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Vegetable Gold: Eden and the Lexicon of the Commodity in Milton's Paradise Lost (1667)

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Abstract: Milton's Eden is celebrated for its abundance, yet the descriptions that carry that abundance are habitually quoted apart from the similes introducing them. Read together, they show the poem reaching twice for the East Indian spice trade to figure an approach to paradise: Satan is a merchant fleet out of Bengala and the Moluccas, and the odours of Araby reach him as they reach sailors who round the Cape and do not land. The surrounding diction is of the same kind. Eden's fruit is vegetable gold, its brooks roll on orient pearl and sands of gold, and its air carries myrrh, cassia, nard and balm, which is to say the contents of a warehouse rather than of an English garden. This paper argues that Milton registers Edenic plenty in the commodity lexicon of his century, so that Giamatti's desirability and inaccessibility are realised as the structure of a distant market. The method is a qualitative close reading of Fowler's edition, with passages selected by three stated criteria, figural, lexical and distributional, and analysed for simile vehicle, descriptive noun and focalisation. The distributional finding is the most consequential: the lexicon of value belongs to Satan and to the narrator reporting Satan's gaze, while Adam, Eve and Raphael live in the garden and never price it. Rival alchemical, formal and political readings are examined, and the limits they set on the claim are stated. **Keywords:** Milton; *Paradise Lost*; earthly paradise; commodity lexicon; spice trade; early modern globalism.

INTRODUCTION

In an age in which dystopia rules the cyber culture and deadens our finer sensibility, we have grown accustomed to reading Milton's Eden as a repository of pure sensuous plenitude, a place whose fragrances and fruits compensate the reader for what the fallen world withholds. That tradition of reading is long and distinguished, and it remains the default of the classroom and the anthology. Is there, however, any good reason to read the descriptions of Eden apart from the similes that introduce them? This study proposes that the tradition, while not wrong, is incomplete in a way that current scholarship on early modern globalism allows us to specify. Two terms used throughout require definition at the outset. By commodity lexicon this paper means the set of nouns, compounds and figures by which a seventeenth-century English text names goods that were priced, weighed, shipped and traded: spices and aromatic resins (myrrh, cassia, nard, balm, gum), precious substances used as measures of worth (gold, pearl), and the terms of carriage and exchange (merchant, cargo, trading flood, drugs in the period sense of exotic commodities). The lexicon is a matter of diction rather than of subject matter; a text employs it whenever it registers value in the vocabulary through which value was then transacted. By early modern globalism this paper means the scholarly account of the seventeenth century as a period in which English literary culture was reorganised by long-distance maritime commerce, by the chartered trading company, the Indies routes and the competition for the spice monopoly, and in which that commerce supplied writers with images, geographies and terms of value. The phrase names a critical field, not a historical thesis, and designates here the body of work running from Lim (1998) to Soon (2022). Scholarship on Milton's paradise has developed along three lines which have rarely been brought into contact. The first and oldest is the study of the earthly paradise as a literary

inheritance. Giamatti (1966) established its terms by examining the gardens of antiquity and the Renaissance and identifying their two governing attributes, desirability and inaccessibility. Stein (1953) labelled the garden's teeming growth its authorised excesses; Knott (1971) argued that Milton's central representational problem was to show nature perfected without making it unbelievable; Kermode (1960) posited that Milton required a garden of pleasure neither naturalist nor libertine, into which innocent delight had somehow to be introduced; and Empson (1935) noticed the strands of organic growth, music and odour which converge whenever Milton thinks of paradise. This body of work established the descriptive richness of Books 4 and 5 as the poem's central aesthetic achievement, but it did so by reading the descriptions largely in isolation from the similes which frame them, a habit of quotation which the anthologies have done much to encourage.

The second line is ecocritical, and it is at present the most active of the three. Hiltner (2003, 2011) and McColley (2007) shifted attention from the garden as tableau to the garden as place and as work, recovering Milton's attentiveness to husbandry, to interspecies kinship, and to the labour Adam and Eve actually perform. Cox (2023) discerns in the poem an ecological fall distinct from, though concurrent with, the human one. Barrett (2024) reads early modern epic as a genre saturated with environmental thinking, and shows how the ecological costs of extraction and warfare surface in the poem's own machinery. This scholarship has established that Eden is a site of activity rather than of static contemplation, but it has tended to treat the produce of that activity as a matter of stewardship rather than of value. What becomes of the ecocritical account, one might ask, if the yield of the garden is measured in the terms by which yield was then priced?

The third line is the least assimilated of the three. Lim (1998) opened it by placing Milton at the end of a poetics of colonialism running from Raleigh, and Morton (2000) traced the way fantasies of an ideal substance of extraordinary wealth and beauty, located in distant imaginary realms, percolated into poetic language. O'Brien (2002) took up the question of whether Milton writes for or against empire, a question which, as Dhar (2025) observes, remains genuinely open. Haydon (2017) read the poem against the politics of the trading corporation, and Soon (2022), comparing *Paradise Lost* with Richard Fanshawe's *Lusiad* of 1655, notes that Eden is scented with spices whose perfumes waft beyond its borders exactly as Sabeian odours waft from Araby. This line has established that the poem is legible within the commercial history of its century, but it has concerned itself principally with the poem's politics rather than with its descriptive language, and it is there that the present paper enters.

What has not been undertaken is the meeting of the first line with the third. The paradise tradition supplies a structure of longing, the globalism scholarship a commercial history, and the descriptive lexicon of Eden, which belongs to both, has not been read as belonging to both. This study addresses that gap, and in doing so raises one question above the others. In what vocabulary does *Paradise Lost* register the abundance of Eden, and what follows for the poem's account of desire if that vocabulary should prove to be the vocabulary of trade? Put more sharply: does Milton's garden simply inherit the tradition's structure of desirability and inaccessibility, or does it reproduce that structure in the contemporary form of a distant market? The aim of what follows is to read the descriptive and figural language of Eden as an instance of the commodity lexicon of the seventeenth century, and to draw out what that language does to the poem's treatment of paradisaic longing. Three narrower objectives serve that aim:

- to establish where the poem's Edenic similes find their vehicles, and what is accomplished by the particular vehicles chosen;
- to read the nouns Milton uses for Edenic produce, and the compound "vegetable gold" above all, as a fusion of the organic with the monetary;
- and to ask how that vocabulary is distributed among the poem's consciousnesses, since the question of who perceives Eden in these terms is not the same as the question of

whether the terms are present.

Three conclusions may be signalled in advance. The two similes that govern the approach to paradise are both drawn from the Indies trade and both attached to Satan, so that desirability and inaccessibility are realised as the structure of a distant market. The descriptive nouns of Eden constitute a sustained commodity lexicon which the poem uses without embarrassment, reserving its condemnation for extraction rather than for value as such. And that lexicon is unevenly distributed: it belongs to Satan and to the narrator reporting Satan's gaze, and is absent from the speech of the garden's inhabitants.

Two theoretical frameworks are required, and they answer to one another. Giamatti's (1966) desirability and inaccessibility are treated here not merely as a psychological structure but as a description of the relation between a consumer and a distant source. Morton's (2000) poetics of spice arrives independently at a related position, arguing that the rhetoric of the ideal exotic substance carries an economic content into poetic language and survives there long after the arrangements which produced it have gone. Giamatti theorises from the tradition, Morton from the commodity; between them the garden may be read without forcing a choice.

MATERIALS AND METHOD

The primary material of this study is the text of *Paradise Lost* as established in Fowler's second edition (Milton, 1667/2007), and all quotations are given in that edition's modernised spelling and cited by book and line so that any reader may verify them. Fowler's commentary is cited separately (Fowler, 2007) where the argument depends on his glosses or on the earlier criticism he records. The 1667 first edition is named in the title because the argument concerns the poem as a product of the decade of the Navigation Acts and the second Anglo-Dutch war; no substantive variant between 1667 and 1674 bears on the passages discussed.

The method is qualitative and interpretive close reading, the procedure appropriate to a claim about diction. Because such a claim can be made to look inevitable by a selective choice of passages, three criteria of selection are stated here rather than left implicit; a passage entered the corpus if it satisfied at least one.

The first criterion is figural: every simile in Books 1, 2, 4, 5 and 9 whose vehicle is drawn from maritime navigation, cargo, or long-distance trade. This yields a small and well-defined set, of which the fleet simile at 2.636–643 and the Sabeian simile at 4.159–165 are the two that govern an approach to paradise.

The second criterion is lexical: every noun, compound or epithet in the descriptions of Eden that names a traded substance, whether a spice, an aromatic gum or resin, a precious metal or a precious stone, taken with its immediate context. The resulting inventory is small enough to be given entire: vegetable gold (4.220), golden rind (4.249), Hesperian fables (4.250), odorous gums and balm (4.248), orient pearl and sands of gold (4.238), and the catalogue of myrrh, cassia, nard and balm at 5.292–293. Passages of Edenic description containing none of these terms, such as the account of the four rivers, were noted as negative evidence and are not suppressed here.

The third criterion is distributional, and it converts a lexical observation into an argument. Every occurrence identified under the first two criteria was tagged for focalisation: narrator in his own person, narrator reporting what Satan sees, Satan's own speech, or the speech of Adam, Eve or Raphael. The speeches of the garden's inhabitants were then searched for the same vocabulary, so that absence as well as presence could be counted. This is the step that guards the argument against the obvious objection that a critic who looks for commercial diction in a long poem will find some.

Milton's prose is used for corroboration at one point only and is not part of the corpus. The study involves no human participants, so consent, privacy and ethical approval do not arise; nor does it require sampling procedures, tables or figures, its evidence being verbal and

presented as quotation and analysis.

THE EARTHLY PARADISE AS A STRUCTURE OF DISTANCE

The tradition Milton inherited had already made distance a condition of paradise. The two basic ideas which emerge from any examination of the gardens of antiquity are, according to Giamatti (1966), desirability and inaccessibility, and they mirror the predicament of being torn between what one wants and what one can have. Perhaps for that reason the very inaccessibility of the earthly paradise produced the false paradise of the Renaissance poets, which embodies the split between what a place seems and what it is.

Giamatti's formulation has been read almost exclusively as a psychological or theological structure, yet the pairing describes something else with equal precision. A commodity is desirable and inaccessible when its source lies at the far end of a trade route, and the tradition places its paradises accordingly. The classical writers held that the place existed on the other side of the earth, in the Fortunate Isles. The Garden of the Hesperides is set beyond the ocean; its name means simply "in the west." It occupies the same location as Homer's Elysium and Hesiod's Blessed Isles. Its orchards are heavily laden with fruit, and a watchful dragon guards them. The Sumerian and Babylonian myth had, like Genesis, its paradise in the bright land of Dilmun, where grain is abundant and there is neither sickness nor death. These are not only images of longing. They are also images of a place from which good things come and to which one cannot go.

The guarding is as much a part of these stories as the abundance, and it is the guarding that makes them economic as well as mythic. The Hesperides keep golden apples which only Hercules can pluck, and the difficulty of the plucking is the whole of the story; in Norse mythology a dragon guards the apple tree of immortality belonging to Idun. What is narrated in each case is not simply that a wonderful thing exists, but that it exists elsewhere and is defended. Is that not the situation of any valuable good whose source lies beyond one's reach? Men of the Middle Ages and the Renaissance continually discussed the location and nature of the blessed land, and the discussion of location is precisely what a merchant conducts.

Milton inherited this tradition without simply imitating it, alluding freely to the classical and Renaissance paradises while insisting that those were feigned and the Edenic paradise alone true. Knott (1971) notes that Milton's garden offers not a pleasance, as Dante's does, but a landscape closer to the environs of Spenser's Bower of Bliss, and that, like Spenser's false paradise, Eden is shown through the eyes of an antagonist visitor highly susceptible to its charms. The allurements of Eden are most strongly felt by a person denied entry into it. That observation, made in the vocabulary of pastoral criticism, will prove to have an economic dimension which Knott did not pursue.

Where the tradition offered Milton a structure of distance, he had available a second and far more literal version of it, one being worked out in his own century upon actual water by actual companies. It is to that version that the poem turns at the very moment it needs an image for the approach to the fictive world.

SATAN AS MERCHANT FLEET

The keystone of the argument stands at the end of Book 2, where the poem requires a figure for Satan's approach as he clears Chaos and first sights the created world. Milton supplies a merchantman:

As when far off at sea a fleet descried
Hangs in the clouds, by equinoctial winds
Close sailing from Bengala, or the isles
Of Ternate and Tidore, whence merchants bring
Their spicy drugs: they on the trading flood

Through the wide Ethiopian to the Cape
Ply stemming nightly toward the pole. So seemed
Far off the flying fiend. (Milton, 1667/2007, 2.636–643)

The geography of these lines is not ornamental, and each element carries a specific commercial charge. Ternate and Tidore are the Moluccas, the Spice Islands proper, and by the 1660s their names carried the whole history of Portuguese, Dutch and English competition for the clove and nutmeg monopoly, including the events at Amboyna in 1623 which had poisoned Anglo-Dutch relations for a generation. Bengala names the other pole of the same commerce. The winds are equinoctial, the route runs through the wide Ethiopian sea to the Cape, and the cargo is specified as spicy drugs, where *drug* carries its period sense of an exotic commodity rather than a medicine (Fowler, 2007, note to 2.640–641). Most tellingly, the water is not merely a sea but a trading flood. Milton is naming, with the precision of a man who had read the voyage literature and served a government with commercial ambitions, the principal commercial artery of his century, and he is using it to describe the arrival of the enemy at the world.

The effect of the simile deserves more attention than it has had. Satan is at this moment sublime, and the fleet hanging in the clouds is one of the great images of distant magnitude in English verse; yet the tenor is a fiend and the vehicle a merchantman, so that the poem has arranged for the two to illuminate one another. Is the merchant fleet ennobled by the comparison, or is Satan given a motive by it? Milton does not say, and criticism has divided upon the point, some reading the poem as an argument against empire and others as complicit with it. O'Brien (2002) has shown how much the answer depends upon which parts of the poem one privileges, and Haydon's (2017) account of the corporation suggests why the ambivalence may be structural rather than accidental: the trading company was an institution the period itself could not decide whether to admire, being at once an instrument of national wealth and a body whose conduct abroad was a standing embarrassment.

That the commercial content of the simile is not the invention of the present reading can be shown from two directions. Barrett (2024, p. 50) takes it as plain that Satan here assumes the role of a mercantile opportunist or conquistador in flight toward the newly created earth, and reads the proximity of that appetitive posture to the poem's gorgeous Edenic description as a deliberate source of unease. Fowler (2007, note to 2.636–643) records the older reading that Satan speaks in the idiom of a shrewd businessman, and observes that the fleet carries spicy drugs because Satan is going to barter for Eve's innocence the fruit of the forbidden tree. The point is not that the simile is hostile to trade, but that the poem's most careful readers, early and recent, have heard the commercial register doing figurative work rather than supplying local colour.

What the simile establishes for the reading that follows is a direction of travel. The poem has aligned the approach to paradise with the approach to a source of valuable goods, and it has done so at the structurally decisive moment, the first sighting of the created world. Everything subsequently said about Eden's produce arrives to a reader who has been given that frame.

VEGETABLE GOLD

Once the Book 2 simile is in view, the descriptive vocabulary of Book 4 changes character, because Milton's Eden is not merely fertile but fertile in commodities, and in the particular commodities then being fought over. The point can be made by working through the inventory of Edenic nouns in the order in which the poem supplies them.

Consider the trees first. The poem gives us fruit "burnished with golden rind" that hangs "amiable," then adds the guarded gloss that these are "Hesperian fables true, / If true, here only" (4.249–251). Milton is doing two things at once: asserting that the classical fable of the golden apples finds its only truth in Eden, and measuring that truth in the metal. Thirty lines earlier the tree of life stands "High eminent, blooming ambrosial fruit / Of vegetable gold"

(4.218–220), a phrase of extraordinary compression which fuses the organic and the monetary into a single substance. Gold that grows, growth that is gold: the compound names exactly the fantasy Morton (2000) traced in the poetics of spice, of an ideal substance of extraordinary wealth and beauty located in a distant imaginary realm. What the Hesperides guarded, and what merchants sail to Ternate for, is here found growing.

The water of Eden is described in the same register, and this is the evidence most consistently overlooked. Milton does not say that the brooks run over stones and sand. He says that they run “from that sapphire fount,” “Rolling on orient pearl and sands of gold” (4.237–238). Three of the four substantives there are trade goods, and the fourth, the epithet *orient*, is itself a commercial term: orient pearls were the pearls of the Indian Ocean fisheries, and the word functioned in the period as a grade as much as a direction. A stream bedded in pearl and gold dust is not a natural feature but a warehouse floor, and the poem arrives at it by pure description, without a simile to license the vocabulary.

The fragrance passages work in the same way, and here the inventory becomes a catalogue. Nature in Eden “Wantoned as in her prime,” pouring forth more sweet, “Wild above rule or art,” and what she pours is a merchant's list: Raphael comes “through groves of myrrh, / And flowering odours, cassia, nard, and balm; / A wilderness of sweets” (5.292–294). Are these the flowers of an English garden? They are the contents of the apothecary's drawer and of the East India warehouse, goods whose scarcity gave the trade its value and whose names a London reader of 1667 would have met upon a bill of lading quite as readily as in a poem. Fowler's gloss confirms the point from the other direction: *odour* in the period literally meant a substance that emits a sweet smell, a spice, so that “flowering odours” names the goods and not merely the sensation (Fowler, 2007, note to 5.292–294). The phrase “a wilderness of sweets” then repays pressure, since a wilderness is by definition unowned and uncounted while sweets, in the sense the catalogue has just established, are precisely what is counted. The phrase registers abundance as an economic impossibility as much as a horticultural marvel, and the paradox is constitutive of its beauty rather than incidental to it.

The gums repay similar pressure. Milton tells us that the groves of Eden had “rich trees” that “wept odorous gums and balm” (4.248), and the verb has always been read as pathos, the garden weeping its sweetness in anticipation of the loss to come. Yet weeping is also what a tree does when it is tapped, and gum and balm reach a seventeenth-century reader as goods rather than as effusions, carried from Arabia and the Levant and priced by the ounce. The adjective *rich* make the point without help: Fowler (2007, note to 4.248–249) records the eighteenth-century observation that the epithet sets the valuable aromatics against the merely edible fruit, and adds drily that Hesperian fruit would not come cheap either. Is the pathos of the line diminished by that recognition? It is rather deepened, since what the garden pours out freely is exactly what the fallen world will have to buy, and the fall may therefore be measured as the moment at which abundance acquires a price. Milton nowhere states this. He does not need to, having chosen his nouns.

The poem's treatment of actual gold confirms the point from an unexpected direction. Mammon was “the least erected spirit that fell / From heaven,” whose thoughts even in heaven were “always downward bent, admiring more / The riches of heaven's pavement, trodden gold, / Than aught divine” (1.679–683); his followers “Ransacked the centre, and with impious hands / Rifled the bowels of their mother earth / For treasures better hid,” opening in the hill “a spacious wound” and digging out “ribs of gold” (1.686–690). The passage is a sustained condemnation of extraction, and “precious bane” (1.692) compresses the judgement into two words. Barrett (2024, pp. 52–53) shows how far that judgement reaches into the poem's machinery, since the rebel angels' artillery in Book 6 is mined out of the soil of heaven and answered by a faithful terraforming that uproots its hills, so that the war becomes a study in ecological havoc rather than in heroism. What is striking is that the same poet, three books after

Mammon, calls the unfallen fruit vegetable gold without apparent unease. The contrast is instructive rather than contradictory. Gold torn from the earth is theft; gold that grows upon a tree is bounty. The difference is the labour and the violence, so that the poem is not condemning value as such but distinguishing what is given from what is taken. A poet indifferent to value would have had no need of the distinction.

COUNTER-READINGS AND THE LIMITS OF THE COMMODITY CLAIM

An argument of this kind is strengthened rather than weakened by the readings that resist it, and three such readings deserve direct engagement. Each takes the same evidence and construes it otherwise.

The first and most serious is the alchemical reading of “vegetable gold.” Fowler (2007, note to 4.220) records that “vegetable stone” and “potable gold” were recognised varieties of the philosopher’s stone credited with preserving health, and connects the phrase to Ovid’s Hesperidean fruit and to Genesis 3:22, where God’s concern is that the tree of life might prove an elixir to fallen Adam. On this account the compound is hermetic rather than mercantile. The objection cannot be dismissed, but two things may be said. The alchemical and the commercial senses were neighbours rather than alternatives in the seventeenth century, since the search for transmutable gold was an economic project pursued by men who wanted the metal and not merely the symbol. More decisively, the alchemical gloss accounts for one phrase and leaves the surrounding inventory untouched, having nothing to say about orient pearl, spicy drugs, the trading flood, or the catalogue at 5.292–293. The commodity reading rests on a distribution rather than on a single compound, and a rival gloss on one item does not disturb a pattern.

The second counter-reading treats the merchant simile as narrative mechanics rather than commercial content. Fowler (2007, note to 2.636–643) preserves Empson’s demonstration that the vehicle corresponds to the tenor at many points at once, since the ships ply nightly because Satan has come out of darkness, hang far off like a mirage because he seems to fly, and head toward the pole because he moves toward the top of the concave wall of hell; Fowler adds that trade often figured intellectual activity for Milton. On this account the spices are chosen because a fleet must carry something. The reply is that such readings are compatible with the present one. A vehicle may be selected for its structural aptness and still import the associations it carries, and the argument here does not rest on one simile but on the poem’s return to the same trade route when it needs a second image for an approach to paradise at 4.159–165. One such simile is a coincidence. Two are a habit of mind.

The third counter-reading is political rather than philological, and it cuts against any account that makes Milton a critic of commerce. Fowler (2007, note to 2.636–643) records the suggestion that the passage alludes astringently to the imperialism of Camoens, then observes that such readings may forget the imperialist thrust of the Commonwealth Milton served. Barrett (2024, pp. 50–51) presses harder, showing that the poem can endorse the exploitative arrangements it also depicts, since Michael’s speech in Book 12 rehearses the curse of Ham as a warrant for enslavement. This paper therefore does not claim that Milton condemns trade. The claim is narrower: that the poem exhibits the mercantile imagination rather than merely employing it, and that the distribution of the vocabulary shows the exhibition to be deliberate. Whether Milton approved of what he exhibited is a question the poem does not settle, and this study does not need it settled.

THE TRADER’S EYE

At this point the question of focalisation becomes decisive, and it is here that Milton’s handling seems most deliberate. The whole of the great description of paradise in Book 4 is mediated through the baleful eyes of the intruder. We see Eden as Satan sees it, and the poem says so. The Sabeian simile makes the alignment explicit, and it does so by placing the perceiving figure

at a precise point on a known route:

As when to them who sail
Beyond the Cape of Hope, and now are past
Mozám bic, off at sea north-east winds blow
Sabea odours from the spicy shore
Of Arabie the blest, with such delay
Well pleased they slack their course, and many a league
Cheered with the grateful smell old Ocean smiles.
(Milton, 1667/2007, 4.159–165)

Read as a passage about scents, this is one of the loveliest achievements in the poem, and it is customarily quoted for the smiling ocean. Read as a passage about position, it is sharper. The sailors are identified by their route: past the Cape, past Mozambique, upon the run to the Indies. They do not land. They slacken their course, are cheered, and proceed, because the shore of Araby the blest is not their destination but a fragrance encountered in transit. This is inaccessibility rendered as commerce, and it is Satan's situation exactly, since he too will approach, be delayed by sweetness, and pass through without possessing. That the simile is a deliberate reprise rather than an unrelated flourish is confirmed by Fowler (2007, note to 4.159–166), who reads the second comparison as taking up the first after the intervening journey and notes the pun by which Satan, past the Cape of Hope, is a soul past hope.

The poem's own language establishes what kind of visitor this is. Satan arrives carrying his condition with him, since "within him Hell / He brings, and round about him" (4.20–21), and he arrives with the eye of a man assessing a coast, seeing a place of unguarded plenty already described in the terms by which plenty is valued elsewhere. His first speech in the garden turns upon dispossession, upon the sight of "our room of bliss thus high advanced" now occupied by "Creatures of other mould" (4.359–360), and his ruin is sharpest when he watches Adam and Eve "Imparadised in one another's arms" while he is "to hell am thrust, / Where neither joy nor love, but fierce desire" remains (4.506–509). Is the grievance not, among other things, proprietary? Milton has given the intruder the vocabulary of the trader, and has then made his ruin consist in seeing a possession he cannot hold.

The distribution of the vocabulary among the poem's speakers turns this from an impression into a finding. Adam and Eve, who live in the garden, never once describe it in these terms. Eve's account of the smells of paradise is the test case, since it is the one speech by an inhabitant that catalogues the garden's sensory goods at length, and it is conspicuously free of the lexicon: "Sweet is the breath of morn, her rising sweet, / With charm of earliest birds; pleasant the sun / When first on this delightful land he spreads / His orient beams, on herb, tree, fruit, and flower, / Glistening with dew" (4.641–645). The list is as full as the narrator's and as sensuous, but every item in it is named in ordinary English and none is priced. Even *orient*, which named a grade of pearl four hundred lines earlier, has reverted here to a direction of sunrise. Raphael, likewise, passes through the spicy forest without pricing it. The mercantile lexicon belongs to the narrator when he is describing what Satan sees, and to Satan himself. Are we to think that an accident, in a poem so exact about who says what?

LABOUR, YIELD, AND THE ECOCRITICAL READING

The ecocritical scholarship becomes useful at this juncture, because it has established that Eden is a place of work and has therefore prepared the ground for a question about what the work is for. Hiltner (2003) and McColley (2007) taught us to read Milton's garden as a working place rather than a static tableau, attentive to husbandry, to interspecies kinship, and to the labour the poem assigns its inhabitants. Cox (2023) has since shown how far Milton's environmental thinking extends beyond the garden wall, while Barrett (2024) situates such reading within a

broader account of epic as an environmentally saturated genre.

What the commodity reading adds is a question about the object of that labour, and the poem answers it in the language of yield. Adam tells Eve that they must rise to reform the arbours and alleys "with branches overgrown, / That mock our scant manuring, and require / More hands than ours to lop their wanton growth" (4.626–629), and adds that the fallen "blossoms also, and those dropping gums" lie "bestrewn unsightly and unsmooth" and "Ask riddance" (4.630–632). The detail is remarkable: the very gums that the narrator had valued at 4.248 are here so plentiful that they are litter. Eve's proposal in Book 9 arises from the same problem, since "the work under our labour grows, / Luxurious by restraint; what we by day / Lop overgrown, or prune, or prop, or bind, / One night or two with wanton growth derides" (9.208–211), and it is that problem of yield which produces the division of labour on which the fall turns. If Eden is a place of work, it is also a place of produce, and the poem's way of praising the produce is to name what the produce is worth.

This does not convict Milton of commodifying paradise. It suggests instead that the two most powerful vocabularies available to him for describing abundance, the pastoral and the mercantile, were by 1667 no longer separable, and that a poet writing about a garden of unlimited fertility in the decade of the Navigation Acts and the second Anglo-Dutch war could not describe spice without describing trade. Hiltner's (2011) argument that the pastoral conceals its own environmental and economic conditions applies here with unusual force; Milton's pastoral conceals rather less than most. Read in this way, the celebrated fragility of Eden acquires a second explanation. The garden is vulnerable not only because Satan is malicious and Eve persuadable, but because it holds, in unguarded and unmeasured quantity, precisely the goods over which the poet's own century was conducting a naval war. The place has already been valued by the being who intends to take it.

THE PERSISTENCE OF THE LONGING

The commodity reading also gives a second dimension to the most familiar account of why the paradise image survives at all. Eliade (1960) singles out the nostalgia for paradise as among the most recurrent of human longings, defining it as man's repeated attempt to restore the paradisiac condition. The definition holds and may be extended, since the longing for the earthly paradise and the longing for the distant costly thing have borrowed one another's language at least since the Renaissance, and Milton is where the borrowing becomes fully visible.

The afterlife of the image bears this out. When Coleridge (1816/1912) decrees a stately pleasure dome in Xanadu and furnishes the account with incense-bearing trees, and when Pope (1713/1966) observes that the groves of Eden, vanished now so long, live in description and look green in song, the paradisaic image arrives already bound up with the exotic import. Morton's (2000) argument that the rhetoric of spice supplied Romantic writing with a poetics of consumption describes a tradition which Milton had already brought to its point of maximum tension. Blake (1966) would locate paradise in moments rather than in any place, and Wordsworth (1936) proposed to find the Elysian fields and Fortunate Isles of the old poets in the common day of his Grasmere valley. Both relocations may be read as attempts to find a paradise which cannot be shipped. The nineteenth and twentieth centuries completed the movement by internalising it, until Jung (1959) could treat paradise as an archetype and Bodkin (1934) could relate it to the pleasure principle, and Kafka (1954) could reduce the whole matter to two sins, impatience and laziness, the first driving us out and the second preventing our return. What is common to these later formulations is that each relocates paradise into a domain from which it cannot be extracted and sold.

DISCUSSION

The question with which this paper began was whether Milton's garden merely inherits the tradition's structure of desirability and inaccessibility, or whether it reproduces that structure in the contemporary form of a distant market. Each of the three objectives set out in the introduction may now be answered, and the answers converge on the second alternative.

The first objective was to establish where the Edenic similes find their vehicles, and they find them in the Indies trade. Milton figures the approach to the created world as a merchant fleet out of Bengala or the Moluccas, carrying spicy drugs upon what the poem itself calls a trading flood (2.636–643), and the approach to Eden as a landfall scented from the sea by sailors who do not land (4.159–165). The two are formally linked and both attached to Satan. The choice gives Giamatti's desirability and inaccessibility a seventeenth-century body: the paradise one longs for is positioned exactly where a cargo is positioned relative to a buyer.

The second objective was to read the nouns of Edenic produce, which constitute a consistent commodity lexicon: vegetable gold (4.220), brooks rolling on orient pearl and sands of gold (4.238), rich trees weeping odorous gums and balm (4.248), golden rind that makes the Hesperian fable true here only (4.249–251), and a wilderness of myrrh, cassia, nard and balm (5.292–294). That Milton could see the pursuit of such goods as violation is beyond doubt, since Mammon's followers rifle the bowels of their mother earth for treasures better hid (1.686–688) and the metal they raise is a precious bane. The distinction the poem draws is between value given and value taken, not between value and its absence.

The third objective was distributional, and it yields the finding on which the argument rests. The lexicon appears in the narrator's voice when he reports what the intruder sees, and in Satan's own speech, where the grievance is proprietary. It does not appear in the speech of those who live in the garden: Eve's catalogue at 4.641–649 is as sensuous as anything in the poem and contains not one term of value, and Raphael passes through the spicy forest without pricing it. Presence and absence together make a pattern an impressionistic reading could not produce.

These findings bear on each of the three bodies of scholarship reviewed at the outset. For the paradise tradition, Giamatti's pairing has served for sixty years as an account of longing; it serves quite as well as an account of a market. For the ecocritical line, the yield of Eden proves describable in terms of worth as well as of stewardship, so that the labour Hiltner and McColley recovered has an object not yet named, and the extractive violence Barrett (2024) traces through Books 6 and 12 has a descriptive counterpart in Book 4. For the globalism line, the argument shifts the evidence from the poem's explicit politics, where the question of Milton and empire has proved intractable, to its descriptive diction, where the evidence can be counted and located.

The counter-readings set the proper limits on all this. The alchemical gloss shows that no single phrase can carry the argument; the correspondence reading shows that the commercial content is additional to, not a replacement for, the simile's structural work; and the reminder that Milton served an imperially minded Commonwealth, and could excuse enslavement in Book 12, blocks any temptation to make him a critic of trade. What survives all three is the distributional finding, which none of them addresses.

CONCLUSION

Paradise Lost registers the abundance of Eden in the vocabulary of the seventeenth-century commodity, and it does so systematically enough that the vocabulary can be inventoried, located and assigned to speakers. The similes come from the Indies trade; the nouns name goods that were priced by the ounce; and the whole lexicon belongs to the intruder and to the narrator reporting the intruder's gaze. The consequence for the poem's account of desire is that Edenic longing in Milton is not merely the longing of a fallen creature for an unfallen condition but, in its very diction, the longing of a buyer for a distant source. Reading that lexicon as

evidence, rather than reading only the poem's explicit politics, is a procedure that other paradise writing of the period might reward.

Two limits should be acknowledged. This paper has stayed inside the poem, and Milton's prose, where trade and plantation and national wealth are discussed without the protection of figure, would either strengthen the case or complicate it in useful ways. The poem's colonial afterlife also remains untouched, and readers who encountered Eden from the far end of the trade routes described in Book 2 were positioned very differently from Milton, and from us. Neither line of inquiry would overturn what has been argued. Each would sharpen the claim that the lexicon of Eden carries an economic content, and that its poet knew what he was choosing.

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ETHICAL APPROVAL

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DECLARATION ON THE USE OF AI-ASSISTED TOOLS

Grammarly was used in the preparation of this manuscript. Its contribution lay in language editing. The author reviewed and verified all sources, takes full responsibility for the accuracy, originality and attribution of the content, and confirms that no AI system is listed as an author.

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