

The Orphic Beauty of Milton's Devil¹

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At once born of darkness and the star of light, Satan is an oxymoron. The creature is deceptive and fascinates the eye and bewitches its prey, not only through its celestial beauty but also through its diabolic rhetoric. So begins the Orphic dive into the darkness and the lust of the Diabolos where the fallen man discovers himself and comes out into the light. The ontological journey of the being in Milton's poems is similar to that of Orpheus in the Underworld. Then, through the arabesques of Milton's work, the image, evanescent as Eurydice, of the *locus amoenus*—the 'illuminated' flowery orchard of the Garden of Eden—is printed like a watermark. This image is the lost object of the Miltonian quest.

Telle est donc la véritable beauté du diable:
deformis formositas ac formosa difformitas.
Roland Villeneuve, *La Beauté du diable*

In Judaeo-Christian iconography, the Devil is traditionally portrayed as a grotesque and terrifying-looking creature. Half-human half-monster, the fallen angel is adorned with stag's antlers, straight, pointed ears, a hooked nose and a lion's muzzle; the back of his head forms a point and he has a goatee beard. He is framed by serrated, bat-like wings; his eyes glow, his legs are hirsute and his goatlike feet end in curved, sharp-pointed claws (see Richardson 39). Satan's image differs in the fifteenth century, where he is an androgynous figure, depicted either as 'a woman-headed [serpent] often resembling Eve [or as] a male, a charming putto, a bristling monster' (McColley 20). Often assimilated to his female counterpart, Lilith, he is the incarnation of an erotico-religious bestiality. His tiara of horns (in Hebrew *queren* means both 'horn' and 'ray [of light]'²) is the symbol of his virility as well as his divine splendour.

¹Translation from French by Anna Clark.

²The latter sense derives from the verb form *karan*, literally 'to radiate or shine'.

Milton's Satan is intrinsically divine, as suggested by the alliteration 'devils to adore for deities' (*PL* I 373; Fish), although, after his fall, having lost most of his beauty, his face is stigmatised with 'scars of thunder' (*PL* I 601). As Moore points out: 'while blessed spirits are both sublime and beautiful, fallen spirits are only sublime' (103). In Burke's terms, the sublime, associated with obscurity, power and darkness, is the antithesis of beauty and light. Protean, endowed with a chameleon-like ability to change colour to adapt to his environment or with the epidermal phosphorescence of a firefly which attracts and deceives insects, the cervine god is diverse and changeable, according to the light or the conditions of the day. The sublime Satan, however, does not compare with the sun ('glowing' *PL* III 594) and appears like a 'spot' (*PL* III 588), a blemish or stain on the splendour of the star's orb. In order to bring a body to life, he needs only condensed air or water vapour and to enclose a more or less accurate ghost in their molecules.

The Devil's supreme power is that of transforming himself, and his mask is to be condemned because it is the very principle of what is diabolical; it is the Devil's realm of existence. The mask is like the Devil: 'imago', 'figura', 'similitudo'. He is not conceived of as that which he hides or masks, but as that which he shows in place of what he hides. He breaks the relation to being, to truth, the relation of man to his only image, God. The mask appears as a decoy; it is a metaphor for nothing, it steals what is real. And the Devil is the very metaphor of the mask, because he transforms himself. In fact, he does not wear a mask, he is the Mask.

Whether they lived in rock, in the air, on earth, in water, underground or in Hell, the demons who enjoy the gift of ubiquity left the icy banks of the Cocytus to dilute themselves into the air we breathe. In the same way, Satan made himself human (*PL* I 31; *PL* II 298-300), adorned himself in splendid finery, bedecked in gold. The lie, a creator of illusions, has an undeniably seductive quality. That Satan should be the 'great illusionist' in whom no truth can be found conforms to biblical tradition (2 Cor 1: 11; 11: 14). In the Temptation scene, Satan, frustrated at his lack of success is, as Milton's presents it, reduced to terrorizing tactics. On this occasion, he appears to Christ in his traditional and terrifying forms: 'stormy blasts' (*PR* IV 418), 'infernal ghosts and hellish furies' (*PR* IV 422) or 'grisly sceptres' (*PL* IV 430). The verb 'seem' and all the comparative forms ('like', 'alike', 'as', etc.) assimilate Satan to the universe and metamorphose him. His body becomes flowers, fruit, precious stones and astral spheres, like a painting by Arcimboldo. In this description of Milton's, inspired by the book of Ezekiel, Satan strives to rival God in splendour:

Not all parts like, but all alike inform'd
With radiant light, as glowing iron with fire.

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If metal, part seemed gold, part silver clear;
If stone, carbuncle most or chrysolithe,
Ruby or topaz, to the twelve that shone
In Aaron's breast-plate
(*PL* III 592-598)

Once the most glittering of all the angels, he comes close to achieving his aim, clothed in gemstones and cameos, cut stones which bring out their many sparkling glints of red, yellow, green, azure or turquoise. Only a few words tarnish the brilliancy of this figure who, seated on a throne in Hell like God on his mountain, wears gleaming, sparkling armour – these words are ‘barbaric’, ‘bad’, ‘despair’, ‘insatiate’ and ‘vain’ (*PL* II 4-9).

The devil's beauty has something of the *aweful* fear evoked by contemplating the Gorgon. Alain Michel would have us notice that Medusa fascinates men by her beauty, and not by her ugliness:

La beauté véritable, celle qui tue, celle qui exprime la
transcendance, porte en elle les caractères de l'inhumain (21)

inhuman in the sense of monstrous or outside human language and understanding. One wavers between fascination and fear on looking at Satan. Moore speaks of an ‘aesthetic of terror’ (90-133), because Satan is indeed an oxymoron: ‘now of things which are terrible, those are the most terrible, which are the most wonderful’ (Dennis 325). Let us attempt to explore this transcendency, or at the very least to examine this annihilating splendour, this *trompe-l'oeil* beauty which resembles death, and is only attained, if at all, through the throes of metamorphosis. Such beauty cannot be expressed: it can only be the object of an ecstatic, passive vision which is dangerous for its subject in so far as it metamorphoses him and brings him close to a fusion with the sublime. Plato's *Phaedra* describes the symptoms of the *innamoramento* faced with the vision of beauty. We notice:

But he who has been recently initiated, and who formerly beheld many things, when he sees a god-like countenance, or some bodily form that presents a good vision of beauty, at first shudders and some of the former terrors come over him, then as he looks steadfastly at it, he reverences it as a god... (327)

This emotion is close to the frisson with which Ronsard often plays (‘Car l'Amour et la Mort n'est qu'une mesme chose’ in ‘Sonnets pour Hélène’, *Oeuvres* 278). His portrait of Narcissus imposes an equivalence between beauty and death:

il sentit dessus le bord humide
De son beau sang naître une belle fleur
(‘Amours de Cassandre’, *Oeuvres* 278)

Milton’s poems convey this fragile point of equilibrium between the pleasure of beauty and that of death, as much by their descriptions of the deaths of ‘Lycidas’ transmuted into Orpheus (lines 58-63) and of the ‘Fair Infant’ made a flower (line 1), as by the description of the garden of Eden balancing on a knife edge between the fall (Hell) and the sublime (Heaven); or by the contrast between the macabre landscape of the first lines of ‘L’Allegro’ (lines 1-10) and the visionary contemplation of ‘Il Penseroso’ (lines 147-150). The eroticism of the heady fragrances of Eden plays on temptation and suicidal dizziness. Milton seems to have taken a masochistic pleasure in brushing the extreme limits of ecstatic emotion, which creates the illusion of a self at the brink of its own loss. What his Orpheus was looking for in the maze of verse was both Ariadne and Eurydice, an Ariadne whose thread would finally allow the world’s enigmas to be connected, an Eurydice who would be the truth that is lost or masked in everything .

Going to the very ends of the experience of satanic beauty means crossing the limits of fiction (which alone *reflects* such beauty) in order finally to touch reality. But suddenly what is real blots out words. The face of Milton’s melancholy vanishes in the light—Satan’s, like Lamia’s, becomes reptilian. Are nothingness and death not to be found behind words and beauty?

In Michelangelo’s depiction of the Temptation on the ceiling of the Sistine Chapel (1510), Satan is a hybrid creature, half-woman, half-fabulous serpent. In Raphael’s fresco (1517, Vatican, Palazzi Vaticani), the snake is Eve’s shadow. The resemblance between the serpent of Eden and Eve goes back to biblical exegesis in the Middle Ages. It is assumed that the analogy of the serpent with a woman’s face emerged at the beginning of the twelfth century through P. Comestor, who interpreted the Fall in the following way:

Because [Lucifer] was afraid of being found out by the man, he approached the woman who had less foresight and was ‘wax to be twisted into vice’ and this by means of the serpent He also chose a certain kind of serpent which has the countenance of a virgin, because *like favors like*. (Kelly 308)

Such a reading of Genesis suggests that the snake chosen by Satan for his metamorphosis resembles Eve, and that her fascination for the reptile is to

be partly accounted for by the reflection of her own image in his. The isomorphism is often implicit in Milton's poems. The poet attributes for instance to Eve the snake's smooth, scaly tegument ('color serpentine' *PL* X 870). At the same time, the depiction of Satan coincides almost word for word and image for image with the previous description of Adam's wife. In the two cases, Satan and Eve each embody an unutterable beauty, while inspiring a potential threat. The emphasis placed in particular on the colour gold, or the vivacity of the 'verdant', has an artificial and deceptive quality. The following diptych-like passages, set in parallel, mirror each other:

For softness she and sweet attractive grace
She as a veil down to a slender waist
Her unadorned **golden** tresses wore
Disheveled, but in **wanton ringlets waved**
As the vine **curls** her tendrils, which implied
Subjection, but required with gentle sway,
And by her yielded, by him best received
Yielded with coy submission, modest pride,
And sweet reluctant amorous delay
(*PL* IV 298 ; 304-311)

toward Eve
Addressed his way, not will indented wave
Prone on the ground, as since, but on his rear,
Circular base of **rising folds**, that tow'rd
Fold above fold a surging maze; his head
Crested aloft, and carbuncle his eyes;
With burnished neck of verdant gold, erect
Amidst his **circling spires**, that on the grass
Floated redundant
[]
his tortuous train
Curled many a wanton **wreath** in sight of Eve
To lure her eye
(*PL* IX 495-503, 516-518)

Terms such as 'softness', 'sweet', 'attractive', 'grace', 'coy' and 'amorous' to qualify Eve seem essentially feminine, but there is something of Satan behind this picture. In the second passage, which is to be taken as a description of Satan, it is Eve who is the cynosure. The 'toward', intensified by the phonic echo with 'tow'rd', guides the direction of the gaze until the image gradually focuses on what has become prey: 'in sight of...', 'to lure her eye'. The shape and colour used to describe Eve and Satan are isomorphous in the two descriptions - 'wave/waved' and 'gold/golden'. The waving shock of gold covering the nape of Eve's **neck**, later described as 'the flowing gold of her loose tresses' (*PL* IV 497) reflects Satan's 'burnished **neck** of verdant gold' (*PL* IX 501). The 'wanton ringlets' formed by her hair suggest 'the circling spires' which the snake traces whilst moving across the grass. 'Ringlets' seems made to echo 'wreaths'; the two terms, repeating the sound [ri], are, moreover, qualified by the same adjective - 'wanton'. Eve's hair is 'disheveled' just like the 'rising folds' of ophidian skin which, compared to a 'surviving maze', seem impossible to untangle ('rolled / In tangles' *PL* IX 631-32). The 'folds', like Eve's hair, shine and captivate. The sibilants of the two passages suffice to recreate the serpent's hiss. Eve's curiosity is first aroused aurally, by the murmuring waters, (*PL* IV 453-4) to which will be added the rustling of leaves (*PL* IX 519), in counterpoint to the fricatives uttered by the snake. The woman-serpent stands out against the rustic green of the setting. Eve's

body, moving sensually and voluptuously, seems to follow a snake-like movement. The sinuous contour of her shape contrasts with Adam's coarser features, which she will find 'less winning soft, less amiably mild' (*PL* IV 479). The terms 'bent' and 'bending' (460-02), the first describing Eve, the second the image reflected by the mirror of water, bring to mind a curved back with a supple dorsal spine, like those of invertebrates, an S-shaped creature. The verb 'to curl' used in both passages, first referring metaphorically to the anthropomorphised 'vine' (*PL* IV 307) and secondly to Satan's 'train' (*PL* IX 517), is also reminiscent of a crawling reptile. In the lines of Book IX, the assonant and visual encounter of the sublime 'his' (516) with the beautiful 'her' (528) reflects both Eve and Satan's selves, as in the foil of a mirror, until Satan's gaze becomes lost in itself in Eve's eye. The empathy with the other's self will eventually result in an introspective journey's into one's own self: 'when admiration is mixed with terror [] the soul turns towards the object to assess its nature *before* it is 'ravished' or 'transported' and returned to itself' (Moore 106).

When Adam wakes up in the shade he instinctively turns both eyes and spirit towards the heavens (*PL* VIII 253-82). Eve, in contrast, wakes in the shade where the serpents slumber (*PL* IV 450-451 later echoed in *PL* IX 408-411). Like Adam, she meditates upon creation, but instead of looking upwards, she lowers her eyes to look at herself in the water, as in the silvering of a mirror, and so splits into two parts. This catoptric phenomenon is the symbolic expression of the break which separates the animal and the superior aspects of her psyche. In the warping mirror, the woman sees herself as she likes to imagine herself, and not as she really is (Falconer 146):

I thither went
 With unexperienced thought, and laid me down
 On the green bank, to look into the clear
 Smooth lake, that to me seemed another sky.
 As I **bent down to look**, just opposite
 A shape within the wat'ry gleam appeared
Bending to look on me: **I started back,**
It started back, but **pleased I soon returned,**
Pleased it returned as soon with answering looks
 Of sympathy and love; there I had fixed
 Mine eyes till now, and pined with vain desire
 (*PL* IV 456-66)

The coming and going motion of the reflection and its model ('I started back / It started back'; 'pleased I soon returned / Pleased it returned'), emphasized by textual echoes as well as alliterations ('bent down to

look'/'bending to look'; 'green'/'gleam'; 'mine'/'pined'), evokes both the spasmodic contractions of a snake and the human reaction of drawing back upon seeing one: supple, gracious and sometimes venomous, the serpent fascinates and terrifies. Satan, when frighteningly hideous, is magically seductive. Such a dualism is, moreover, applicable to all perversion; the perversions of bodily desire, for example, are both seductive and repulsive. The ocular metaphor used in association with the water imagery conveys the pivotal point of the 'stepping across the threshold' (Falconer 120). The 'glance', in the myth of Orpheus in the midst of Hell, is the moment when Orpheus can see Eurydice, resurrected from the dead, but also that very moment when she forever vanishes. Man cannot discover the truth about himself without being paralysed with fear. The subject looks at himself as though hypnotised by a basilisk's fiery red eyes. The same is true of Satan who, contemplating his feminine counterpart, falls in love, like Narcissus (Leonard 174), with his own image, to the point of being blinded by it. The snake stares at the snake. The beast closely examines the beauty, unless it is the other way around. In this narcissistic phantasm, beauty is ugliness, ugliness beauty. Satan, who came to seduce, is seduced by a visceral beauty.

When Eve sees Satan eating the fruit, she is frozen with fear (*PL* V 65), and yet this very fear motivates her irresistible longing to leap into the Orphic unknown. Fatal beauty is beauty which creates an a-temporal universe. From that moment on, by means of subliminal suggestion, she is incapable of not biting into the apple ('could not but taste' *PL* V 86). Eve never seems as beautiful as just before she is lost ('Angelic, but more soft, and feminine' *PL* IX 458-65). It is the transience of that moment, the consciousness in the writing of the imminent fall which magnify her and make her comparable to the *houri* of the Islamic paradise. The ideal is created as soon as what has been acquired, as in the eyes of Orpheus, is about to disappear. The enjoyment of such contemplation at the very moment of its dissolution will become a-temporal, and, for the subject, all that will remain will be the bitter memory of having *tasted* it. This remnant of spiritual force and the regret which accompanies the fall are what motivate the desire to be lifted up again. The condition necessary for victory is not transitory ascension, but remaining at a constant level of elevation. Definitive victory is not to be acquired by one single battle, but through a lifelong, tireless struggle. Faced with what is thought unutterable, the poet is not reduced to aporia but—in order to preserve the singular flavour of the forbidden *gusto*—brushes endlessly against descriptive beauty, a beauty which dices with death, since it brings about the infernal dyad of the sublime and *bathos*.³ The moments where the rhythm slows,

³*Bathos* is here taken to mean the fall which follows contemplation of the sublime, according to the definition offered by *A Dictionary of Literary*

where the excess syllables deprive the narrator of breath, ('her heav'nly form; her graceful innocence, her every air of gesture ', *PL IX* 457-460), offer a time of contemplation or an opening outside the temporality of the words. Marcel Cressot defines the general function of this rhythm:

Son rôle est de bercer la conscience, de la mettre dans un état de passivité euphorique et de réceptivité qui lui permettra de réagir immédiatement à la première impression forte (286)

Prolonging this rhythm creates a sensual effect, by the insistent slowing down of the contemplation (through numerous commas and instances of enjambment):

Such pleasure took the serpent to behold
This flowery plat, the sweet recess of Eve
Thus early, thus alone; her heav'nly form
Angelic, but more soft and feminine
(*PL IX* 455-458)

[and]

That space the evil one abstracted stood
From his own evil, and for the time remained
Stupidly good...
(463-465)

The adverbs ('her heav'nly', 'stupidly') and the more frequent use of past participles ('reviv'd Adonis, or renown'd', 440, 'overawed', 460, 'bereav'd', 461) increase the duration of the eroticised picture. The syntactic construction, faced with a beauty which cannot be described, runs out of qualifying adjectives and superlatives ('flowery', 'sweet', 'Angelic', 'more soft', 'feminine'). The failure of language makes itself felt when the only solution left open to the poet is tautology: 'She fair, divinely fair' (489). In the present instance, beauty does not incarnate the ideal of love, but the enchanting character of femininity, which takes prisoner the one who looks upon it and can, in other words, stand for death's snare. 'Divinely', however, emphasises the divine germ inherent in her being. The association of 'divine' and 'fair' allows an ambivalence to show through, which conveys the dilemma by which the human creature finds herself

Terms: 'Bathos is achieved when a writer, striving at the sublime, overreaches himself and topples into the absurd' (Cuddon 75). Once the spell is broken, the being falls into the ridicule of disillusion.

divided. Drowned in the sensuality of the 'fair', the intrinsic divinity must detach itself from the flesh to be able to open itself to the spirit.

Satan's courtship of Eve is pursued on two levels: the first is visual, to charm and blind her, the other is auditory, to impress her, make her fall. Just like a bird in courtship display, the beast exhibits shimmering colours to conquer his partner. Nevertheless, his sensuality cannot simply be attributed to his sparkling colours, his virility and his licentious movements (*PL IX 513-517*) which are all lures to entrap her. In fact, having transformed his own appearance, Satan goes on to manipulate words, by the repetitions and phonic echoes of his rhetoric. He becomes a eulogist or Thracian bard, his speech a serenade to woo the beauty, but this seduction is more pernicious yet, since behind the play of sonorities is hidden a play of reflections.

Wonder not, sovran mistress, if perhaps
Thou canst, who art sole **wonder**, much less arm
Thy looks, the heav'n of mildness, with disdain,
Displeas'd that I approach thee **thus**, and **gaze**
Insatiate, I **thus** single, nor have feared
Thy **awful** brow, more **awful** thus retired.
Fairest resemblance of thy Maker **fair**,
Thee **all things** living **gaze on**, **all things** thine
By gift, and thy celestial beauty adore,
With ravishment **beheld**, there best **beheld**
(*PL IX 532-541*)

The combination of 'gaze' and the adjective 'insatiate', which joins the visual to the gustatory, is already a foretaste before the apple is even bitten. Satan devours Eve with his gaze, and then devours her all over again, but this time slyly, through his syntax. The rhetoric is debased down to its very tessitura where the Devil's signature appears again like a watermark in the alliteration of 's' ('sovran mistress...canst...less...looks...'). The serpent charms the serpent inside Eve. Rather like a lullaby, where the words and sounds are repeated and carry a subliminal message, it tries to send its victim to sleep. Furthermore, these word sequences which recur, like an insistent refrain, break up and divide the phrasing. The *Dia-bolos* seeks to provoke fission by means of sounds and images. Indeed, the many redundancies in the chiasmic structure of this speech clearly constitute a textual mirror. The repetition of 'wonder' and 'awful' blurs the distinction between Eve as subject and object of veneration. In 'wonder not', Eve is the subject and the snake the object, but 'art sole wonder' brings about a change in viewpoint. Eve becomes the object of the ophidian's admiration.

Kerrigan argues that ‘one can behold the double valence of the game . Playing himself, Satan creates [Eve] as the image of God . Simultaneously, playing God, he creates her as the image of himself—an envier of God who will produce sin and death, and for her transgression go to hell’ (288). In line 566 of Book IX, the phallic animal once again becomes the object of wonder. The first ‘awful’ qualifies Eve’s brow, but the second, more subjective, use of the word comes from Satan’s perception: it is the snake who considers Eve ‘more awful thus retir’d’. Eve, the object of its gaze and the universal gaze (‘Thee all things living gaze on’) is also the eye of all who see. The changes in perspective brought about by twisting the pairs *Wonder/wonder, gaze/gaze, awful/awful, Fairest/fair, all things/all things, beheld/beheld* creates the climactic point when, by means of a resonant effect, Satan’s voice becomes the counterpoint of Eve’s. Whether or not she attempts to become reptilian, Eve nonetheless has a spell cast upon her by the physical attractions and fluent speech of the Devil. The mouthful of pulp bitten violently out of the apple by Eve marks the break with God, the state of disunion with everything and the break with Eurydice. To find his Eurydice again, the first man will, in his turn, have to plunge into the ophidian, into the earth’s entrails. The snake is the seat of the libido, it crystallises a fantasmal and eroticised picture of Eurydice (become snake-like) which situates itself in primordial indifferentiation, in the depths of consciousness; latent subconscious impulses. As quick as lightning, and slimy, the snake slides between objects as between the winding paths of the spirit, and then plunges deep beneath the earth, into Pluto’s realm.

Forgetful of her mortality and limits, Eve, by biting into the fruit, manages to become so carried away that she is tempted to want to become God’s equal, a pure symbol of the spirit. The fall occurs because that act is accompanied by a state of imaginary exaltation: vanity, as the saying goes, ‘is the mother of all vice’. The apodal reptile symbolises the impossibility of attaining such elevation, and whoever, through vanity, lays claim to what is absolute, incurs its fatal bite. Through its bite, temptation infiltrates the imagination and blinds the intellect. Eve’s fate is symbolic of the evolution of Milton’s characters, the path which leads from animal innocence (unconsciousness), in the guise of life at its paroxysm (Eden), through intellectualisation (consciousness/Earth) and the danger of losing one’s way (subconsciousness/Hell), towards the opening onto supraconscious life (Heaven/Paradise regained). Pursued by Aristaeus, Eurydice is bitten by a viper and finds herself in the realm of the shades. Orpheus, who has descended to Hell to bring her back, only succeeds in possessing the crude shape of a dream-like image.

This is an exaltation towards the sublime, but without solidity, for he cannot bring a dead soul back to the land of the living. Eurydice is Orpheus’ sublime side. Her death represents the vanishing of sublime force and

thereby even the death, the stultification, of Orpheus' soul. Orpheus' *hubris* prevails when, by glancing at Eurydice, he transgresses God's authority, and he yields to the Gorgon's power.

Every man must struggle against the power of Medusa's seduction, which he carries within him, and against the risk of psychic petrification. When he allows himself to be enchanted by the hideous seduction he only gives free reign to his appetite, his presumptuousness. The fascination which is exerted stands not for the liberating Truth of the supraconscious, but for the lie subconsciously desired. Vanity carries out the seduction, brings about the fall and leaves a feeling of guilt; it is the suppression of guilt which petrifies. As far as guilt is concerned, there are two possible attitudes which can be adopted: confession and denial. Confessing the fault brings about its comprehension (spiritualisation) and purification (sublimation). Guilt is thus dissolved and absolved. As for denial, it leads to the stultification of both body and intellect.

Myths are the diverse aspects of a single hidden meaning, for beneath their symbolism and codified secrets, the same mystagogic journey is mapped out, both for the mythical hero and for the poet—a journey towards self-knowledge and towards the spirit. Through the labyrinth of Milton's verse, the descent is initiated 'toward a higher and more distant goal, the recovery of man's grace, and place, in the divine hierarchy' (Falconer 163). The Greek and Roman myths are guiding images which symbolise life and its meaning. The mystery of life, inscribed in the range of mythologies and deciphered through their interpretation, inevitably includes that of death. The meaning of life is a form of reality: it is the ideal reality, Truth. This can only be grasped, and man can only be in harmony with the meaning of life, through the mediation of spiritualised desire (idea) and sublimated desire (the ideal incarnated by Eurydice).

Only Christ in *Paradise Regained* will achieve what Eve and Orpheus strove for—a knowledge of the highest degree of sublimation, of flesh into spirit, of man into God. The messenger of truth (the Messiah), a mortal among mortals, purifies himself entirely, rejects his subconscious (Satan), sanctifies himself and accomplishes the essential duty, the ideal suggested symbolically by all myths in their quest for the Truth. In the closing scene of *Paradise Lost* (XII, 648-649), Adam and Eve cast a final glance to the Garden of Eden. This crossing of the desert, which at once comes to an end and starts for the parents of humanity, is in fact a *mise en abîme* of Satan's experience. With this 'Orphic backward look' (Falconer 180), as through Satan's gaze, they see standing on the horizon their past as well as their destiny, leaving the beautiful for a sublime peregrination.

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