Introduction

> The hardness and smell of the oakwood began to speak clearly of the slow and lasting way in which the tree grew. The oak itself proclaimed that all that lasts and bears fruit is founded on such growth alone; that growth means to lie open to the span of the heavens and, at the same time, to have roots in the dark earth, that everything real and true only prospers if mankind fulfills at the same time the two conditions of being ready for the demands of the highest heaven and being safe in the shelter of the fruitful earth.
>
> Martin Heidegger[1]

Place is of profound environmental importance. Indeed, if we all acted well towards our individual places on Earth, from our bodies to the earth beneath our feet, the Earth would not be experiencing global devastation. We in the modern West have all but forgotten that many of our peasant ancestors were once so thoroughly bonded to their places on Earth that separation from place seemed a fate worse than death. To a people who, on average, transplant ourselves and our households twice a decade, emphasis on place may seem altogether misguided. But along with this idea of being rooted in the earth comes a deep commitment to place and to the Earth. In what I find the most moving lines of *Paradise Lost*, when a confused Eve learns that she is to be exiled from her place (the Garden), she cannot help but emote the bond she has with her place: "O unexpected stroke, worst than of Death! / Must I leave thee Paradise? thus leave / Thee Native Soile?"[2] To our modern sensibilities, Eve's response to the news of her exile may seem more the reaction of a plant faced with being uprooted than a human being confronting the prospect of moving. But it is these modern (which were forming in the seventeenth century) sensibilities which reject thinking of ourselves as planted in place, to which I shall argue Milton's poetry speaks – or more accurately, rebuffs.

Although there is a temptation to see profound ecological change as a modern phenomenon, the history of seventeenth-century England sadly

argues otherwise. In Milton's era England's old-growth forests were almost completely destroyed, not only because of a boom in housing and ship construction but to fuel such emerging industries as cooper smelting and glassmaking.[3] Enormous agricultural changes, in part brought about by enclosure and engrossing, also radically altered the English landscape. Following the 1523 publication of the *Boke of Husbondrye* by John Fitzherbert, a century of works by Thomas Tusser, Barnabe Googe, Andrew Yarranton, and others propounded the theme that changes in agricultural practices could lead to dramatic increase in crop yields.[4] Not only did this radically alter existing cropland, but the desire to make previously unproductive lowlands arable led to the substituting of indigenous plants with ryegrass, clover, trefoil, carrots, turnips, and sainfoin.[5] Moreover, increased demand for meat, tallow, and wool led not only to overgrazing but also contributed to the draining of fens, marshes, and wetlands for pasture and cropland.

Mining, not only for metals but increasingly for coal (as Sir William Cecil noted in 1596, "London and all other towns near the sea . . . are mostly driven to burn coal . . . for most of the woods are consumed"[6]), also took its toll on places. (Aghast at mining practices, in *Paradise Lost* Milton describes human beings who "with impious hands / Rifl'd the bowels of thir mother Earth / For Treasures better hid" [1.686–88], as having been taught the practice by the epic's devils.) Moreover, the advent of proto-industrial practices not only pushed urban development into new places but also increased reliance on imported goods; especially grain,[7] as subsistence gardening no longer supported a broad swath of the population. Aside from setting policy for the exploitation of undeveloped (and what was perceived as under-developed) places, the Commonwealth itself, having confiscated land from Church, Charles I, and private royalists, was pressured to develop formerly unused land to service its own debts.[8] With each of these changes in practices came the loss of places that had otherwise been unchanged for thousands of years. While it may seem that the nineteenth and twentieth centuries had a monopoly on the rampant development of largely unmolested places, the history of Milton's era sadly proves otherwise.

Not surprisingly, these massive ecological upheavals fueled public debate. Consider the example of deforestation: in 1653 Sylvanus Taylor baldly stated that deforestation had become a central issue for all of England, that "all men's eyes were upon the forests."[9] Although discussed earlier, the issue exploded in April 1649 with the scandal that royalists had nearly decimated the Forest of Dean. Accordingly, the 1649 Act for the Sale of Crown Lands temporarily excluded forests as debate on woodland management

continued through the next decade. While not expressly environmental (the Commonwealth was actually hoping to preserve a supply of timber for ship construction), the debate nonetheless centered on the issue of sustainable yield, with Taylor enthusiastically suggesting that two trees be planted for every one cut down. A report prepared by Dr. John Parker and Edward Crasset encouraging mass deforestation carried the day and resulted in November 1653 in the passing of the Act for the Deforestation, Sale, and Improvements of the Forests.[10]

While debates like these raged, Milton was writing his poetry. Indeed, in 1664, when the poet was likely finishing his *Paradise Lost*, John Evelyn published his enormously well-known *Silva*, a sentimental and unabashed plea for the preservation of forests. Underpinning my current inquiry is a desire to understand how the ecological upheavals of the seventeenth century appear in Milton's poetry. Eco-critic Robert Pogue Harrison has argued that with this loss of woodlands came a "remarkable inversion" as early as the sixteenth century, in which the representations of forests in literature begin to shift from "sinister" to become instead "innocent, pastoral."[11] If Harrison is correct in holding that even works written in Shakespeare's day were "works of nostalgia,"[12] wistfully harking back to an improbable past of innocent pastoral, then Milton's poetry may be the most nostalgic of all, finding in our past an unrivaled Paradise, lost through our own folly. Read this way, *Paradise Lost* is indeed a retelling of the biblical story of the loss of Eden, but, told in an early modern age witnessing the passing of a once-pristine landscape, the epic brings fresh new meaning to the notion of losing a Paradise.

The present inquiry is not largely historical – although such an investigation is not only possible but sorely needed. Fortunately, Diane McColley has recently completed the first book-length eco-critical treatment of the early modern era, which is firmly historical in its approach. Something of a complement to McColley's work, I instead draw attention to Milton grappling with issues of theology and philosophy in his "Green Reformation" of Christianity and early modern thinking. For example, while medieval theology often interpreted the Fall as humanity giving in to the temptation of the "earthy" flesh – and in so doing cast much that is of the Earth as not only inferior and suspect but evil – Milton offers a startling reading of scripture which finds Eve falling as she attempts to pull *away from* the Earth. Not surprisingly, such an Earth-friendly approach puts Milton in the company of some very modern environmentalists.

In my opening chapter I note how a group of environmental thinkers known as "Deep Ecologists" have since the late 1960s sought to rethink the

relation of human beings to the places on Earth we inhabit. Drawing from a wide range of disciplines, Deep Ecologists eschew the traditional subject–object distinction of Western thought for a view that human beings are as much a part of the places we inhabit as those places are a part of us. As the "subjectivism" these ecologists are railing against can principally be traced back to Descartes, Milton's much-noted rejection of Cartesian mind–body (and accordingly mind–place) dualism has profound environmental import. Those ambivalent to place in *Paradise Lost* are always devils. Either the epic's devils see place as objectively that which can be consumed and developed, or like Satan, boast they have attained the subjectivist's dream of being a mind apart from both body and place – that "mind is its own place." In contrast, Adam and Eve are found to be thoroughly rooted in the Earth; understanding their garden place (in particular the Bower) not as dead re-sources to be utilized, but rather as the very *source* which makes life in the Garden possible. Before the Fall Adam and Eve are never subjects who view their place as an object. When Satan finally realizes the horrid truth that being without place is Hell itself, the tragedy of *Paradise Lost* ensues as he tempts Eve to uproot herself from her own life-giving place.

In chapter 2 I consider how a close reading of the major works of the 1645 *Poems* together with *Paradise Lost* reveals a remarkable similarity between humanity in the epic and the "spirits or guardians of the place" (*genius loci*) of the early works. Many of Eve's characteristics were first penned to describe the early *genius* figures. This is especially clear in the case of "the Genius of the northern Wood" from *Arcades*: both Eve (with Adam) and the Genius are given "dominion" over their particular place, live in a "Bower," "nurse" the plants in their place, see to the bounty and beauty of their place, protect the place from "nightly ills," attend to their place with morning "haste," "number the ranks" of the plants, "visit" the plants in their domain, and are as attentive to a spiritual realm as they are to the Earth. While certain medieval Christian thinkers considered human beings as merely visitors here on Earth, as essentially "spirits without place," in *Paradise Lost* Milton has Adam and Eve not only moored to the Earth, but actively attending to the place which makes their lives possible. As will become apparent in upcoming chapters, this reunification of human beings and place is nothing less than a deconstruction of medieval theology's dualistic representations of Christianity.

Milton's reverence for place is made especially clear, I argue in chapter 3, when we consider the wound Earth receives at the Fall in *Paradise Lost*. This very unusual wound is not caused by something striking *at* the Earth, like a fist or spear, but instead something struck *from* the Earth – humanity.

Paradise is lost as a dualistic theologian (in devil's clothing) momentarily dupes Eve, the *genius* of the Garden, into believing that she should uproot herself from her place on Earth. Like some great tree which had simply reached too high for its roots in the Earth to support it, Eve falls and leaves a massive open wound in the Earth. With this extraordinary – though entirely plausible – interpretation of the biblical Fall, Milton delivers Christianity to the fold of environmentalists who hold that our own foolish acts have brought ecological devastation to the Earth. But Milton goes further in suggesting that this foolish uprooting of ourselves from our place on Earth was the pivotal human act – and the source of our current sorrow. However, because the wound is the site of the separation, humanity's greatest opportunity to renew a precious bond we once had with the Earth is to allow ourselves to feel this shared wound at once for ourselves *and* for the Earth (as Milton's sentient "Earth felt the wound," at once for herself and for humanity).

While *Paradise Lost* tells the story of how humanity was uprooted from its place on Earth, the much earlier *Ludlow Mask* rewrites the role of the *genius loci* Sabrina in a traditional British founding myth to tell the story of how humanity might restore the Human–Earth bond. In chapter 4 I suggest that, in a rather circular way, one could say that Sabrina is both mother (along with the other *genii* of the 1645 *Poems*) to Eve, as *Paradise Lost*'s heroine inherits many of the characteristics Milton first penned in the *Mask*, but also daughter to Eve as Sabrina takes up the mother of humanity's postlapsarian task of "re-rooting" humankind in a new place on the Earth. Through the inclusion of *three* "spirits" in the *Mask* (Sabrina, Comus, and the Attendant Spirit), Milton introduces a ternary structure which makes problematic medieval theology's either of the Earth ("earthy," like Comus) or not of the Earth ("spiritual," as in the Attendant Spirit) dilemma. While medieval theology generally favored the "not of the Earth" horn of the dilemma (at the cost of marginalizing the Earth), through Sabrina and Eve Milton enacted a deconstruction bent on revealing what is arguably the original Judeo-Christian understanding of Adam and Eve as "spirits thoroughly of the Earth" – first expressed by Milton in the bio-regional terms of the *Mask* as "spirits of place," *genius loci*.

The observant reader no doubt will have noticed (perhaps even winced at) my passing use of deconstruction in connection with Milton, yet the link is not as tenuous as it might first appear. Chapter 5 considers how Paul's first letter to the Church at Corinth and Luther's *theologia crucis* are not only, as recent scholarship has disclosed, sources for (Heidegger's early formulation of) modern deconstruction, but direct attempts to undo Christianity's

fusion with the Greco-Roman-exalted Judaic traditions. According to both Luther and Paul, by substituting a physical for a meta-physical God, a manifestly weak God-Man for an all-powerful transcendent God, an absent (as Christ is until the Parousia) God for an eternally present God, and celebrating weakness over strength, Christianity from the very start attempted to destabilize the Greco-Roman tradition – a tradition which has brought horrific environmental consequence to the Earth. Paul, Luther, Kierkegaard, and the young Heidegger all argue for a Christianity firmly rooted in place on Earth. Ironically, however, through the influence of the ancient traditions (especially Greek), what became orthodox Christianity actually reversed its position on the importance of place on Earth to human beings.

1 Corinthians also had an enormous influence on *Paradise Regained*. Chapter 6 places Milton in the company of Paul, Luther, and Heidegger in their deconstructive enterprises as *Paradise Regained* can be considered a confusing text precisely because it con-fuses (stands against the fusion of) those born into a fusion of the Christian, Greek, Roman, and exalted Judaic traditions. In looking past the crucifixion (the source of the deconstruction conceived by Paul and Luther) to Jesus' temptation in the desert, Milton radicalizes the approach by holding that Jesus himself countered the prevailing Greco-Roman-exalted Judaic juggernaut; represented in *Paradise Regained* through the corresponding central temptations of Greek learning, Roman power, and the glorious Throne of David. In *Paradise Regained* we can actually see in the Son the emergence of the paradigmatic Christian Self as a counter to Greek and Roman values: not until Satan offers distrust, power, glory, and a kingdom here does the Son understand he must privilege trust, weakness, humiliation, and a kingdom not here. In this view, Christian values are themselves con-structed to deconstruct the Greco-Roman-exalted Judaic world-view, though the fact that Christianity has again and again (such as in medieval theology) been fused with the very traditions it was constructed to oppose is not only one of history's great ironies, but the reason Milton may have felt compelled to pen the con-fusing *Paradise Regained*. While this deconstruction has profound environmental significance, as it places Christianity in the company of such place-friendly approaches as Native American spiritualism, the understanding of Christianity put forth in *Paradise Regained* has the added characteristic of actually being tailor-made (con-structed) to counter the Greco-Roman-exalted Judaic mindset. To Milton, Christianity is not a disease infecting the Earth, it is a well-crafted cure.

Although critical of the exalted Judaic mindset in *Paradise Regained*, Milton also argues that it is a mistake to consider Christianity apart from Judaism as an environmental cure, as my chapter 7 suggests. The Book of Job, and the wisdom contained in it, had a remarkable influence on both the form and content of *Paradise Regained*. However, if Job's wisdom is Hellenized, as is often done by Milton scholars, it is possible to completely miss the "wisdom" of *Paradise Regained*. In light of thinking by Kierkegaard, Heidegger, and Derrida, it becomes clear that to Milton wisdom (*sapientia*) in the postlapsarian world is not Augustine's quiet knowledge and vision of his God, but rather Job's fear and trembling before a God neither known nor seen. By directing our thoughts back to the here-and-now of our existence on Earth, Milton rejects the Greek notion of quiet contemplation of an-Other realm. This point is also made abundantly clear in *Paradise Lost:* while Adam and Eve fully experience the terror of their fallen existence, the devils in the epic immerse themselves in speculative theology in order to avoid confronting the horror of their condition.

Chapter 8 considers how the concept of "appointed time" (as the New Testament Greek *kairos* and the Hebrew *zem-awn'*) is constantly at work in Milton's work. Without taking *kairos* into account, the central temptations in *Paradise Regained*, *Paradise Lost*, and the *Ludlow Mask* cease to be temptations at all. Satan and Comus do not tempt the Son, Eve, and the Lady of the *Mask* with what they should never have, but rather with what, in the best of possible futures, they each will have: the Throne of David, the attainment of Heaven, and a sensuous and sensual life, respectively. Whether the Son, Eve, and the Lady act fully to realize their destiny or act to squander it, is all a question of *kairos*. As *kairos* arguably forms the basis of the late Heidegger's environmental maxim of "standing reserve" (*Bestand*), it is possible to use Heidegger's postmodern thought to explicate the environmental implications of *kairos* on place. By having his protagonists tempted with the prospect of appointing their own time, thereby ignoring *kairos*, it can be argued that Milton is suggesting that the Earth's places should not "stand in reserve" for human needs, but quite the contrary, human beings should stand in wait for the Earth's places to present their gifts in the Earth's (God's) time. Milton clarifies the environmental importance of time on place through his clever reformulation of medieval thought: what the Earth has to offer is only forbidden fruit when it is not yet ripe.

Because Milton has placed the wounding of the Earth in *Paradise Lost* where we might have expected the wounding of the Son, my final chapter

considers the typology surrounding Christ's wound as well as the "wound" opened in Adam's side during the Creation of Eve. Christ's, Adam's, and the Earth's wounds are all quite unusual, as something of consequence actually emerges from them to connect the wounded and what emerges from the wound in a mystical way. However, for this bond to remain intact the wound must be continually felt. The typological tradition describes the bond between the wounded and what emerges from the wound in three ways: as a sort of "birth," as a relation among parts of the body, and as the relation of roots to a tree. Milton uses each of these three approaches to portray how the Earth is wounded at the Fall. Through this use of typology, Milton suggests that our relation to "Mother Earth" is not only that to a "mother" who gave birth to humanity, but also to the "earth" we must be deeply rooted in if we are to grow towards Heaven. Furthermore, in Milton's poetry this mystical bodily connection we share with the Earth runs as deep as our bond to Heaven rises above it.

Finally, it should be noted that throughout the work I make what may seem heavy-handed use of some very modern thinkers: Kierkegaard, Nietzsche, and especially the young Heidegger. Considered together, I argue that the common enterprise of these philosophers can be seen in part as a radical "reformation" of Christian thinking: Kierkegaard's avowed mission is the unsettling of the Church ("Christendom"); Nietzsche's own reform project, although more hostile, is undertaken with near-constant reference to Christianity; and the young Heidegger, who considered himself a Christian theologian, undertook (then quickly concealed and disavowed) a radical reformation of the Western tradition through his secularization of early Christian thinking. My approach is not simply to use these thinkers to explicate Milton's work, but rather to argue that Milton's poetry contains an early modern anticipation of many of the ideas key to this second "Reformation." My larger aim, however, is to explore the ecological implications of Milton's strikingly modern efforts to reform Christianity.

PART I

Having place

1

Place defined: the ecological importance of place

> All that any of us may know of ourselves is to be known in relation to this place.
>
> Wendell Berry[1]

"O unexpected stroke, worst than of Death!"[2] When Milton's Eve learns that she and Adam are to be uprooted from the Garden, she not only cries out that it is a fate worse than Death, but in a surprising turn of events, she looks not to God's messenger, Michael, for further confirmation, but instead directly questions the Garden: "Must I leave thee Paradise?" (11.269). This is one of the few occasions in *Paradise Lost* where the Earth is addressed, though earlier, after surveying "Hill, and Vallie, Rivers, Woods and Plaines . . . Rocks, Dens and Caves," a bitter Satan remarked to the Earth, "but I in none of these / Find place or refuge" (9.116–19). In contrast to Satan, who surveyed the entire Earth to find his place, Eve's attention next drops to where she is particularly placed – the very earth beneath her feet – to which she echoes her question in disbelief: "thus leave / Thee Native Soile?" (11.269–70). Satan searched the whole of the Earth in vain for what has been lost by Eve, which has been right under her feet all along: *place*, now the paradise lost.

Christopher Fitter has aptly noted of the above passage that "the utmost weight of the tragic vision in *Paradise Lost* falls here, in what must accordingly be one of the most crucial and carefully mediated experiences of the epic's imagination,"[3] as this is when both Eve and Adam learn what they have lost is not only – as is so often noted – sin-free life, but in that "unexpected stroke," the place itself. While Jon Whitman has considered general theories of place in *Paradise Lost*, and Diane McColley, Wendell Berry, Richard DuRocher, and others have been reading the epic "Greenly" for years,[4] the purpose of the present chapter is to consider how place and ecology are related in Milton's account of our lost paradise.

In the 1960s and early 1970s, Lynn White, Paul Shepard, Gary Snyder, Arne Naess, and others published a number of enormously influential essays