



Milton's Ovidian Syntheses: Paradise Lost VII and Metamorphoses I

From Charles Martindale ("Paradise Metamorphosed: Ovid in Milton," 1985) to Maggie Kilgour (*Milton and the Metamorphosis of Ovid*, 2012), many scholars have documented the influence of Ovid's *Metamorphoses* on *Paradise Lost*. Like Ovid's epic, Milton's is an extended meditation on art, creativity and the act of creation itself, *Paradise Lost* being a poem almost entirely populated with artist figures, themselves created in the image of a uniquely artistic God. In this, Milton emulates Ovid's own, artful, art-driven cosmos, home to such creators as Arachne, Daedalus, Pygmalion, Orpheus: all of which, like Adam and Eve, experience a Fall of a kind, whether at the hands of the Gods or their own. Not restricted to theme, plot or character-building, Ovid's influence on Milton extends to Milton's borrowing of what Maggie Kilgour calls a system of conflicting "antitheses," where the binary, conflictual relations between creator and creation (Pygmalion and Galatea), lover and beloved (Narcissus and Echo), self and reflection (Narcissus and Narcissus), blur one another in ironic conflict (70). This paper will document Milton's borrowing and simultaneous transformation of this system in an episode whose Ovidian sources remain relatively underexamined: the retelling of Biblical Genesis in *Paradise Lost* VII.

By comparing this episode to the *Metamorphoses*' own account of creation, I will show the extent to which Milton's retelling of the Bible is also, crucially, a retelling of Ovidian Genesis. In doing this, Milton transforms Ovid's poetics of self-ironizing binaries into a poetics of creative synthesis, creating an epic system in which binaries exist not in conflict with one another, but rather to complete one another, covalently and cooperatively working toward a common teleological aim unknown to the universe of Ovidian epic: Salvation, that final resolution of the created world's antinomies. My analysis will adopt what Tobias Gregory calls a "recuperative" view of Milton's classical reception. Rather than plainly to upstage or "beat" his Classical models, I argue that Milton meant to weave himself into the textual or poetic continuum of these renovating the achievement of each for his era (Gregory, "Milton and His Epic Precursors" 450). Milton's recuperative reception, I hold, is also largely inspired by that of Ovid's poem, which similarly recuperates, renovates, transforms several earlier classical models. If Ovid proposes, with divine aid, to weave the totality of his era's cultural knowledge into a "seamless song" (*perpetuum (...) carmen*, *Met.* I.4), sourcing material in Greek myth, Roman folklore, presocratic philosophy and the poetry of his Augustan contemporaries, Milton aims to

“justify the ways of God to men” (PL I.26) in a poem that similarly weaves together elements derived from Biblical, Greco-Roman and Renaissance canons. By analysing his unique fusion of Ovidian Genesis with Biblical Genesis and Early Modern science, and by showing how that fusion mirrors Ovid’s own synthesis of Lucretian, Platonic and Hesiodic Creation, I wish to locate Milton’s Ovid-inspired ideal of poetic synthesis at the heart of his poetic thought and practice of the epic.

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When: October 31st, (Tuesday) 7:00 pm (Brazilian time zone) – 6:00 pm (Toronto time zone)

Where: Join Zoom Meeting

<https://us06web.zoom.us/j/82327063269?pwd=rTjzD5TKbiapQcaTmRORBZhK3zYYpM.1>

Meeting ID: 823 2706 3269

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