Wound and Weight: “Cumbrous Flesh” and Pain in Paradise Lost and Paradise Regain’d

John Robert Jenkins

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Abstract

The seventeenth-century poet, civil servant, and prose polemicist John Milton is well-known for his renditions of Satan and Jesus in his poems *Paradise Lost* and *Paradise Regain'd*. While scholars maintain a clear difference between Satan and Jesus, there is a surprising and unnoticed relationship between the fallen angel and the Son of God. While Milton shies away from explicitly illustrating Jesus’ crucifixion, the pain and weight of Jesus’ body hanging from the cross cannot go unillustrated. Left in the void and searching for a vessel to signify this touchstone of Christian theology, Milton employs Satan as a perfect candidate. His division from angels and the pain and weight of his physical body suggests that Satan endures the pain displaced by Milton's underrepresented crucifixion. Milton displaces the crucifixion, favoring a fluctuating divine and human ideal of Jesus, but he places the weight and pain Jesus would have endured on Satan. Observing Satan as a retainer of the pain displaced by Jesus changes our notions of Satan in Milton's microcosm. This paper will specifically detail how the pain and weight of a corporeal frame effectively blurs Satan’s role in Milton’s poetry.

*Keywords*: pain, bodies, weight, crucifixion, Satan, Jesus, *Paradise Lost*, *Paradise Regain’d*, John Milton
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Wound and Weight: “Cumbrous Flesh” and Pain in *Paradise Lost* and *Paradise Regain’d*

by

John Robert Jenkins

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Oil on wood. 31 x 100cm. Kuntstmuseum, Basle

Figure 2: Michelangelo. *Pieta*; 1498-1500
marble. 174 cm x 195 cm. St. Peter’s Basilica, Vatican City
The Passion of Christ is not prefigured only by the sacrifice of Abraham; it is surrounded by all the glories of torture and its innumerable dreams; Tubal the blacksmith and Isaiah’s wheel take their places around the Cross, forming beyond all the lessons of the sacrifice the fantastic tableau of savagery, of tormented bodies, and of suffering. Thus the image is burdened with supplementary meanings, and forced to express them.

—Michel Foucault, *Madness & Civilization*

‘Look,’ he says, still speaking in a whisper. He throws his head up. There is a long scar going across his throat. Now I understand what he means – from ear to ear. A long, thick, white scar. It’s strange that I haven’t noticed it before

—Jean Rhys, *Good Morning, Midnight*

In *Paradise Lost (PL)* and *Paradise Regain'd (PR)* by John Milton, the poet ultimately neglects to portray Jesus’ crucifixion fully as it is depicted in the Bible. *PL* makes a small, unsubstantial reference to the crucifixion in Book XII’s preface and "incompletely circles it before turning [our] attention to other matters" (Schoenfelt 581). In *PR*, although Jesus appears in the flesh, displays pangs of hunger as he dwells the desert and comes toe-to-toe with Satan, his body emerges unscathed. In avoiding the account of the crucifixion in the gospels, Milton also shies away from the manifold of explicit artistic renderings of this event that predate his poetry. Hans Holbein’s 1521 painting of Jesus (Fig. 1) and Michelangelo’s 1499 sculpture of the same (Fig. 2) illustrate the consequences of inhabiting the corporeal form—the price Jesus paid for humanity’s sins. These renditions suggest art is capable, yet Milton avoids any commensurately substantial endeavor to depict this Christian touchstone.
While changes in religious belief, time, geography, and other variables contribute to the varied interpretations of Jesus’ crucifixion as depicted in these paintings, Samuel Smith maintains that "Milton's decision not to dwell on the cross or the details of the crucifixion in his poetry does not manifest a rejection of the cross as God's means of effecting atonement"; instead, he suggests the atonement is fulfilled through "substitution" (5). Although Smith’s observations are valid, pain does not vanish or become nullified. As John Donne remarks in his poem "The Cross,” “who from the picture would avert his eye, / How would he fly his pains who there did die?” (7-8). Donne demonstrates an awareness of the way that the power of spectacle and pain surrounding the crucifixion craves representation. Following Donne’s testament, Jesus' "pain" finds placement in Milton's poetry. The physical makeup and difference between angelic and satanic bodies, Satan's wound and the aspects of weight dispersed throughout PL and PR, together with his ontological descent throughout PL, satiate the unillustrated pain Jesus endures in the Bible during his crucifixion and further complicate Satan's role in Milton's poetry. Satan does not replace Jesus or become holy through the displacement of pain. Instead, closely aligned, Milton's relationship with these two figures becomes complicated and plunged into a gray area worthy of further study Satan absorbs and displays the pain and suffering neglected by Milton’s Jesus. Satan effectively maintains these physical symptoms which remain a touchstone in Christian theology: a body writhing in pain.

Before observing Satan's descent and the wound he sustains through physicality, we should note the distinction between angelic and Satanic bodies. Stephen M. Fallon maintains that as with Hobbes and Henry More, Milton’s conception of angels derives from his ontological assumptions…that [derive] from Raphael’s speech on the “one first matter”…
Milton’s angels are not Aquinas’s disembodied spirits; their substance, like their mode of reason, differs from man’s “but in degree, of kind the same” (141-2).

Fallon’s position suggests that both angelic and satanic bodies maintain a materiality in which they mirror one another. However, Karma DeGruy further elucidates Fallon’s vision with a difference, drawing a clear distinction between these two types of bodies: “although fallen angels may have grosser or thicker bodies [than angels], they still possess fluid bodies and may change shape at will, and unfallen angels are equally material,” if generally more beautiful (120).

DeGruy points to a feature of satanic bodies that not only aligns with Fallon’s contentions and Milton’s theology but also goes a step further. By considering them “thicker,” DeGruy produces an image of satanic bodies with a skin-like outer layer, capable of enduring a physical wound—a feature essential to Satan's role in PL and absent from angelic bodies. DeGruy drags satanic bodies a step below angels. Their dragging is symptomatic of their fall, yet DeGruy still maintains that “angels are equally material.”

However, Milton abhors such a reading and suggests through a contradiction a more startling difference between angelic and Satanic bodies. While Fallon and DeGruy establish a concrete, well-debased dichotomy between angelic and satanic bodies, Satan is completely divided from his ethereal body through a contradiction developed by Milton. As Satan's wound heals in Book VI of PL, Milton tries to establish an image of Satan which continues to align Satan with angelic bodies:

Yet soon he heal’d; for Spirits that live throughout
Vital in every part, not as frail man
In Entrails, Heart or Head, Liver or Reines,
Cannot but by annihilating die;
Nor in thir liquid texture mortal wound

Receive, no more then can the fluid Aire:

All Heart they live, all Head, all Eye, all Eare,

All Intellect, all Sense, and as they please,

They Limb themselves, and colour, shape or size

Assume, as likes them best, condense or rare. (344-53)

Milton claims that spirits—whether angelic or satanic—are "not as frail man." He suggests that angelic and satanic bodies maintain an image quite consonant with the assertions made by Fallon and DeGruy. While Satan remains semi-divine in certain ways—he changes shape and size, and “cannot but by annihilating die”—God indicates that facets of corporeality plague the fallen angel, and he appears through his fall from heaven quite different from angelic bodies.

However, Milton establishes the true fallen nature of his fallen angel through a contradiction with Milton’s God character. In Book III of PL, Milton employs God to illustrate the fallen nature of Satan—unnoticed by DeGruy and Fallon. Speaking to the Son (Jesus), God says, “he may know how frail/ His fall’n condition is” (179-80). God’s contradiction suggests that Satan is more debased and "not as frail [as] man." Through this contradiction, God establishes an image of satanic bodies not altogether consistent with Fallon and DeGruy’s contentions. He effectively dampens the apparent ethereal light which likens him to angels and closely aligns him with humans. Milton’s contradiction suggests that Satan is like a frail man, which equates him further with the biblical Jesus whose flesh is systematically wounded.

Satan’s frailty marks his material debasement, and his capacity for being wounded—a departure from his angelic counterpart. In Book VI of PL, Satan incurs a material, unfatal wound
during the battle in Heaven. The Archangel Michael lifts the sword which was "giv'n him tempered so, that neither keen/Nor solid might resist that edge" (6.322-23) and cuts into Satan. The blade effortlessly glides into his material body, and a painful wound emerges:

But with swift wheele reverse, deep entring shar'd
All his right side; then Satan first knew pain,
And writh'd him to and fro convolv'd; so sore
The griding sword with discontinuous wound
Pass'd through him, but th' Ethereal substance clos'd
Not long divisible, and from the gash
A stream of Nectarous humor issuing flow'd
Sanguin, such as Celestial Spirits may bleed,
And all his Armour staind ere while so bright. (6.326-34)

The continuous application of caesura and enjambment suggests that Satan’s pain is convulsing, looking for the closure of the open wound, but each partial stoppage breaks; the flow of pain and blood issues forth. The pain semi-stops in line 327 and 333, but the gush continues until 334, where the blood curdles and stains his armor. The flowing enjambment also suggests that Satan’s nectarous humor is flowing retroactive to the line signifying the ebb and flow of blood. This deep wound, when “Satan first knew pain,” marks the first instantiation of his fallen body. The first instance of anything, especially pain, is a significant event, and Satan’s wound is no exception. As Elaine Scarry suggests, “physical pain has no voice, but when it, at last, finds a voice, it begins to tell a story” (3). Satan’s wound is the beginning of his story, the story of his fall as a pawn in God’s game. Satan is effectively the lost piece required for atonement: he carries the pain.
The recurring nature of Satan’s wound is highlighted by Milton’s adjective choice. Milton describes the wound as “discontinuous,” which is defined in two ways: 1) "producing division between the parts of something; (hence) torn apart; open, gaping," which fulfills the visual and physical traits of a gaping wound. 2) "not continuous in time; occurring or existing at intervals; intermittent" (OED; my emphasis). Satan's wound, while repairable (Milton notes that "th' Ethereal substance clos'd/ Not long divisible") repeatedly opens like scar tissue unable to fully mend. His wound remains in flux and forever plagues Satan—a constant reminder of his epic transgression and the requirement for bodily pain displaced by Milton. The structure of the previously cited lines also conforms to the second definition. While the lines close at many times, they reopen, and meaning pours out.

Satan’s torn flesh and the flowing nectar further develop a startling likeness between Satan and the biblical Jesus. Satan’s scar, his wound on “all his right side,” has “[an] underlying logic, the secret code, registered in [this] bodily mark” (Greenblatt 222). What is the secret in Satan’s wound? Satan’s wound represents more than his fallen nature. The wound on Satan’s “right side” mirrors Jesus’s lance wound. John the Apostle writes: “but when they came to Jesus and saw that he was already dead, they did not break his legs, but one soldier thrust his lance into his side, and immediately blood and water flowed out (19:32-34). While the implements do not coincide, and which side of Jesus’ torso is pierced is unspecified, the physical nature of the wound remains. These mirroring wounds are not a coincidence. Milton deliberately punctures Satan to inhabit the pain he withholds from Jesus. He punishes Satan and from his body the “stream of Nectarous humor issuing flow’d Sanguin” resembles the blood pouring from the biblical Jesus. "Sanguin" is defined as “of or pertaining to blood; consisting of or containing blood” (OED); Satan’s humor appears human in origin.
The human-like sanguine nectar flowing from his wound does not dissipate; it stains Satan’s armor. Milton's "bright[ening]" of the focal point suggests that Satan's ethereality further collapses, and his garments are stainable. His bodily transformation is defined by the capability to be stained and harbor an imprint which the liquid, transmutable texture of angelic bodies cannot. The stain marks not only his material debasement, unlike the materiality of angels, but also closely resembles, like a mark of otherness, the inscription Pontius Pilate orders to be placed on the cross, which reads, “Jesus Of Nazareth The King Of The Jews” (John 19:19), or the crown of thorns placed on his head. Each mark on the wearer signifies an aspect of otherness—a reminder of their position. Satan’s mark signifies his position in Milton’s microcosm as a body capable of injury, much like the inscription above Jesus. Satan's wound also proves his armor is useless, if not absurd, and the blood stain suggests its impracticality compared to Michael’s sword. As Dobranski suggests, "while some seventeenth-century soldiers worried that metal fragments from armor could aggravate gun-shot wounds, the decline of defensive weapons primarily stemmed from their inconvenience and clumsiness" (494).

Satan's stained defensive armaments not only represent his debased, clumsy nature but also align him with the biblical figure of Cain. His stain appears like the Mark of Cain, indicating otherness and the body expelled from Eden because he lied to God about murdering his brother. Cain says to God in Genesis, “behold, thou hast driven me out this day from the face of the earth; and from thy face shall I be hid; and I shall be a fugitive and a vagabond in the earth; and it shall come to pass, that every one that findeth me shall slay me” (4:14). But God abhors escape through death: “and the Lord said unto him, therefore whosoever slayeth Cain, vengeance shall be taken on him sevenfold. And the Lord set a mark upon Cain, lest any finding him should kill him” (4:16). Like Cain, Satan is marked, and forced to live and dwell within the body capable of
carrying his sin and incapable of death because “vengeance shall be taken on him sevenfold.” Furthermore, the mark of Cain can be seen as a sign of love for the fallen angel. By marking Satan like Cain, others will reconsider annihilating him. Thus, the stain is a way of preserving Satan’s condition and further suggests he is a vessel for pain.

Yet Satan’s armor does not stop at the body plates. Satan’s shield further suggests his corporeal frame, and further elucidates a vision of Satan as a vessel. The position and massive size of Satan’s shield continue to drag the fallen angel from the ethereal realm to possessing the body of a “frail man.” The shield is reminder of the war in Heaven and his new material condition. Milton writes,

\begin{quote}
He scarce had ceas’t when the superiour Fiend
Was moving toward the shore; his ponderous shield
Ethereal temper, massy, large and round,
Behind him cast; the broad circumference
Hung on his shoulders like the Moon, whose Orb
Through Optic Glass the Tuscan Artist views
At Ev’ning from the top of Fesole,
Or in Valdarno, to descry new Lands,
Rivers or Mountains in her spotty Globe. (1.283-91)
\end{quote}

The size of Satan’s shield, equated with the Moon, suggests not only its massive dimensions but also its materiality. Milton deems the shield “massy, large and round,” and the commas strain each word. The linguistic weight of Satan’s shield affects the iambic pentameter, and the reader feels the drudge. The shield, “hung on his shoulders,” suggests it is a hindrance, and useless. The weight also pulls down the lines; the enjambment is no longer flowing, and implies that a
crippled and wounded body is being dragged “to descry new Lands” and a new material predicament. The war in Heaven is over, but, like Ulysses returning from Troy, the shield remains a reminder that Satan’s material predicament is far from over. The adventure has just begun, and God is not finished with Satan. Satan must house aspects of pain, regardless of whether he understands his plight.

The mass of Satan’s shield further illustrates his otherness because it likens the fallen angel to a tortoise. As Dobranski notes, “wearing his shield on his back, crawling from lake to land, slowly moving with ‘uneasy steps’ [I, 295], Satan momentarily resembles—to compare great things with small—one of the amphibious tortoises described in seventeenth-century animal encyclopedias” (500). The resemblance between Satan and the tortoise suggests Satan is weighed down by materiality and keeps his likeness to sea creatures—including the serpent. The shell of a tortoise also, if pulled apart, can be seen as a possible vessel. Seen as a vessel, Satan is capable of holding and carrying material weight. Likewise, beneath his shield coverings secrets remain hidden from the reader, perhaps covering other wounds.

The sheer material weight of Satan’s body and shield as he limps off the burning lake illustrates the vital aspects of corporeality neglected by Milton in his portrayal of Jesus in PR. In PR, Jesus is never burdened by weight. He is light, especially when he displays his divinity for Satan on his pinnacle:

There stand, if thou wilt stand; to stand upright

Will ask thee skill; I to thy Fathers house

Have brought thee, and highest plac’l, highest is best,

Now shew thy Progeny; if not to stand,

Cast thy self down; safely if Son of God:
For it is written, He will give command
Concerning thee to his Angels, in thir hands
They shall up lift thee, lest at any time
Thou chance to dash thy foot against a stone.
To whom thus Jesus: also it is written,
Tempt not the Lord thy God, he said and stood. (4.551-61)

In this display, Jesus is unburdened by the weight effectually dragging Satan’s body downward. The effects of physicality, critical to the biblical conception of atonement, appear absent from the carrier of “the mass of sinful flesh” (162). Jesus is incapable of carrying excessive weight. “There stand, if thou wilt stand,” Satan remarks, and Jesus fulfills the command. Following Satan’s words, “he stood,” and floats when the weight of his mortal frame should throw him Earthward. Jesus’ display is also heretical: “also it is written, / Tempt not the Lord thy God,” he says. He fulfills a variation of Eve’s temptation in Paradise. Jesus, like Eve, effectively obeys Satan’s wishes, and, again, performs a feet of divinity which further drags the supposed Son of God from his corporeal frame, necessary for atonement, to the ethereal realm long before his death. Milton’s Jesus is at odds with the humility and weight plaguing the biblical Jesus. Satan seems more and more closely aligned with the biblical Jesus.

The physical peculiarities of the biblical Jesus are better understood by observing visual representations of the body by Early Modern artists.¹ The Body of the Dead Christ in the Tomb (1521) by the German painter Hans Holbein the Younger is a vital image to examine when referencing the biblical Jesus and his corporeality. Holbein’s artistic rendering of Jesus’ body suggests that art is capable of illustrating pain and suffering. It creates a visible reminder of

¹ While these pre-Miltonic images are easily disputed for their use-value. These images perform and maintain the consequences of inhabiting a corporeal form.
pain—a necessary illustration neglected by Milton. Painted with oil on wood and measuring 31x100cm, the painting shows Jesus of Nazareth stretched out in his tomb after the crucifixion, which according to the Gospel of Matthew, was “at a place called Golgotha,” which means “the place of the skull” (27:33). Holbein's gruesome depiction of Jesus is a disconcerting reminder that the body of Jesus was not immune to the physical symptoms of pain, which are so nearly absent in Milton’s poems.

![Image](image.png)

**Fig 1.** Hans Holbein the Younger. *Dead Christ*. 1521-1522. Oil on wood. 31 x 100cm. Kuntstmuseum, Basle

Jesus’ face, void of life, slack-jawed, with eyes fixated skyward, reminds the onlooker of rigor mortis. His lean torso depicts the subtle but essential segment of flesh gouged from a lance, mirroring Satan’s wound in Book VI. Laying at his sides, his hands bear the markings of the nails that pierced his flesh. The confinement of the box echoes the feeling of breathlessness in the thick air surrounding Satan in Hell. Jesus’s torn flesh appears a deep red, resembling the sanguine humor pouring out of Satan’s wound. But moving from the epicenter of these mortal wounds, the surrounding tissue is gangrenous: Jesus is decomposing; he is body; he is dead.

Michelangelo’s *Pietà* further elucidates the correlation between embodiment and wounding. As Giorgio Vasari suggests, it “stressed [the] transaction between surface and depth” (Sawday 85). While the relationship between Milton and Michelangelo’s work remains underdeveloped, the sculpture creates an awareness of the image that Milton lacks in writing about Jesus.
The Pietà depicts the same physical, earthly body that Holbein presents, even though there is no color. While lacking the colored variations to illustrate the rotting, gangrenous corpse, Michelangelo’s Jesus conveys the physical weight lost to paint on wood. The mass of this medium—6,700 pounds—deepens the immensity of this body, like Satan’s immense body in PL (which I will come to further on). The drooping body illustrates the disparity between the biblical idea of Jesus and Milton’s character. Milton’s Jesus effortlessly floats, exemplifying his divinity while unsuccessfully displaying the qualms of “cumbrous flesh.” Milton’s Jesus never feels or embodies the powerful predicament of his incarnation. He shies away from the brutal and torturous images mankind’s’ redemption hinges on. The Mother of Jesus drags the body and flesh of Jesus back to Earth. Draped in her arms, lying amongst folds of linen, the bodily expression of Jesus suggests lifelessness.
Looking at these early modern illustrations of Jesus supplies an image of Jesus coincident with the biblical accounts and with commonly held ideas regarding the crucifixion. While we have no way of knowing Milton’s personal connection with this painting and this sculpture, the grim and striking vision of Jesus illuminated in them remained a touchstone of Christian theology regardless of Milton’s iconoclastic tendencies. He must have been aware of the capabilities of art to illustrate Jesus’ death. Some critics argue that Milton’s iconoclasm should deter us from looking at these images and comparing them to Milton’s verbal representation. However, Daniel Shore argues against Milton's iconoclasm. He writes, "far from destroying idols, Milton seeks to capture and preserve them under judgement, investing them with poetic care even as he hollows them out from the inside" (23). Milton's image of Jesus “capture[s] and preserve[s]” facets of his body clearly illustrated by Holbein and Michelangelo, but the crucifixion and body in pain remain absent in PL and PR. The whole purpose of the incarnation is death: Jesus’ incarnation allows his destruction of the "mass of sinful flesh." Milton himself remarks in *De Doctrina Christiana* that "the Incarnation of Christ by which he, since he was God, assumed human nature and was made flesh and, as a result, did not leave off being numerically one, this Incarnation Theologians deem to be far and away the greatest mystery of our religion”—a position that Hillier calls "the impenetrability of the Incarnation" (19). Therefore, it is increasingly odd to see Milton tread lightly past the crucifixion: he understood that Jesus “was made flesh.” Regardless of deeming it “a mystery," the body of Jesus remains.

The results of Jesus’ incarnation illustrated by Holbein and Michelangelo deepen the relationship between weight, body, and atonement. Speaking to Satan in Book VI, Belial continues to relay the importance of weight and physicality, a feature of the cannonballs the devils fire at God’s regiments of angels during the war in Heaven:
Leader, the terms we sent were terms of weight,
Of hard contents, and full of force urg’d home,
Such as we might perceive amus’d them all,
And stumbl’d many, who receives them right,
Had need from head to foot well understand;
Not understood, this gift they have besides,
They shew us when our foes walk not upright. (621-7)

Like the engagement between Jesus and his atonement, the terms of the devils’ engagement with angels are saturated in weight. The end-stops punctuating the end of each line look and feel like weight abruptly ending the flow of poetry. Belial is confident of these set “terms” of weight, which ultimately do not remain. Moments later, angels hurl hills at the devils and reintroduce the weight the devils try to purge. The weight behind these cannonballs scares the angels, and possibly suggests the same fear and anxiety angels would display while observing Jesus on the cross. Not much scares or throws angels off their balance, but the physical weight seems to fulfill their greatest fears: gross material weight.

After Belial notes the importance of this displaced weight effectively thrown at their counterparts, the angels retaliate and re-introduce the weight ineffectively dispersed by Satan and his devils:

Thir arms away they threw, and to the Hills
(For Earth hath this variety from Heav’n
Of pleasure situate in Hill and Dale)
Light as the Lightning glimps they ran, they flew,
From thir foundations loosning to and fro
They pluckt the seated Hills with all thir load,
Rocks, Water, Woods, and by the shaggie tops
Up lifting bore them in thir hands: Amaze,
Be sure, and terrour seis’d the rebel Host,
When coming toward them so dread they saw

The bottom of the Mountains upward turn’d (6.639-49)

God's angels revert to material war to match their adversaries, after disposing of their heavenly weapons. Mystical armaments are no longer viable, and Milton even marks Heaven's physical features by arranging his note in parentheses, which look like the "Hill and Dale." The angels are seen rocking the hills "to and fro" and using their physical might to extract and lob the material. Their return fire is the return of the weight they cannot undertake, and the weight Jesus will endure on the cross cannot effectively be dealt with on their side of the battlefield. Satan’s emotional state is an understanding of the weight he must carry, and the “upward turn’d” mountains appear like the reversal of the designated, encumbered body, now Satan’s and no longer Jesus’s.

Following the war in Heaven, Satan remarks on the physical, brutal aspects of their physical form. Bound to the burning lake with “Adamantine Chains” (1.48), Satan speaks to his partner Beelzelub, “breaking the horrid silence” (1.83), and demonstrates the changing and fallen nature of their bodies since their expulsion from Heaven. Writhing in pain, Satan cries,

If thou beest he; But O how fall’n! how chang’d
From him, who in the happy Realms of Light
Cloth’d with transcendent brightness didst out-shine
Myriads though bright (1.84-7)
The three caesuras and enjambment punctuating Satan's first line suggest the fallen angel cannot phrase the physical peculiarities of his fallen comrade—the thrown, material hills, like the angels, have stunned the arch-fiend and his crew. "If thou beest he,” he utters, and cannot find the end to his question before his demeanor changes and he wails out, “But O how fall’n! The exclamation mark indicates dejection and surprise at Beelzebub's physical makeup. These material changes surpass any preconceived idea of how a fallen body could look. The enjambment shows through poetic form the fall of these fallen angels from one line onto the next. The fallen angels appear closely aligned with Holbein’s portrayal of Jesus: their war-torn bodies are taken down from their hanging position above humanity—like Jesus on the cross—and are laid amongst the folds of a rippling Lake, like the ripples of the cloth in both Holbein and Michelangelo. The fall has done more damage than Satan can comprehend, the horrors of inhabiting a corporeal form still echoing Holbein’s image. Beelzebub is no longer “Cloth’d with transcendent brightness”: he is debased and ruined by the physical and symbolic fall.

Beelzebub’s change is not singular; “joynd with me once,” Satan remarks, and continues, “now misery hath joynd/ In equal ruin” (90-1). Satan’s body is equally unrecognizable. His body is similar to his forgotten name noted in Book V: “his former name/ Is heard no more Heav’n” (655-6). He is significantly altered by his “misery”—a symptom of his “discontinuous wound.” Satan’s ethereality mirrors his partners, saying, “[I] chang’d in outward lustre” (97).

Satan’s stripped “outward lustre” is a move back to his wound, and his fallen nature is further exemplified through his discourse. He begins to understand his fallen nature, disclosed by God in Book III. While writhing in pain, Satan says,

True is, less firmly arm’d,

Some disadvantage we endur’d and pain,
Till now not known, but known as soon contemnd,
Since now we find this our Empyreal form
Incapable of mortal injurie
Imperishable, and thought pierc’d with wound
Soon closing, and by native vigour heal’d. (6.431-7)

Satan removes his armor and notices his debasement: he is "less firmly armed" now. His body becomes visible and vulnerable. Satan never understands his disadvantage, the disadvantage God hints at in Book III: his fragile body. Nonetheless, Satan tries to account for the pain “Till now not known,” but he still fails to understand the implicit meaning of pain. He still trusts that the wound is “soon closing.” But this marks the third instance Milton supposedly closes the closing of a wound that God cannot and will not close because he needs a proper medium to express pain.

Satan continues to display his frailty, even as his weapons are used to hold up his frail and wounded body. While the fall from Heaven marks a fall from grace, the body endures the repercussions of falling through “Nine times the space that measures Day and Night” (1.50), Milton describes the supposed “Empyreal form” limping and using his spear as a crutch:

His Spear, to equal which the tallest Pine
Hewn on Norwegian hills, to be the Mast
Of some great Ammiral, were but a wand,
He walkt with to support uneasie steps
Over the burning Marle, not like those steps
On Heavens Azure, and the torrid Clime
Smote on him sore besides, vaulted with Fire; (1.292-8)
Leaning on his spear for support, Satan is at odds with his physicality. As Dobranski notes, “Satan's spear also measures his material debasement: that he uses it literally as a crutch implies his misplaced deep external force and forecasts a larger pattern whereby Satan’s heart is figured in his association with hardened matter” (491). Satan remains “uneasie” while his body changes and hardens. He painstakingly moves his feet, and feeling the ruination, appears like an old man incapable of fully understanding his predicament.

This moment in PL marks Satan's body not only as crippled but also as war-torn and damaged, and Milton wastes no time exploring his immense size, which further associates the fallen angel with the gross materiality capable of carrying the mortal wound of Jesus unillustrated by Milton:

Thus Satan talking to his nearest Mate
With Head up-lift above the wave, and Eyes
That sparkling blaz’d, his other Parts besides
Prone on the Flood, extended long and large
Lay floating many a rood, in bulk as huge

As whom the Fables name of monstrous size (1.192-7)

Laying “prone on the Flood,” Satan’s body extends past the confines of Milton’s verse; each line pours into the next, suggesting his limbs “extend[ing] long and large” break any possible end to the lines. They break the confines of preconceived notions of his physical and symbolic makeup. Moreover, Satan's divine body comes into question as these large limbs "Lay floating…in bulk as huge/ As whom Fables name of monstrous size." While floating, Satan's body still shimmers as his "eyes/That sparkling blaz’d,” but soon that sparkle of divinity will leave his body when he enters the body of the snake, thus completing his descent into physicality. “Extended long and
large,” Satan’s quasi-divine body “lay floating” while wrapped in chains. He is surrounded and comprehended by the physical form he endures. Unsurprisingly, after this parallelism Milton writes, “So stretcht out huge in length the Arch-fiend lay/ Chain’d on the burning Lake” (209-10). Satan undergoes a mock crucifixion here. This is not to say his body dies like Jesus's and his spirit ascends into Heaven—that is an aspect of spirit he is incapable of assuming. Milton’s splayed Satan is, however, undertaking the physical torture of a body “stretcht” out in pain like a crucified body. Satan is falling further from his semi-divinity; he is succumbing to his earthly body as his head demonstrates physical, human-like traits. The hyphen linking “up” and “lift” provides the metrical intonation which feels like Satan is lifting his head up and down, misunderstanding the weight of his body as he “heav’d his head” (1.211). These bodily movements are involuntary reactions to Satan’s new body.

Satan’s dipping head is not the only instance where the weight of corporeality plagues the fallen angel and mirrors the pulling down of the body—a symptom of crucifixion:

Forthwith upright he rears from off the Pool
His mighty stature; on each hand the flames
Drivn backward slope thir pointing spires, and rowled
In billows, leave i’th’ midst a horrid Vale. (1.221-4)

Leaning on his hands for support, Satan lifts his body from the lake. He struggles with his upward mobility, struggling in his new form, which is in excruciating pain. “His mighty stature” further pushes his body into the realm of gross physicality. While lifting himself upward, “on each hand the flames / “Drivn backward” suggests this bodily movement is painful and difficult.

This difficult physical activity further indicates that Satan’s body is closely aligned with the biblical Jesus, who “bearing his cross went forth into a place called the place of a skull, which is
called in the Hebrew Golgotha” (John 19:17). Like biblical Jesus, Satan can barely stand on his feet.

The sheer weight of his body is still depicted even when Satan takes flight for the first time since his fall. Rising from the burning lake, he attempts to take flight, but the weight of his corporeality and the material world interrupt his ascent:

Then with expanded wings he steers his flight
Aloft, incumbent on the dusky Air
That felt unusual weight, till on dry Land
He lights, if it were Land that ever burn’d
With solid, as the Lake with liquid fire;
And such appear’d in hue, as when the force
Of subterranean wind transports a Hill
Torn from Pelorous, or the shatter’d side
Of thundring Aetna, whose combustible
And fewel’d entrals thence conceiving Fire,
Sublim’d with Mineral fury, aid the Winds,
And leave a singed bottom all involv’d
With stench and smoak: Such resting found the sole
Of unblest feet. Him followed his next Mate,
Both glorying to have scap’t the Stygian flood
As Gods, and by their own recover’d strength,
Not by the sufferance of supernal Power. (1.225-41)
Satan's wings are spread, but some "unusual weight" affects his lift-off. The air is thick and suggests a chemical imbalance, or the natural elements pitch his fallen body off-kilter. He wobbles “till on dry land/ He lights,” and the saturated “dusky Air” weighs on the fallen angel. His wings are no longer angelic; he is affected by the thick air polluting “the Lake with liquid fire.” Marked by torrents of wind, “as when the force/ Of subterranean wind transports a Hill/ Torn from Pelorous,” and the “shatter’d side/ Of thurndering Aetna,” Satan’s flight seems far from ethereal compared to the natural world of storms. The form suggests smooth sailing; the lines flow and fold onto the next, but small caesuras shutter his wings.

Satan’s uneasy flight, mixed with the sparse but sudden caesuras, resembles the writhing and wavering of a body fastened to a crucifix. John Granger Cook observes the effects of wind during a crucifixion in *Ephesian Tale of Anthia and Habrocomes* by Xenophon. During Habrocomes’ crucifixion, Habrocomes recites a prayer and “the God took pity on his prayer. [And] a sudden gust of wind arose and struck the cross, sweeping away the subsoil on the cliff where it had been fixed. Habrocomes fell in the torrent and was swept away; his fetters did not get in his way” (263). The wind overcoming the crucifixion does not stop Habrocomes’ death; in fact, he is “sentenced to be burned by the prefect” (263). While this account of wind affecting a crucifixion is not specifically acknowledged by Milton, natural elements continuously affect the characters in *PL* and *PR*. Satan and his mate are trying to escape “fetters” on the burning lake “as Gods, and by their own recover’d strength,” with torrents of wind pushing and encumbering their ascent. However, like Habrocomes, they are brought back to burn, as Satan remarks in Book IV: “Which way I fly is hell; myself am hell” (75). Satan cannot escape his dutiful pain, his quasi-crucifixion and the body he inhabits. Rolling in the wind, Satan escapes his physical chains, but the symbolism remains and binds him to the weight and pain needed for the crucifixion.
Before Satan emerges from his fetters, Milton develops our understanding of Satan’s bodily makeup by juxtaposing him with mythological and biblical monsters. These parallel images solidify and concentrate our understanding of Satan and dress the arch-fiend in slabs of flesh capable of the wounds illustrated in Holbein and Michelangelo:

Titanian, or Earth-born, that warr’d on Jove

Briareos or Typhon, whom the Den

By ancient Tarsus held, or that Sea-beast

Leviathan, which God of all his works

Created hugest that swim th’ Ocean stream:

Him haply slumbering on the Norway foam (193-208)

Comparing Satan to monsters illustrates Satan’s newfound body and suggests that he can feel the pain and wounds displaced by the unillustrated crucifixion. As Jonathan H. Collett notes, “the Titans are obvious material for Milton’s purpose both because of their legendary stature and the successive revolts they waged among themselves on Olympus” (89). Of the mythological creatures Briaeros and Typhon, Collett writes that “Briareos, first of all, was simply a powerful, hundred-armed Titan who flashed fire from a hundred mouths,” while “Typhon had a hundred heads, but specifically, in the legends, they were serpents’ heads from whose eyes fire ‘sparkling blazes’” (89). Satan’s likeness to these creatures is meant slowly move Satan slowly into the lowly serpent when he speaks to Eve. But this also suggests Satan’s mass and corporeality.

While the “Leviathan” expresses his sheer immensity, the blubber surrounding the “Sea-Beast” supplies more meaning. The parallel between sea-creature and Satan suggests that the blubber covering the whale covers Satan. While distant in time, Samuel Otter’s book Melville’s
Anatomies, which studies whales in Herman Melville’s novels, highlights the significance and hidden meaning in the blubber:

the whale, the largest species of mammal known to exist, offers immense possibilities for unlocking the secrets of the skin and head. The whale’s skin, up to fifteen inches thick, can be peeled from its body and sliced into leaves; its epidermis is detachable, its rete mucosum preservable, and precious fluid can be distilled from its blubber, the cutis vera. The sperm whale’s head is one-third the size of its entire body; it can be split open and its contents carried away in pails. (132)

The whale’s body does not end at “the whale’s skin,” and once we separate these “fifteen inch thick” “leaves,” we are left with more whale, more meaning, and more “contents [which are] carried away in pails” to be examined. When Milton aligns “the Leviathan” and Satan, deeper meaning is layered in: the deeper the skin, the more we will find. When we talk about skin, we are not only talking about the visible surface. Plate contends, “so much of life occurs at the surface…the skin, in short, makes us who we are. Skin is deep” (165). Satan’s skin makes him more human, more debased, and capable of enduring the kind of pain captured by Holbein and Michelangelo.

Compared to the massive whale with slabs of blubber, Satan becomes more than just a material body capable of carrying the weight of sin. In addition, his fall from Heaven and his debasement are fully realized because of this "string of gradually ossifying animal imagery that charts his ontological descent" (Dobranski 503). In the depths of Satan's skin, the wound emerges, the blood oozes sanguine, and these physical attributes disclose the hidden secrets of the fallen angel. As in whales, the deeper wounds are hard to see and hard to read, but they exist
and persist. Nonetheless, Milton uses this metaphor to create a resemblance between Satan and the serpent. Collett writes,

Finally, the Leviathan of the Bible is not simply a whale, as the notes of some editions give it, but ‘that crooked serpent’ in Isaiah: Milton gives him a ‘skaly rind.’ Under the guise of some comparative accounts of Satan’s size, Milton has skilfully rendered Satan’s transformation from a Titan-like monster to a biblical serpent. (90)

Collett’s recognition of Satan’s descent from “titan-like monster to the biblical serpent,” conveys angelic plasticity while concouringly plunging Satan into corporeality. Satan’s “skaly rind” is a perfect image of the skin. "Rind" is defined as “the outer crust, skin, or integument of anything; an outer or superficial layer or coating” (OED). Nevertheless, veering slightly from the definition, Satan’s "skaly rind" or skin is not "superficial” because “skin is deep.”

In Book III of PR, Jesus unveils for Satan the significance of body and flesh. Jesus unfolds his “hidden meaning”:

What if he hath decreed that I shall first
Be tried in humble state, and things adverse,
By tribulation, injuries, insults
Contempts, and scorns, and snares, and violence
Suffering, abstaining, quietly expecting
Without distrust or doubt, that he may know
What I can suffer, how obey? Who best
Can suffer, best can do: best reign, who first
Well hath obeyed; just trial ere I merit
My exaltation without change or end. (188-197)
Jesus emphasizes the importance of physicality and suggests that pain enlivens the spirit (“Who best/ Can suffer, best can do”) while examining the purpose of his “humble state, and things adverse.” He believes “tribulations, injuries, insults/ Contempts, and scorns, and snares, and violence, / Suffering, [and] abstaining” are essential attributes to uphold. The body must endure this shortlist of bodily harm “without distrust or doubt.” Leaving the crucifixion aside, Milton suggests that Jesus satisfies this shortlist by wandering the desert. However, Jesus’s physical torments pale in comparison to the constant pain affecting Satan. Although Satan fails to sustain harm “without distrust or doubt,” he satisfies the requirement of pain.

Jesus’ previous sentiments are retroactively fulfilled in Belial’s speech. When Jesus considers that “Who best/ Can suffer, best can do,” Belial’s echo reverberates:

To suffer, as to do

Our strength is equal, nor the Law unjust
That so ordains: this was at first resolv’d,
If we were wise, against so great a foe
Contending, and so doubtful what might fall.
I laugh, when those who at the Spear are bold
And vent’rous, if that fail them, shrink and fear
What yet they know must follow, to endure
Exile, or ignominy, or bonds, or pain,
The sentence of thir Conquerour: This is now
Our doom; (2.199-209)

Belial's speech mirrors Jesus’s claims of suffering to appease the pain displaced by Milton’s neglect. Belial notes that the law is not "unjust," because the position of fallen angels fulfills an
ontological need: the need of evil that sustains the dichotomy of Christianity. Here, it seems like Milton’s voice creeps in, reassuring the fallen angels of their position. The devils are capable, and Milton continues to use them to endure pain for this reason. Milton is aware of the pain required to suffer, and he imbues his devils with pain and torment "to suffer, as to do" and to "obey,” because this is their “doom.” Satan remains at the forefront of this pain; the arch-fiend is the proper, physical, skin-covered vessel who, unbeknownst to author and character, fulfills a need.

While it is Jesus who believes that “who best/ Can suffer, best can do: best reign,” Satan’s pain paradoxically fulfills this void without blasphemously suggesting Satan is divine or holy. Long after the war in Heaven, Satan continues to feel the pain he endured there:

he with his horrid crew

Lay vanquished, rowling in the fiery Gulf

Confounded though immortal: But his doom

Reserv’d him to more wrath; for now the thought

Both of lost happiness and lasting pain

Torments him; round he throws his baleful eyes

That witness’d huge affliction and dismay (1.51-7)

While “vanquished, rowling in the fiery Gulf,” one can imagine Satan’s pain in the depths of hell. Milton marks “lasting pain” on the bodies of these devils and Satan, a pain actively stemming from the wounds endured in the war in Heaven. This pain “torments” Satan, as “the thought/ Both of lost happiness and lasting pain” surround his mind and body, remaining absent from Jesus in PR. While pain is described very little aside from its “tormenting” aspect and how “he throws his baleful eyes,” language has a hard time signifying pain. As Scarry writes,
“hearing and touch are of objects outside the boundaries of the body, as desire is desire of x, fear is fear of y, hunger is hunger for z, but the pain is not ‘of’ or ‘for’ anything—it is itself alone” (162). Through Milton’s depiction of Jesus walking in the desert, he gives a mini-representation of the pain of the crucifixion. Satan clearly demonstrates aspects of brutal pain and torture. Pain is a personal, inward battle.

In PR, Milton again attempts to articulate Jesus’s pain, but it pales in comparison to Satan’s. Jesus’ pain is acute compared to Satan’s. Although inhabiting the same form, Jesus’s body does not endure the same “pain” and “torture” Satan does. While fulfilling God’s request and trudging through the desert, Jesus describes his feeling of hunger:

But now I feel I hunger, which declares,
Nature hath need of what she asks; yet God
Can satisfie that need some other way,
Though hunger remain: so it remain
Without this bodies wasting, I content me,
And from the sting of Famine fear no harm,
Nor mind it, fed with better thoughts that feed
Mee hungering more to do my Fathers will. (2.252-9)

When Jesus “feels…hunger,” the reader understands his human plight, registering the idea of hunger, a “bodies wasting,” and the “sting of Famine” as touchstones of pain and suffering. The interiority of Jesus’ pain can suggest the aspects of pain that the biblical Jesus endures, but they remain inward and bodily, like hunger. However, as Scarry suggests, “the interior states of physical hunger and psychological desire have nothing aversive, fearful, or unpleasant about them if the person experiencing them inhabits a world where food is bountiful and a companion
is near” (166). These pangs of hunger appease the interior, humane feelings of the reader. These feelings satisfy the reader’s inherent desire for the Son of God to inhabit a corporeal form capable of “suffering,” a touchstone of Jesus’ atonement. However, while his suffering is dull, food and human companionship are nearby, and the reader remains content with Jesus’s quasi-suffering. To further perpetuate suffering, Milton has Satan obnoxiously offer him a luxurious dinner in the desert—which, although it must be ignored and denied, satisfies Jesus’ desire for spiritual challenge. Jesus, “hungering more to do my Father’s will,” appears at odds with the fallen angel, whose body continues to convulse in pain. Jesus’s suffering is dull, “nor does he mind it.” His condition is trivial, less painful, and insignificant compared to Satan’s “lasting pain.”

Draped in flesh and writhing in pain, Satan comes closer to his semi-divine counterpart, Jesus of Nazareth. Through Satan’s material difference, ontological descent, and the wound he receives in Heaven, the fallen angel is the perfect conduit to illustrate the pain and suffering surrounding the crucifixion that Milton otherwise neglects. In no way does Satan replace Jesus. Such an assertion would ignore the importance of Jesus to Milton and the necessary dichotomy on which Christian theology depends. Milton buries the pain that craves representation. Whether knowingly or unknowingly, there are times when Milton specifically tortures Satan for his digression: Satan is a tool, a vessel for the poet to bury the bodily predicaments he otherwise disregards.

While Satan’s agony represents the pain neglected by Milton, Satan’s role becomes blurred in Milton’s microcosm. The fallen angel’s purpose is no longer strictly to fulfill the dichotomy of good and evil, nor is he the hero in this reading. Instead, Satan inhabits a complexity almost incapable of being pinned down—a complexity that Milton is honored to
uphold. Nonetheless, Satan remains a vessel for pain, and this complex notion will busy scholars for years to come.
Works Cited


