation" (10). For the most part, scholars have distinguished Milton's view of catharsis one of two ways: as a pathological *purgatio*, signifying the "complete extirpation of a passion" (Sellin 725) or as a "purification or [lustration] of *excess* passions" (Sellin 725; emphasis mine).¹ Rather than dividing these terms, I suggest that both are equally pertinent to reading *Paradise Lost*, for while it *is* a kind of purging Adam and Eve must experience and whether or not this purging completely extirpates a passion, they do so

¹ There is a more complicated reading of how scholars have interpreted Milton's use of language to explain his view of catharsis than I am getting into in my paper. Multiple scholars have pointed to the particular language Milton uses to describe catharsis, and several decades of debate between the terms *purgatio*, *expatio*, and *lustratio* to distinguish Milton's catharsis have not clarified matters. Due to the length of this paper, I am not able to flesh out these terms.

to redeem themselves in the eyes of God, thereby purifying them for redemption. In his preface to *Samson Agonistes*, Milton explains his view of catharsis:

Tragedy, as it was antiently compos'd, hath been ever held the gravest, moralist, and most profitable of all other Poems: therefore said by *Aristotle* to be of power by *raising pity and fear, or terror, to purge the mind of those and such like passions*, that is to *temper and reduce them to just measure* with a kind of delight, stirr'd up by reading or seeing those passions well imitated. (Milton, emphasis mine)

Milton was unique in his understanding of catharsis as a bodily phenomenon that involved “like passions” (Milton, Preface) purging like passions. Milton explained that in order to purge one of an emotion (pity/fear) or humor (melancholy) he or she must be exposed to that very emotion or humor: “for so in Physic things of melancholic hue and quality are us'd against melancholy, sower against sower, salt to remove salt humors” (Preface). In *Paradise Lost*, I argue that Adam and Eve go through a cathartic process of having to repeatedly first experience the uncomfortable and devastating emotions of the fall through physical expression before being able to purge themselves of these emotions. Indeed, the very physiological process of sighing reflects this restorative process of Milton’s catharsis; as Tsentourou suggests, sighing is “characterized by a ... swift convulsion the body is subjected to in order for the *balance between air and blood in the lungs to be restored*” (267). Their catharsis is most commonly expressed and experienced through sighing or expelling breath so that the emotion is forced out of and purged from the body. In justifying the ways of God to man, Milton must convey his characters first experiencing the consequences of their sins before their sins can be washed away and they can be redeemed. In other words, Milton’s characters must purge their sins so as to purify their souls.

Furthermore, Milton’s use of the verbs “temper” and “reduce” here in regards to restoring the passions to “just measure” reinforces the interpretation that this purging Adam and Eve must experience is a way to restore some semblance of what they have lost in the fall. To reduce or to temper something would be to bring that something under some level of control, or, as we might say, to bring something that had momentarily been out of control *back* under control. When

Adam and Eve eat from the forbidden fruit, their passions become overstimulated not only by the sheer effect of their actions, but also the *consequences* of their actions. Despite not being able to ‘get back’ to Paradise, for, as we see, God expels them from Eden, reducing or tempering their passions suggests the attempt to give back some semblance of redemption back to them.

Reducing and tempering their passions, stirred by their actions, thus, is the cathartic process they must go through in order to redeem themselves. In other words, Milton’s catharsis functions as the remedy to Adam and Eve’s *lapse* in judgment.

Adam and Eve’s prayers for redemption are described not as words or verses they send up to heaven, but, rather, as “sighs now breathed / Unutterable” (XI. 5-6). Indeed, the Son agrees to “[i]nterpret [Adam’s prayers] for him” (XI. 33) to God because Adam is supposedly “[u]nskilful with what words to pray” (XI. 32). The Son’s comment suggests the degree to which Adam and Eve are quite literally speechless, only able to evoke their repentance through sighing. One might argue that this bodily response is more material than words could be, making it all the more feasible to conceive of some substance of emotion being sent up to heaven. Indeed, this visualization is corroborated by the fact that Adam and Eve’s prayers are “winged for heaven” (XI. 7), “by envious winds / Blown vagabond” (XI. 15-16) and “pass[ing] / Dimensionless through heavenly doors” (XI. 16-17). Even as their prayers are described as “Dimensionless,” which is footnoted as being “Non-corporeal, immaterial” (Orgel and Goldberg 273), the fact that they are literally described as moving in space and, further, “mix[ing] / With incense” (XI. 24-5) that can be recognized in the air via scent gives them more substance, whatever that substance may actually be. It is as if their prayers were expelled from them so forcefully that they have taken on a will, indeed, a *passion*, of their own.

Feeling “intoxicated” (IX. 1008) from having eaten the forbidden fruit in Book Nine, Adam and Eve engage in “carnal desire inflaming” (IX. 1013) that consequently “scorns the earth” (IX. 1011). This fiery passion emerging from Adam and Eve is plausibly a result of erotic melancholy that, as Wolter Seuntjens suggests, resembles a similar effect to that of wine; importantly termed ‘spirit’, wine “was thought to induce both melancholy and lust” (38) because

of their mutual “smokiness” (38). That Adam and Eve feel “As with new wine intoxicated” (IX. 1008) after eating the forbidden fruit, imbues the fruit with a kind of *immoral* passion of sorts, what Milton describes as “carnal desire” (IX. 1013) that inflames their humors. Indeed, the very line, “In lust they burn” (IX. 1015), reinforces their passion as smoky; their passion is not only represented as a metaphorical fire burning but also as the smoke that is emitted *from* the fire, resembling sighing, as a by-product of stimulated humors. Seuntjens describes the process of burning as “caus[ing] smoke and vapour” (38) within the body which rises upwards, like the smoke from a fire, and “result[s] in sighing” (38).

Yet, even as Adam and Eve’s mutual passion does not result in bodily sighing, their smokiness *does* rise upwards, only not to the mouth but to the eyes. Indeed, Adam is described as “cast[ing] lascivious eyes” (IX. 1014) at Eve and she, in turn, “dart[s] contagious fire” (IX. 1036) towards him. Their flirtatious ‘eyeing’ functions in the same way sighing does: to emit the erotic melancholy inflaming their humors. Interestingly, during the seventeenth-century, the eyes were not considered merely passive receivers of light, but, rather, active agents in “emit[ting] spirit [and] damp” (Seuntjens 44), or flames of desire. This phenomenon is called “extramission” (Weststeijn 154) and was a prominent theory during the Renaissance period. The overabundance of passions in the body causes Adam and Eve to experience an imbalance of their humoral bodies, perpetuating an erotic melancholy that in some ways is not unlike the melancholy they feel after “the force of that fallacious fruit” (IX. 1046) wears off. Once the fumes within their bodies are exhaled, Adam and Eve “f[ind] their eyes how opened” (IX. 1053) with the veil of innocence, “shadow[ing] them from knowing ill” (IX. 1055), now “gone” (IX. 1055). This line suggests that they have learned humility the hard way, finding in their new state that “[they] know / Both good and evil” (XI. 1071-72) and, more specifically, “good lost, and evil got” (IX. 1072). Thus, in this moment, Adam and Eve’s eyes are not only literally but also figuratively opened.

Later, in Book Eleven of *Paradise Lost*, when Michael arrives to show Adam a vision of the future of mankind, he “purge[s]” (XI. 414) Adam’s eyes clean of the false promise of

“clearer sight” (XI. 413) inspired by eating the fruit. He then puts three drops “from the well of life” (XI. 416) into Adam’s eyes. By having Adam experience catharsis partly through vision, Milton closely aligns his narrative with traditional Aristotelian tragedy, wherein one watches specific actions take place on a stage to experience catharsis. These visions, in a sense, are the ‘theatrical’ scenes Adam must watch. This scene introduces two different instances of purging. Firstly, Michael purges Adam’s eyes of the false vision the fruit promised him. However, after this initial purging, Michael arguably performs another kind of purging on Adam wherein the visions he shows Adam act as a cathartic experience for Adam. Given that Michael replaces Adam’s sight with another kind of unhappiness, from a false promise of unhappiness to literal unhappiness in the form of death, sickness, and wickedness, it is plausible that the vision Michael bestows upon Adam is for some purpose: namely, to expose Adam to the consequences of his actions in the hopes of restoring his humanity. As Robert L. Entzminger argues, the “content of the vision ... works as a kind of negative formula, [wherein] Michael objectifies alternatives to the way of life he is espousing as a means of purging Adam of the desire to pursue them” (204). Succinctly describing Milton’s view of catharsis as “like banish[ing] like” (204), Entzminger, thus, suggests that Michael performs a kind of reverse psychology on Adam by exposing Adam to the very behaviour he wants him to avoid.

When Adam opens his eyes, emphasized twice within a span of seven lines (XI. 423; 429), he is said to “beh[o]ld the effects which thy original crime hath wrought” (XI. 422-5). The “effects” are visions of his descendants who, despite not having committed the Original Sin, will “bring forth more violent deeds” (XI. 428) as a result of Adam and Eve’s actions, the two that *did* commit the Original Sin. The multiple visions Adam sees are in the same vein, suggesting the sorrowful truth that his and Eve’s actions will affect his descendants: his own children will fight to the “death” (XI. 462), and the lives of many will be ravaged by “sick[ness]” (XI. 490) or ruined by “lustful[ness]” (XI. 619). Michael seems to be showing these visions to Adam to provoke an emotional response within him that suggests he recognizes and refuses to participate in this behaviour; this is, quite literally, the “like banishing like” (204) Entzminger suggests is

evident in Book Eleven. After each vision, the narrator describes Adam as experiencing a “sight of terror, foul and ugly” (XI. 464) or as being “all in tears... turned full sad” (XI. 673-74). As the visions continue, however, there comes a point where Michael reveals to Adam not only the flood that causes the “end of all [Adam’s] offspring” (XI. 755) but also the calm *after* the storm, that is, the moment wherein “the one just man alive ... save[s] himself and household from amidst / A world devote to universal rack” (XI. 818-19). In other words, Michael shows Adam a future beyond the devastation mankind must experience, suggesting the very structure of Michael’s vision as one of catharsis: in order for Adam to come out, redeemed and renewed, on the other side, he must first endure the “painful passages” (XI. 528) caused by his actions.

Interestingly, Milton uses the term “cataract” (XI. 824) to describe the rain from heaven “open[ing] [and] pour[ing]” (XI. 825) down onto the earth. The word “cataract,” here, explicitly refers to “the ‘flood-gates’ of heaven, viewed as keeping back the rain” (“cataract, n.” OED 1.a.). However, one could argue that “cataract” has a double meaning here, also referring to eyesight, which was undoubtedly a significant topic not only to *Paradise Lost* but to Milton himself as one who progressively lost his own sight. Indeed, a cataract is alternatively defined as the “opacity of the crystalline lens of the eye, ... producing more or less impairment of sight” (OED 4). If we consider that the word “cataract” referenced in this scene connotes both a floodgate and eyesight, it is plausible to envision the rain pouring down on earth as the tears of the worldly body crying, weeping for mankind. The figurative cataract is meant to keep the rain in heaven from pouring down onto earth, just as a physical cataract in the eye creates a film over the eye, thereby keeping the eye from seeing properly. However, in this micro/macrocosmic analogy, the opening of the floodgates of heaven precipitates a mirroring metaphorical change in Adam’s eyesight. Instead of blurring Adam’s vision, the *release* of the ‘cataract’ clarifies it so that Adam, having experienced and finally been purged of sorrow and defeat, is able to see the “[rain]bow” (XI. 865) before him and, thus, “revive / At this last sight” (XI. 871). In doing so, the final vision Michael bestows upon Adam reflects Adam himself, as one whose movement from sorrow to joy is achieved by crying his eyes clear. In doing so, like the film Michael removes from Adam’s

eyes that promised false idealism, the film of Adam's "cataracts" burst open (if we use the metaphor of a flood-gate) or clear (if we consider a real cataract in the eye) from the force of Adam's sorrow. In either case, what becomes evident is that the metaphorical cataract of Adam's eyes impairs his vision no longer, thereby allowing him to see the joy after the sorrow, the rainbow after the rain.

The emotional response to sorrow occurs most frequently in two ways in *Paradise Lost*: through the eyes as a kind of erotic melancholy, which I previously discussed, and through the mouth, in the form of sighing or exhaling. Explicit references to sighing or exhaling are symbolic of *sorrowful* rather than erotic melancholy, produced by the overabundance of black bile in the humors. The black bile in *Paradise Lost* could be interpreted as the Original Sin. Only once the "exhilarat[ing] vapour" (IX. 1047) caused by indulging in the forbidden fruit wears off do Adam and Eve "exhale" (IX. 1049) the "unkindly fumes" (IX. 1050) that have "played" (IX. 1048) with their spirits. The word "now" in "That with exhilarated vapour bland ... was *now* exhaled" (IX. 1049) distinguishes the past from the present moment, revealing that, all this time, the fiery passions of their indulgence have been situated strictly within the body until *now*. In this scene with Adam and Eve becoming aware of the effects of tasting the fruit, it is evident that the exhalation of pure melancholy (from having come down from their euphoria) functions as a self-conscious response to and negation of the extramission of erotic melancholy. By interpreting Milton's view of catharsis as a kind of "negative formula" (Entzminger 204) purging like passions, it is plausible to interpret the erotic melancholy Adam and Eve experience as the melancholy of similar "hue or quality" (Milton, Preface) that is used against – that, essentially, *negates* – and, thus, releases their sorrowful melancholy. Only after the effect has worn off can they exhale, thereby leaving them with a feeling of having woken up "As from unrest" (IX. 1052).

When Adam and Eve become conscious of the effect subsiding, their exhalation of the spirits could be interpreted as sorrowful sighing; like waking up from an unrestful sleep, Adam and Eve feel the effects of the "unkindly fumes" (IX. 1050) in their bodies. Their exhalation,

here, resembles Earth, who has “felt the wound” (IX. 782) of Adam and Eve’s actions, and Nature, whose “sighing” (IX. 783) and “groaning” (IX. 1001) prompts “some sad drops” (IX. 1002) to rain down onto the world. Nature is literally crying here, a cosmological, bodily phenomenon that can be interpreted as a figurative cry for help. That Adam and Eve exhale the fumes of the forbidden fruit, only to be left with minds “How darkened” (IX. 1054), not unlike the sky that “loured” (IX. 1002) immediately after they indulge themselves, suggests how the sighs they breathe out in Book Eleven are *their* cries for help, the prayers that they hope will save them from their own destruction. Expelling the spirits through sighing and groaning are the only ways in which Adam and Eve understand the magnitude of their actions.

Moreover, Seuntjens argues that when there is “talk of a movement of air” (44), one finds terms, such as sigh, wind, tempest, and flood, whereas when there is “talk of stagnating air, [one] find[s] damp, qualms, mist, and cloud” (44). The future events Michael reveals to Adam in Book Eleven can be interpreted by looking at the language used to describe the atmosphere surrounding the two individuals as either a movement or a stagnation of air. When Michael describes the universal flood that would “depopulat[e]” (XI. 756) the world, he says that “with black wings / ... all the clouds together drove / From under heaven” (XI. 38-40) and that “exhalation dusk and moist / Sent up amain” (XI. 741). Orgel and Goldberg footnote “exhalation dusk” to mean “Dark fog” (294), which is an evocative term arguably suggesting that fog is the exhaled vapours of the earthly ‘body’. Michael goes on to describe that the sky was “[l]ike a dark ceiling” (XI. 741-42), causing a tempest of rain until “the earth / No more was seen” (XI. 743-44). The emphasis on “dark” here arguably suggests that the exhaled dusk he describes is reminiscent of the effect, even appearance, of nature sighing out a mass of black bile. Moreover, the “exhalation dusk” is arguably the outward manifestation of melancholy: the twilight sky casts a gloomy shadow over mankind just as the flood symbolizes “another flood, / Of tears and sorrow” (XI. 756-57). The tempestuous atmosphere reflects the inner turmoil of mankind after the fall. In addition, the clouds in this future scene are described paradoxically as having “black wings” (XI. 738), yet “hovering” (XI. 739). The clouds, here, are the epitome of the stagnation of

air, returning to Seuntjens' description, as a mass of vapor that has been given the capability of flight but not actually being able to go anywhere. Indeed, as if it is stuck in place.

In comparison, like Adam and Eve who must first feel the wound of their actions before humbling themselves for salvation, Adam must see the destruction of mankind in the flood before he can see both the metaphorical and *literal* clear sky, as I have already suggested. After the flood, Adam sees that the flood has “now abated” (XI. 841) because the “clouds [have] fled / Driven [away] by a keen north wind” (XI. 841). Worthy of note, here, is the use of the word “now”, which recalls when Adam and Eve “now exhaled” (IX. 1049) the spirits of the fruit; both uses indicate a shift in emotion or humoral disposition of Adam and Eve and the environment around them. Moreover, rather than remaining stagnant above the ground, the clouds move in this moment. Indeed, the use of the terms “fled” and “driven” together suggests that the clouds do not even move of their own free will, but are driven *out* by the wind. Moreover, while the adjective “keen” is likely meant to mean merely a biting wind (“keen, adj.” *OED* 4.b.), perhaps one could also suggest that the term enables the wind with the *keenness* (“keen, adj.” *OED* 6.a.) to drive the clouds away. While I hesitate to infer that there is a stark dichotomy between stagnant and moving clouds in Book Eleven, I think it is worth pointing out that the movement of air changes, or at the very least contributes to, our understanding of what *Paradise Lost* may be conveying by the end of Book Eleven regarding the relationship between the natural world and humankind.

When “a [rain]bow / Conspicuously” (XI. 865-66) appears out of a “dewy cloud” (XI. 865), one might argue that the suggestion of the movement of air as an exhalation of emotion necessary for one's salvation collapses in on itself, since the presence of a cloud earlier in my paper symbolizes the stagnation of air. However, several times throughout Book Eleven, including in this moment with the rainbow appearing “[c]onspicuously” (XI. 866) out of a cloud, Milton's language evokes an image of expulsion even when it first does not seem obvious. Despite the rainbow being “*in* the cloud” (XI. 865; emphasis mine), the adjective “[c]onspicuous” (XI. 866) suggests that the rainbow is clearly visible to Adam and, thus, in fact,

pouring *outward* beyond the cloud towards earth. Indeed, Milton's use of verbs and adverbs are specific and, thus, significant to this idea of expelling or extracting one thing *out* of another. Just as the cloud is being driven out of the way of the ark and mankind, the rainbow bursts out of the dewy cloud, inspiring Adam's joy to "br[ea]k forth" (XI. 869). Quite simplistically, this vision of "rain" (XI. 743) clouds turning into a rainbow infers the necessity of the clouds, and of nature more generally, partaking in this cathartic process of 'crying' to "purge" (XI. 900) sadness from the earthly body and restore a state of equilibrium. Indeed, this atmospheric transformation results from a shift in what the cloud itself expels: at first rain and then a rain-"*bow* [of] three listed colours gay" (XI. 865-66; emphasis mine). This image of the natural world responding to the fall recalls my earlier discussion of the "cataracts of heaven ... open[ing] on[to] the earth" (XI. 824-25) and pouring forth its own tears. Thinking in these terms, perhaps the tears flooding the earth serve as a baptism of sorts, allowing mankind's sins to, quite literally, be washed away.

The use of adverbs to convey an expelling of air or substance pervades Book Eleven, starting with the very fact that God calls Michael down to "drive *out* the sinful pair" (XI. 105) from Paradise. Immediately after Eve "pluck[s]" (IX. 781) and eats the forbidden fruit off the tree of knowledge, the Earth is personified as having "felt the wound" (IX. 782) and nature as "sighing [for] all [that] was lost" (IX. 783-84).² The colon separating "she plucked, she ate" (IX. 781) from "Earth felt the wound" (IX. 782) suggests the direct influence Eve's actions have on Earth's countenance, with the former being the direct cause of the latter. Adam's betrayal of God's orders produces a similar effect on the natural world, wherein Earth is described as "trembl[ing] from her entrails, as again / In pangs" (IX. 1000-01) while nature "g[ives] a second groan" (IX. 1001) of sorrow. Milton makes the Earth a sentient being that reflects the loss between humanity and the environment, or, more specifically, humanity and Mother Earth. It is, arguably, plausible to suggest that this wound the Earth feels and the sigh Nature exhales in their personified forms symbolize not only their response to having to expel Adam and Eve from

² When I talk about the personified Earth, I simply use the term "Earth" and when I refer to the earth more generally, I include "the" and do not capitalize "earth". When I am consciously referring to the anthropomorphizing of the Earth, I say "the Earth".

Paradise, but also their physiological expelling of the couple. My repeated use of the verb “expel” here is intentional, for “to expel” is “to drive or thrust out” (“expel, v.” *OED* 1.a.), which can be interpreted in two ways, both of which are significant here: (1) in terms of expelling breath out of the body and (2) of expelling the bodies of Adam and Eve out of Paradise. Even though Adam and Eve do not physically leave Paradise until the end of Book Twelve, I suggest that the repeated inferences to their removal in Book Eleven introduce their forthcoming departure and shed light on how we might further interpret the relationship between Nature and mankind after the fall.

Leah Marcus further divides this vision of expulsion of Adam and Eve from Paradise in two ways: one that identifies God as the sole individual who can “unleash cosmic discord” (98) and orchestrate the expiration of their time in Paradise and another that identifies nature and man’s relationship as entirely separate from God. The latter perspective is called the “vitalist materialist” (Marcus 99) perspective and the one that is integral for the purposes of my paper. Vitalist materialism follows that objects, like the Earth, can experience emotions of their “own accord” (Marcus 98). While one could argue that God enforces the literal expulsion of Adam and Eve from Paradise, it is Nature that *physiologically* expels them from her environment. Thus, it is equally plausible to interpret Nature’s sighing as symbolic of the physical expulsion Nature must also enforce upon Adam and Eve; in other words, the forcing of spirits out of the ‘body’ of Nature manifests into the literal forcing of the (di)spirited Adam and Eve out of Paradise. Despite God’s inherently significant presence within *Paradise Lost*, it is worthy to note the amount of time Milton takes on establishing the causal relationship between the natural world and mankind, the very perspective that, as Leah Marcus suggests, often functions counter to divine intervention. It is curious, then, how such a perspective would contribute to Milton’s argument on justifying the ways of God to man. I suggest that a plausible answer to this is in large part attributable to Milton’s depiction of the Earth and Nature not merely as sentient beings but also as those that “play a dynamic role within God’s plot” (DuRocher 94) and, more specifically, within the creation of mankind.

In *Paradise Lost*, Earth is frequently not only personified as a sentient being, but is also gendered as a woman, often described in terms of “her fertile womb” (VII. 454). It is this “fertile womb” that mankind is being driven out of, protracting what Ken Hiltner interprets as a kind of birthing of mankind (50). Hiltner interprets Earth “trembling from her entrails / ... In pangs” (XI. 1000-01) as representative of childbirth, wherein the birth of a child leaves a literal “wound” (XI. 782) (an empty womb) within the mother and, thus, a loss of connection *between* mother and child, Earth and mankind. The terms “entrails” and “pangs” reinforce this interpretation of Earth’s response to the fall as a scene of childbirth.³ Indeed, the loss of connection between Earth and mankind after the fall symbolizes the loss of connection between mother and child after birth. Since Hiltner argues that “the birth of each human child is going to be ... a reenactment of the events of the Fall” (50), it is plausible to suggest that Nature experiences two falls and, thus, two births in *Paradise Lost*: the moment after Adam and Eve eat the forbidden fruit and when they are told of their banishment from Paradise. In both scenes, Adam and Eve are being further separated from and lost to Nature.

However, Hiltner argues that these losses of connection are not meant to punish, but, rather, to “remind, so that each new generation might be brought forth in the memory of what befell the Earth through our Original Sin” (50). Interestingly, after the sinful couple eats from the forbidden fruit, God reminds Eve and Adam of their actions in Book Ten by making future childbirth painful (“children thou shalt bring / In sorrow forth”) (X. 193-95) and by making Adam “earn [his] bread” (X. 1054-55) with manual labour. In other words, God incites physical labour (childbirth and manual labour) to remind mankind of what happens when mankind loses connection with its Mother Earth. By making future generations exercise laborious activity that would inevitably cause moments of sighing and groaning, like Earth ‘giving birth’ to mankind, Milton justifies God’s ways to man. It is only through the exhaustion that arises from laborious activity and the *exhalation* of this exhaustion, manifested in a sigh or a groan, that mankind can be reminded of the significance and consequences of their actions. In doing so, Hiltner’s

³ According to Hiltner, Milton associates the term ‘entrails’ with “birth canal” (98) in *Paradise Lost*. Moreover, the seventeenth-century understanding of “pangs” was closely linked to “*childbirth* pangs” (Hiltner 49; emphasis mine).

interpretation aligns with the process of catharsis as one that, despite likely being uncomfortable at best and painful at worst, is necessary. Milton repeatedly places emotions or experiences beside one another, in a kind of “imitat[ion]” (Milton, Preface), so as to counteract them, as I have tried to suggest throughout my paper. Here is no different, for God bestows upon Adam and Eve the very physical experience (labour) the Earth experienced when ‘birthing’ the couple, to recall Richard DuRocher’s point (101), and then not only seeing but also *feeling* them sin.

Yet, rather than considering God’s request as punishment for their sins, if we follow Hiltner’s suggestions, perhaps it is plausible to see Adam and Eve’s newly labored life as a cathartic opportunity. Indeed, despite the pain of labour, it is a necessary process to purify one’s soul. Without knowing the experience of labour and pain, how can they expect to rid themselves of such pain? That God forces Adam and Eve to experience physical labour is not to punish them but to, in fact, purge and purify their spirits of the spiritual burden, a sensation of the same “hue and quality” (Milton, Preface) as labour, afflicting their hearts. As Francis Bacon wrote in his *Sylva Sylvarum* (1626), “Sighing is caused by the drawing of a quantity of breath *to refresh the heart that laboureth*” (qtd. in Tsentourou 43; emphasis mine). Only once mankind begins to “refresh the heart that laboureth”, as Adam and Eve do when they “repent” (XI. 1) to God in Book Eleven, can they begin to repair this severed connection between Nature and mankind. Their “groans of labour” (Tsentourou 264) are a necessary but “temporary circumstance” (264) they must endure before they themselves can experience a kind of rebirth.

Adam and Eve’s cathartic sighs seem to do the trick, as God vouches “not to blot out mankind” (XI. 891), nor “destroy / The earth again by flood, /... nor [let] rain ... drown the world / With man therein or beast” (XI. 892-95). Indeed, despite being expelled from Paradise, Adam and Eve are promised a “far happier place / Than this of Eden” (XII. 463-465), beginning to foster a new attachment to the environment, the process Ken Hiltner deems as necessary in order for mankind to repair its relationship with Nature. Conveying the physiological effects of Adam and Eve’s sinful actions, Book Eleven prompts the beginning of their rebirth, and justifies, through catharsis, that sin can be purged, the soul purified. Their sighs conflate the exhaling of

pain and sorrow with the humility of begging for forgiveness, thereby suggesting that sighing is a necessary moment for Adam and Eve, not only in order to feel the wound of their actions, but, consequently, to purge themselves of the black bile that is their sinfulness. Since sighing within *Paradise Lost* suggests a loss of connection between Earth and mankind, perhaps it is plausible to argue that Adam and Eve's sighing, like Nature's sighing at the loss of connection between herself and mankind, is a moment in which the couple must lose connection with in order to repair themselves, thereby becoming responsible for their own rebirth into the world. Despite being mankind's "lingering parents" (XII. 638), Adam and Eve leave Paradise, each holding a hand of "the hastening angel" (XII. 637) like children being guided out of their most cherished playground. Yet, in this endearing final scene, I would argue that Milton conveys Adam and Eve in their newly reborn states – perhaps shedding a few "natural tears" (XII. 645) for their departed Paradise, but "wip[ing] them soon" (XII. 645) away after having released the sorrow from their bodies. In his epic narrative, *Paradise Lost*, Milton, as Whitney B. Taylor evocatively suggests, "breathe[s] out a poem that is a place of 'respiration'" (19) directly into the heart and lungs of his readers, and, in doing so, having filled their lungs, gives readers something to sigh about.

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Even in Milton's Good God, Dennis Danielson's sweeping book-length defense of Milton's theodicy, the disparity between God's treatment of angels and humans is left untouched. Therefore, all are predestined, humans after the fall and angels from the very beginning (72-3). In the same breath, God pays lip service to freewill, stating that "I put not forth my goodness," while simultaneously precluding the conditions necessary to its existence, revealing that he is "Boundless," "uncircumscribed," "present in all things." Although he claims to "put not forth [his] goodness," this omnipresence seems to imply that all things are permeated with God, and therefore, subject to his will, a suggestion confirmed in the seemingly predestinarian statement that "what I will is Fate." Milton's Paradise Lost is rarely read today. But this epic poem, 350 years old this month, remains a work of unparalleled imaginative genius that shapes English literature even now. In more than 10,000 lines of blank verse, it tells the story of the war for heaven and of man's expulsion from Eden. A committed republican, he rose to public prominence in the ferment of England's bloody civil war: two months after the execution of King Charles I in 1649, Milton became a diplomat for the new republic, with the title of Secretary for Foreign Tongues. (He wrote poetry in English, Greek, Latin and Italian, prose in Dutch, German, French and Spanish, and read Hebrew, Aramaic and Syriac). John Milton, Paradise Lost, 2nd edn. (London: Samuel Simmons, 1674). A transcription by Roy Flannagan of the second (1674) edition in John Milton's Complete Poetical Works Reproduced in Photographic Facsimile. A Critical Text Edition, ed. Harris Francis Fletcher, III (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1948). PR 3551 F52 Robarts Library. As published in Ian Lancashire, in collaboration with John Bradley, Willard McCarty, Michael Stairs, and T. R. Wooldridge, Using TACT and Electronic Texts: Text-Analysis Computing Tools Vers. 146 Hard to belief may seem; yet this will Prayer, 147 Or one short sigh of humane breath, up-borne. 148 Ev'n to the Seat of God. For since I saught.