Western Godhood between the Pre-Modern, the Modern, and the Postmodern; An Analysis of Godhood in Milton's Paradise Lost and Bethesda's The Elder Scrolls
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Postmodern; An Analysis of Godhood in Milton's *Paradise Lost* and

Bethesda's *The Elder Scrolls*

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INTRODUCTION

> We are freeing ourselves of the impediments of memory, association, nostalgia, legend, myth
> or what have you, that have been the devices of Western European painting. Instead of making
> cathedrals out of Christ, man or "life," we are making them out of ourselves, out of our own
> feelings. (Newman, qtd. in Hart 5).

As postmodernism continues to grow and find more and more channels to reach the population of our contemporary Western world, we too see an increasing amount of atheists (Hart) and new spiritual and esoteric movements. "Where Kant envisages a recovery of selfhood to follow the act of self-sacrifice in sublime experiences, Lyotard … takes the 'retreat of regulation and rules' to imply 'the death of God'" (Hart). However, the death of God is but one possible interpretation of the decline of Christianity and the rise of the self-centred religion as is central to postmodernism, I understand this movement rather as the displacement, or replacement, of God. Much like "Eve [who] wants to displace God with herself" (Lim 122), the postmodern philosophy encourages us to replace God.

The Christian concept of godhood has been the recipient of many critiques first in the modern and now in the postmodern era. With my thesis, I aim to give an insight in the way in which narrative media can help us understand how Western concepts of godhood have changed from the modern to the postmodern period. I will use Milton's *Paradise Lost* (*PL*) to gain an understanding of early-modern critique on the Christian understanding of godhood. Furthermore, I will use Bethesda's *The Elder Scrolls* (*TES*) series as a case study to gain an understanding of the postmodern notions of godhood. I have selected these specific texts for a variety of reasons. Though Milton received a lot of criticism in his time, he is seen as one of the greatest authors in the European early-modern period. *PL* specifically is useful for my purpose as it presents a critique of Christianity that not many scholars of Milton's time would have dared to give. It is therefore a representation of an early-modern critique on Christianity, that has become more prevalent throughout the modern era, yet was unique and ahead of its time in the early-modern period in which it was written. For my analysis of the postmodern, I felt obligated to choose a videogame as a case study, as videogames are a postmodern medium. The experience of

gaming, separating one's identity and creating an avatar so that one can reflect upon oneself from an outside perspective, is a very postmodern way of interacting with a medium. *TES* is a well-known roleplaying game (RPG) that deals with religion in an explicit, sophisticated and subversive way, more so than comparable games. In my analysis I will compare different notions of godhood as they are presented in these works by analysing both their similarities as well as their discrepancies.

Before entering into the motivation of my case studies, I will provide concise definitions of modernism, premodernism, and postmodernism as I use them throughout my thesis. All of these terms are "designating a many-faceted cultural development" (Gamache 1), and are therefore hard to define precisely. Therefore, I will give definitions of these terms as they are used within my specific fields of research, as this makes it easier to define these terms somewhat concisely. As both premodernism as well as postmodernism are terms that derive their meaning from their relation to modernism, I will first provide a definition of modernism before providing definitions of premodernism and postmodernism.

For my definition of modernism I adhere to Gamache's "Defining Modernism, a Religious and Literary Correlation", as he attempts to give a definition of modernism in both literature and religion. The definition of modernism that Gamache presents can be summarized in the following quote:

> modernists did think about and search into religious traditions, and for much the same reason the modernist religious scholars probed the origins and development of Christian scriptures and doctrine: both needed to find a basis for their understanding of themselves, society, and the universe, especially as a foundation for understanding human conduct. (Gamache 15).

In the above quote, Gamache argues that modernist religious scholars attempted to create a grand narrative, or a synchronistic understanding, of the world around them, which, at least for my analysis, is one of the most important aspects of modernism

Admittedly, I had difficulty finding a concise definition of premodernism that fit my specific academic fields, yet the following understanding of premodernism Matusov, professor in the School of Education at the University of Delaware, suffices for my particular purpose.

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I understand the old premodernism as a special way of relating to the reality through the divine authority. The reality is created and controlled by the divine authority—an unquestionable mighty god (or gods or God) (Rosenblatt, 1982). A god is in charge of the reality and credited for any events (or for the absence of events) that occur in the reality. We can try to impose our desires and hopes on the reality through special addresses to our god(s), such as prayers, sacrifices, thanks, rituals, servitude, negotiations, exchange of favors, and so on. Thus, in the old premodernism, the relationship between people and the reality is mediated by the divine authority, which itself is usually (but not always) mediated by holy texts and holy priests. (Matusov 63-64).

This definition of premodernism is significant for my research, as it implies the existence of a grand narrative, even if it is mediated by a God or gods. The fact that Matusov here writes "God or gods" is significant, as it means that this definition of premodernism applies to both monotheistic, as in *PL*, as well as polytheistic religions, as in *TES*.

In his chapter titled "Postmodernism" in *The Oxford Handbook of English Literature and Theology*, Kevin Hart uses Lyotard as the basis for defining postmodernism. In doing so, Hart first compares postmodernism to modernism in order to explain the differences between the two. He does realise that defining postmodern by comparing it to the modern is a modern way of thinking, as it seeks for synchronicity; "the practice is evidence of the power that the modern still holds over us, for temporal succession—including cause and effect, growth and decline—is one of the habits of perception we call 'modern'" (Hart 3). I will now partially quote Hart's definition of postmodernism, as he describes and explains Lyotard's definition in a detailed, yet clear manner.

the modern is associated with science, and consequently with clarity and rigour as necessary conditions of discourse, whereas the postmodern is a suspicious attitude towards the ways in which science has legitimated itself. If postmodernists produce arguments to support their views, these are subsidiary to the sceptical stance towards origins and ends that sets them apart from the moderns. The postmodernist will be a pragmatist, although not always of the

card-carrying kind. One difficulty generated by the contrast between science and pragmatism is that some writers, widely regarded as central to postmodernism, reach their positions by closely following a train of reason … Second, although 'modernity' is often used to name a historical period, Lyotard commends it as a mode of thought and sensibility … The postmodern is not what succeeds the modern but is the modern 'in the nascent' … 'The postmodern would be that which, in the modern, puts forward the unpresentable in presentation itself; that which denies itself the solace of good forms, the consensus of a taste which would make it possible to share collectively the nostalgia for the unattainable; that which searches for new presentations, not in order to enjoy them but in order to impart a stronger sense of the unpresentable' (ibid. 81). (Hart 2-3).

This definition of postmodernism explains postmodernism as a "mode of thought or sensibility" that "denies itself the solace of good forms", in other words, it is a way of thinking that denies the existence of a grand narrative and, thus, the idea of temporal succession.

I will now further motivate my choice of using *TES* as a case study. *TES* is a videogame series that features an elaborate game world with many different peoples, cultures, and religions. Moreover, in the games, the player can find many books on these cultures and religions, thus providing a lot of material for research. What is perhaps most interesting in *TES* is that it mimics the real world in its ambiguity on the historical truths in this game world, as many cultures and political factions have different views on both religion as well as historical events. This means that many in-game books from different in-game groups and cultures provide conflicting views. It is then up to the player to either follow one of these beliefs, or, in combining multiple truths, even come up with their own version of reality. The world is filled with different accounts of in-game history, and religious scriptures and myths, making it an extremely interesting universe to explore, not only as a player, but also as an academic.

As *TES* contains a lot of occultist elements, I will provide a short definition of occultism as it is described in the *Encyclopaedia Britannica*.

Occultism, various theories and practices involving a belief in and knowledge or use of supernatural forces or beings … Occult practices centre on the presumed ability of the practitioner to manipulate natural laws for his own or his client's benefit; (Gilbert).

Additionally, this entry in the *Encyclopaedia Britannica* contains general information on occultist practices. The main points that are interesting for my analysis are, firstly, the above notion of supernatural forces or beings, and the ability to manipulate natural laws for personal gain. Secondly, the inherent interest in materialism that is present in this manipulating of natural laws; as present in alchemy for example.

The error people tend to make the most in thinking about games and religion is to assume that the primary opposition at work is the idea that religion is "serious" whereas games are "fun." I propose that a more accurate distinction is between being earnest as opposed to being insincere in one's engagement with the ordered world views that religions and games can evoke. The importance of constructing systems or worlds of order into which people may willingly enter is a key feature of both religions and games. (Wagner 193).

This is how Rachel Wagner start her article "`The Importance of Playing in Earnest", in which she argues that there is an inherent similarity in the experience of gaming and religious practices. This similarity has been pointed out before by scholars such as Johan Huizinga and Eric Zimmerman.

Play infuses both religious ritual and games, according to Huizinga. Since play itself depends upon rules to happen, play is part of the very process that instantiates an ordered cosmos, a play arena, a system for being in the world.

…

Eric Zimmerman, for example, in an essay in First Person defines play as "the free space of movement within a more rigid structure." The "more rigid structure" in most cases is, put simply, the rules of the game, and play is how you interact with those rules. His observations can also apply to the "rules" of religious activity and the "play" with which a practitioner

engages when enacting a ritual, such as vocalizing a liturgy or moving in regulated embodied ways. (Wagner 194).

It is because of these inherent similarities between play and religion that digital games are an interesting medium to discuss religion.[1]

There are, however, a few problems that occur in attempting to comment on views of real world religions through analysing video games, specifically *TES.* Firstly, most fantasy roleplaying games (RPG's), including *TES*, feature polytheistic religions. This makes it difficult to compare notions of godhood in these games to the Christian understanding of godhood, as the very definition of a god in monotheistic religions differs from that of a god in a polytheistic religion. However, I have found that there are enough similarities to be able to draw certain conclusions about the subject. I will come back to these in my analyses.

Secondly, the gods in *TES* are but fictional characters in a fictional work and are therefore inherently different from how real world religious texts understand their gods. Yet, video games are not the first texts to contain gods as characters. In her chapter in the *Cambridge Companion to Paradise Lost*, Silver writes the following:

> These peculiar poetic choices follow what many consider Milton's real blunder in Paradise Lost
> – his decision to make the one true God of Jewish and Christian tradition a mere character in
> his poem. The move offended more than a few of his devout readers, who regarded it not only
> as presumptuous, but blasphemous. (44).

Despite this critique on Milton by "more than a few of his devout readers", Milton is considered one of the classics in English literature and has been the inspiration for many academic studies. Therefore,

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[1] There are many scholars who do research on religion and games. "Playing with Religion in Digital Games", for example, is a collection of essays on religion and video games by many different scholars edited by Campbell and Grieve. The scholars who wrote these essays are Jason Anthony, Isamar Carrillo Masso, Nathan Abrams, Xenia Zeiler, Brenda Gardenour Walter, Vít Šisler, Rabia Gregory, Shanny Luft, Peter Likarish, Rachel Wagner, Oliver Steffen, Michael Waltemathe, and Kevin Schut. This is but a selection of scholars who have done research in the field.

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the study of the gods of *TES* cannot be disregarded by stating that they are but fictional characters in a fictional world, for this would disregard any theological study on any god in any work ever written. In fact, any representation of a god will be a construction and, up to a point, a fiction. In addition, fictional gods and religions in *TES* all refer to very real religions.

The academic fields in which my thesis operates are premodernism (Matusov), modernism (Gamache), postmodernism (Hart), game studies (Wagner), literature and theology (Hart), neomedievalism (Robinson and Clements), and intertextuality (Allen and Sanders). Having already touched upon premodernism, modernism, postmodernism, and game studies, I will briefly explain the importance of the other fields for my research. Thereto I will start with literature and theology, followed by neomedievalism, and finally intertextuality.

In his chapter titled "Postmodernism" in *The Oxford Handbook of English Literature and Theology*, Kevin Hart makes a case to "make 'literature and theology' into a discipline in its own right" (9). The context that Hart provides for this argument is the following:

> In treating English literature and theology from the perspective of postmodernism we can do more than reflect on (a) fiction influenced by cultural postmodernism that also touches on religious matters, and (b) theology marked by postmodernism in one or another sense. We need to take account of attempts in Britain to make 'literature and theology' into a discipline in its own right and to assess the ways in which that has been shaped by postmodern concerns. (9).

To clarify, Hart here speaks of the influence of postmodernism on both fiction that reflects on religion as well as theology itself, yet he does not mean the fictionality of religion. The reason why it is important to make literature and theology into a discipline, Hart here argues, is that this will allow for research that goes further than the researches that Hart specifies above. In my thesis, I indeed reflect on "fiction influenced by cultural postmodernism that also touches on religious matters", and aim to draw conclusions concerning real world theology. Hence, I use both of these methods as they are

described by Hart in an attempt to draw conclusions concerning both these fields of study. Therefore, my thesis fits perfectly in-, and contributes to this field of literature and theology as Hart describes it.

To briefly summarise the understanding of neomedievalism that I adhere to throughout my thesis, I will cite an explanation from Robinson and Clements' "Living with Neomedievalism".

> For our purposes, neomedievalism is, indeed, like the imaginary number i, a new type of medievalism that is born of postmodernist, increasingly globalized values that include an appreciation for the absurd. … The type of neomedievalism we are discussing is a medievalism that seems to be a direct and unromantic response to the general matrix of medievalisms …
>
> In particular, neomedievalism is further independent, further detached, and thus consciously, purposefully, and perhaps even laughingly reshaping itself into an alternate universe of medievalisms, a fantasy of medievalisms, a meta-medievalism. (56).

Robinson and Clements thus argue that neomedievalist works purposefully combine multiple medievalisms into a completely new world that contains medievalisms from our own world, yet is at the same time completely different. The fact that these inconsistencies are created on purpose allows for academics to read into these inconsistencies critiques on real historical events and ideas. This fragmentation of realities is also why Robinson and Clements here present neomedievalsim as "born of postmodernist … values", as this is one of the key concepts of postmodernism.

Lastly I will provide a description of the understanding of the word 'intertextuality' as I use it throughout my thesis. I rely on Graham Allen's work titled *Intertextuality* for my understanding of the history of the term and use Sanders' work *Adaptation and Appropriation* for my understanding of the framework of intertextuality as an academic field. Allen is a lecturer at University College, Cork. In his work, Allen describes the history of intertextuality as an academic term, but also explains its contemporary uses, and uses Sanders' work as the basis for the latter.

In describing the history of intertextuality, and its many different uses and applications, Allen quotes from Barthes book *The Death of the Author*;

We know now that a text is not a line of words releasing a single 'theological' meaning (the 'message' of the Author-God) but a multidimensional space in which a variety of writings, none of them original, blend and clash. The text is an issue of quotations drawn from the innumerable centres of culture … the writer can only imitate a gesture that is always anterior, never original. His only power is to mix writings, to counter the ones with the others, in such a way as never to rest on any one of them. Did he wish to express himself, he ought at least to know that the inner 'thing' he thinks to 'translate' is only a ready-formed dictionary, its words only explainable through other words, and so on indefinitely. (qtd. in Allen 13).

Allen states that Barthes understanding of intertextuality is similar to Saussure's structuralist theory of language, which, very concisely, argues that words only have meaning because we attach meaning to them, that is, they obtain meaning because of their relation to other words. Barthes argues that the same goes for literary works, for authors are influenced by their prior knowledge and the readers are in turn also influenced by the knowledge of their time, thus changing possible interpretations and understandings of literary works throughout time. However, if we understand intertextuality as the connection between all of the authors literary and cultural knowledge, and that of the reader, the intertextual references in a text become both almost infinite and ever-changing, making academic research in the field impossible.

After explaining this historic understanding of intertextuality, Allen moves on to Sanders's work, who explains an approach to intertextuality that does allow for free interpretation, but also allows for academic research. Note that I do not intend to oppose Barthes and Sanders. In the first chapter of her work, Sanders states what, is according to her, the essence of adaptation studies.

[C]onsumption need not always be the intended endpoint of adaptation; the adapting text does not necessarily seek to consume or efface the informing source … it is the very endurance and survival of the source text that enables the ongoing process of juxtaposed readings that are crucial to the cultural operations of adaptation, and the ongoing experiences of pleasure for the reader or spectator in tracing the intertextual relationships. It is this inherent sense of

play, produced in part by the activation of our informed sense of similarity and difference

between the texts being invoked, and the connected interplay of expectation and surprise,

that for me lies at the heart of the experience of adaptation and appropriation. (25).

According to Sanders, the goal of adapting other texts is the pleasure authors and readers find in

tracing the intertextual relations between these texts. Though Barthes' explanation may contain the

technical truth behind intertextuality, it is evident that what Sanders here speaks of are intertextual

relations between texts that are traceable by both the author and the readers of a specific text. This

allows for free interpretation by the reader, as the goal of adaptation studies is partly the joy that the

reader finds in tracing intertextual relations, but this approach also allows for academics to use the

term intertextuality without having to worry about every piece of information the author of their

source text may, or may not, have had. This fragmentation of different meanings that can be attached

to certain works throughout different time periods is what makes the field of intertextuality inherently

postmodern.

As I said before, the aim of my thesis is to give an insight in the way in which narrative texts

help us understand the transition of the Western understanding of godhood from the pre-modern, to

the modern, and finally to the postmodern period, and the interplay between these concepts in my

case studies. Thereto, I will first do an analysis of the concept of godhood as Milton presents it in *PL* as

an example of modern critique on the Christian notion of godhood, followed by an analysis of how it

is presented in the postmodern *TES*. In my analysis of godhood in *TES* I will refer back to my analysis of

PL and at some points link it to premodern, polytheistic understandings of godhood to draw

connections between the different understandings, ultimately allowing me to draw my conclusions.

CHAPTER 1: THE DIFFERENT NOTIONS OF GODHOOD IN MILTON'S *PARADISE LOST*

To start my analysis of godhood in *TES* as compared to that in *PL*, it is firstly important to establish how godhood is defined in Milton's *PL*. Milton presents a modern view on God and delivers a critique on the pre-modern notion of godhood as it is described in the Bible. In analysing godhood as it is presented in *PL* I uncover a paradox that Milton presents regarding the Christian God, and present his implicit critique of the usual imagination of this God. As I will show in my analysis, Milton presents a critique on the duality of the Christian God. According to Gamache, critique on religious duality was not uncommon in modern times (14). What makes the concept of godhood in *PL* so interesting, is that the different points of view that the readers of Milton's epic are confronted with, all present different notions of godhood. Thus, in order to analyse how Milton defines godhood in his epic, it is necessary to analyse all different notions of godhood as presented in the work. Even though Milton presents his poem through a third person narrator, he does ensure that the different main characters' ideas about this concept are present in his work. The characters of whom we learn the most are Satan, Adam, Eve, and Raphael, but *PL* also presents its audience with characters such as Sin and Death, and even conversations involving God as a character. Many of these characters in Milton's epic have different ideas about the Christian God and, thus, the Christian meaning of godhood.

1.1: Milton's heavenly notion of godhood

In this part of my chapter, I will present the analysis of the depiction of God by the archangel Raphael in *PL*, followed by an analysis of the scenes in heaven and, more specifically, God's gift of free choice to both angel and man, and lastly an analysis of Milton's Chaos. These different analyses serve the purpose of providing an understanding of the narrative behind godhood that Milton's God presents to the reader. Raphael is the angel that is sent to Eden to warn Adam and Eve of the danger that currently lurks in paradise. He is sent by God to have a "friend with friend" (Milton V.229) conversation with Adam to not only warn him and Eve of the danger, but also to remind them of God's grace.

In the first two books of *PL* that describe the conversation between Raphael and Adam, book V and VI, Raphael warns the Edenic couple against Satan by relating how the infernal tempter came to be God's adversary.

> Satan, so call him now, his former name
>
> Is heard no more in Heav'n; he of the first,
>
> If not the first Archangel, great in power,
>
> In favour and pre-eminence, yet fraught
>
> With envy against the Son of God
>
> …
>
> he resolved
>
> With all his legions to dislodge, and leave
>
> Unworshipped, unobeyed the throne supreme (V.658-670).

Even though this is but a part of the introduction that Raphael gives before presenting Adam with the complete narrative of the great battle between the legions of God and Satan, this quote perfectly comprises the intended meaning of the story, which it does through three major revelations. Firstly, Raphael tells Adam that, like him, Satan was one of the, if not the, first of his kind, and subsequently great in "power", "favour", and "pre-eminence". Secondly, however, this great Archangel fell prey to sin, thus suggesting to Adam that the same might happen to him if he is not wary. Finally, Raphael here relates what consummated Satan's sin, namely his rebellion against God. Therefore, the main point of this warning by Raphael is that a rebellion against God will result in the rebel being absolved from God's grace. This is ultimately represented in the first two lines of the quote above, for these lines express that Satan not only lost his place in God's paradise, but he also lost his name, and thus his identity.

Milton presents this postlapsarian loss of identity to the reader as both a physical change as well as a mental change at two key points in his work. The first point at which the reader is presented with this tragedy, is in the very first book of *PL*, as Satan breaks the silence in hell.

He [Satan] soon discerns, and welt'ring by his side

One next himself in power, and next in crime,

Long after known in Palestine, and named

Beëlzebub. To whom th' Arch-Enemy,

And thence in Heav'n called Satan, with bold words

Breaking the horrid silence thus began.

If thou beest he; but O how fall'n! how changed

From him, who in the happy realms of light

Clothed with transcendent brightness didst outshine

Myriads though bright (I.78-88).

This is Milton's first description of the physical change that the loss of identity as a result of betraying God causes. Not only can Satan no longer say, or perhaps even remember, the name of his fallen comrade, neither is he absolutely sure that it is indeed who he thinks it is. This metamorphosis is so absolute, that the initial and final entities can be considered as two completely different beings; the Beëlzebub that was before he was expelled from the kingdom of God, however he was named, has made place for the fiend that will later be named Beëlzebub, so much so that not even the name of that initial celestial creature persists. The same goes for the other fallen.

The mental change that occurs after this loss of identity is clearly expressed by Satan later in the work.

Said then the lost Archangel, this the seat

That we must change for Heav'n, this mournful gloom

For that celestial light? Be it so, since he

Who now is sov'reign can dispose and bid

What shall be right: farthest from him is best

Whom reason hath equalled, force hath made supreme

Above his equals. Farewell happy fields

Where joy for ever dwells: hail horrors, hail

Infernal world, and thou profoundest Hell

Receive thy new possessor: one who brings

A mind not to be changed by place or time.

…

Here we may reign secure, and in my choice

To reign is worth ambition though in Hell:

Better to reign in Hell, than serve in Heav'n. (I.243-263).

During the first part of this quote, Satan seems to express sadness for having lost the "celestial light" and the "happy fields where joy ever dwells", yet the expression "hail horrors, hail infernal world" constitutes the opposite. In his famous line "Better to reign in Hell, than serve in Heav'n", Satan embraces his new position of ruler of hell. Ironically, he also states that his "[m]ind [is] not to be changed by place or time", yet his mind is precisely what has changed in his metamorphosis from the now unnamed archangel to God's eternal adversary named Satan.

The reason that this complete metamorphosis of the self after rejecting the Creator is so important in Raphael's narrative is that God "created all / Such to perfection" (Milton V.471-472). Because God created everything to perfection, the moment a creature, no matter how close to godhood, recreates itself, it will no longer be perfect. Therefore, in rejecting God, one destroys one's own identity and one's own perfection. Hence, Raphael's implicit narrative of godhood is that God is the "Almighty" (Milton V.469) creator, who, in his goodness, has created everything to perfection.

This narrative is confirmed through the various scenes of heaven in which God explains his gift of free will. One example of this is when God instructs Raphael to warn the Edenic couple against the temptations of Satan.

As may advise him of his happy state,

Happiness in his power left free to will,

Left to his own free will, his will though free,

Yet mutable; (V.234-236).

In this speech by God, he orders Raphael to remind Adam that the happiness that he currently experiences only exists because of the Edenic couple's choice to stay faithful to God, yet that they are free to do as they will. Whereas Satan blasphemously makes God out to be a tyrant (I.122-124), Milton's God here proves the opposite. He created both the angels and the humans with the free will to make their own decisions, even though God may verbally forbid Adam and Eve to eat from the tree of knowledge forbidden, he does not physically stop them, even though it is within his power to do so. This ultimately causes the fall of mankind, yet a forceful prevention of the fall would have robbed humanity of its freedom and rendered God a tyrant. Therefore, by not forcibly stopping the fall, Milton's God cements Himself as the good Creator of all.

However, Milton's God used Chaos to create his world, or worlds if one counts hell as a different world. Therefore, the notion of God as the Creator inevitably raises questions about the origin and nature of Chaos in *PL*. In order to answer these questions, it is first important to understand what the function of Chaos is in *PL*. The problem with this is that Milton scholars have yet to come to an agreement on this. For this particular part of the analysis, I will present a view on Chaos that depicts it as something neutral, or even good. However, there are also descriptions of Chaos as "the enem[y] of God" (qtd. In "Milton's God and the Matter of Chaos" 1035), such as A. B. Chambers insists in his essay. I will provide an analysis of this depiction of Chaos later in this chapter. Yet, before analysing the implications of Chaos, let us first take a look at what the concept of Chaos entails in Milton's poem. In his article titled "Milton's God and the Matter of Chaos", John Rumrich provides a concise explanation.

> The ontological deficiency of chaos indicates a material potency that is the precondition of creation. Whereas Augustine had not [sic] equivalent of Chaos in his philosophy because he believed in creation *ex nihilo*, Milton, an exponent of creation *ex deo*, believes that the realm of potential creation possesses a shadowy existence of its own. (1041).

Rumrich's understanding of Chaos in *PL* is that of Chaos as "the womb of Nature" (II.911) as Milton's Satan so eloquently describes it. A few lines further in the poem Satan describes Chaos as

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containing "His dark materials to create more worlds" (II.915). This reading of Chaos in *PL* presents Chaos as a passive storm of non-dualistic materials that God can use to either create good and evil alike.

Rumrich is also the author of a chapter in the *Cambridge Companion to Paradise Lost* titled "Things of Darkness: Sin, Death, Chaos" (2014). In this chapter, he argues the following:

> Milton there [chapter seven of the first book of DDC] insists that this state of matter is essential to God, being the material wherewithal of his creative power: "God is the first, absolute and sole cause of all things . . . So the material cause must be either God or nothing" (MLM 1201). In the epic, Chaos is described as infinite and uncreated, adjectives that Milton reserves for God alone. In Paradise Lost the abyss of Chaos thus seems to represent what Milton in his theological treatise defines as the "heterogeneous, multiform and inexhaustible virtue" that "exist[s] in God, and exist[s] substantially" (MLM 1201). (39-40).

This quote leads to Rumrich's conclusion that Chaos is ultimately a part of God. In this understanding of Chaos, Chaos must be good, for God is good and Chaos is a part of God. Moreover, this notion of Chaos constitutes that God is not dependent on some cosmic storm of dark materials outside of his being and creation in order to be able to create, hence, Rumrich here supports the narrative of an omnipotent God.

I agree with Rumrich's reading of Chaos as a part of God, however, in using the Chaos to create good, God also inevitably creates evil. This is the paradox that Milton presents in his epic; Raphael and God portray God to be both all-powerful and good, yet, God, in being good, cannot abstain from creating evil, for it would rob His creations of their free will. Therefore, the all-powerful and good God is doomed to create things that are evil, thus proving that God is not almighty and also not purely good.

1.2: The Edenic understanding of godhood

I will now present my analysis of the interpretations of godhood by Adam and Eve. Their understanding of God undergoes a change both during, and again after their fall. Therefore, this analysis will be split

up in three different parts. Firstly, an analysis of the Edenic couple's prelapsarian view on godhood. Secondly, an analysis of how Satan changes this notion in order to orchestrate the fall. Lastly, an analysis of how Adam and Eve view godhood after their fall from God's grace.

The prelapsarian view of God that Adam and Eve share is not very different from that of Raphael. This ultimately becomes clear during the conversation between Adam and Raphael in books V, VI, VII, and VIII of *PL*. The following quote is from book V, where Adam reveals that he has never even considered being disobedient to God.

> To whom the patriarch of mankind replied.
>
> O favourable Spirit, propitious guest,
>
> Well hast thou taught the way that might direct
>
> Our knowledge, and the scale of Nature set
>
> From centre to circumference, whereon
>
> In contemplation of created things
>
> By steps we may ascend to God. But say,
>
> What meant that caution joined, *if ye be found*
>
> *Obedient?* can we want obedience then
>
> To him, or possibly his love desert
>
> Who formed us from the dust, and placed us here
>
> Full to the utmost measure of what bliss
>
> Human desires can seek or apprehend? (V.506-518).

Adam here relates that, before Raphael had told him, he did not know about his choice to do as he likes, for he cannot fathom what reason there could be for disobeying God. God created him and Eve from "dust" and granted them "the utmost measure of what bliss / Human desires can seek or apprehend", therefore Adam does not understand why Raphael even asks him to be careful, as to him it is nothing but obvious that he would never disobey God. Additionally, as this quote illustrates, Adam did not know much about God, other than that He created him, as he says: "Well hast thou taught me

the way that might direct / Our knowledge". This then explains why the prelapsarian understanding of God that Adam and Eve have is so similar to that of Raphael, because they shaped their opinion from his words.

Though the Edenic, prelapsarian, understanding of godhood is mostly presented to the readers of *PL* through Adam, the change that occurs that leads the couple to the fall is mostly presented through his female counterpart. Similarly to how Adam's view of God is shaped by Raphael, Satan taints Eve's view of God in his tempting of her. However, there is a major difference between the two situations, Raphael relates his version of the truth and thus relates his own understanding of God, whereas Satan lies and deceives Eve in not relating his true understanding of God.

Satan manages to taint Eve's view of God through a multitude of deceitful claims. The first major claim that Satan makes is the following: "who [Eve] shouldst be seen / A goddess among gods, adored and served" (Milton IX.546-547). Eve only knows of the one God, yet, Satan here claims that there are multiple and that she ought to be one of them. Additionally, the only reason he gives for this is that she is "fair" (IX.545), hence suggesting that that is the only criterion that needs to be met in order to become a god or goddess.

The second claim that the disguised Satan makes is that he "was at first as other beasts that graze" (IX.571), but that after eating fruit from a specific tree he learned the human tongue.

ere long I might perceive

Strange alteration in me, to degree

Of reason in my inward powers, and speech

Wanted not long, though to this shape retained.

Thenceforth to speculations high and deep

I turned my thoughts, and with capacious mind

Considered all things visible in heav'n,

Or earth, or middle, all things fair and good;

But all that fair and good in thy divine

Semblance, and in they beauty's Heav'nly ray

United I beheld; no fair to thine

Equivalent or second (IX.598-609).

As Satan claims in this speech, not only did the consuming of that fruit grant him the ability to speak the human tongue, but he also obtained the gift of reason. Moreover, he was able to "[consider] all thing visible in heav'n, / Or earth, or middle, all things fair and good", which must mean that the fruit gave him knowledge of things beyond Eden, for a serpent would never have seen things other than this Garden. Satan then ultimately claims that Eve is fairer than everything he has now seen, concluding that therefore she should be a goddess.

Satan eventually wins Eve's trust as he explains that through the eating of this forbidden fruit, he has the power to "not only to discern / Things in their causes, but to trace the ways / Of highest agents, deemed however wise" (IX.681-683). Thus, as the serpent has eaten of the fruit, he understands what Eve does not, namely why God forbade them to eat from the tree. Satan explains to Eve that she will not die if she eats from the fruit, but rather be given life. He then proves this by reminding her that he has eaten of the fruit and is indeed still alive, and in a better state than he was before. Then, Satan finally explains why God forbade them to eat of the fruit.

Why then was this forbid? Why but to awe,

Why but to keep ye low and ignorant,

His worshippers; he knows that in the day

Ye eat thereof, your eyes that seem so clear,

Yet are but dim, shall perfectly be then

Opened and cleared, and ye shall be as gods,

Knowing both good and evil as they know. (IX.703-708).

According to this explanation, God forbade the couple to eat from the tree because He wanted to keep them as His servants rather than His equals. Lim, an associate professor at the Department of English Language and Literature at the National University of Singapore, writes in his article titled "Adam, Eve,

and Biblical Analogy in *Paradise Lost*", that as she eventually eats from the fruit, "Eve wants to displace God with herself" (122). I agree with Lim's reading of Eve wanting to displace God, yet I want to add a slight nuance. If Eve does indeed believe Satan that there can be multiple gods, she does not aim to displace God, but rather stand next to him in power. Therefore, displacing him as the one true God, yet not fully taking His place. Additionally, Satan here implies that knowledge is the only prerequisite for divinity, meaning that the knowledge gained from the eating of the fruit, the knowledge of good and evil, will result in the apotheosis of Eve.

This leads to the final part of my analysis, namely that of the understanding of godhood that the couple has after their fall from God's paradise. However, despite being thrown out of Paradise, this understanding of godhood is once again not that different from their prelapsarian ideas. Eve knows that she has been deceived and thus does not hold on to the beliefs that she obtained from the serpent and Adam eventually comes to terms with the fact that "I [Adam] [am] now upbraided, as the cause / Of thy [Eve] transgressing" (IX.1168-1169). Before throwing the couple out of Paradise, Michael shows Adam the future, and tells him of the "paradise within thee" (XII.587). Through showing Adam these visions, Michael shows Adam what their sin has brought on mankind, yet too shows Adam that mankind will be saved by the Son of God. As Fenton explains in her chapter in *The Cambridge Companion to Paradise Lost,* "they discover the most compelling reason to continue living is to enact the promise that they shall bring forth the "seed [that] shall bruise / The serpent's head" (10.1031-32)" (179). The last vision that Michael shows Adam is that of mankind being saved by God. Therefore, despite knowing that through creating more of mankind they will create suffering, the couple has faith in God as the Creator and the embodiment of all that is good that this will help defeat Satan and will lead to the redemption of mankind.

In conclusion, both the prelapsarian, as well as the postlapsarian understandings of godhood that Adam and Eve have is based solely on what the archangels Raphael and Michael have told and shown them. In his deceit of Eve, Satan managed to change her view of godhood and managed to convince her that she could be a god. After it became clear to her that she had been deceived, she

returns to her original belief that God is good. Therefore, their view of God is that He is good and created all things perfect, that their transgression is their own and that they can only be redeemed by having faith in God. This is one of the notions of godhood that Milton presents in his poem.

1.3: Godhood as depicted by God's adversaries

In the final part of my analysis of different understandings of godhood in *PL,* I will focus on the adversaries of God; Satan, Sin, and Death. In *PL* Sin and Death are allegorical characters that, under orders of God, guard the gates of hell. Yet, they go against God's will and open the gates for Satan. This is why they can be seen as God's adversaries. I will start by providing my analysis of Satan's understanding of godhood, after which I will end this chapter with an analysis of the interaction between Sin, Death, and Chaos, and its implications regarding the narrative of Chaos as good.

In analysing Satan's understanding of godhood, it is important to distinguish between Satan's lies and his truths. Milton's Satan always has an agenda and changes his narrative accordingly. For instance, in his tempting of Eve, Satan tells Eve that there can be multiple gods or goddesses, and that knowledge is the only prerequisite for divinity, yet these are lies. With his famous line "Better to reign in Hell, than serve in Heav'n" (I.263), Satan paints God a tyrant. Moreover, he states that "Whom [God] reason hath equalled [to the angels], force hath made supreme" (I.248). This suggests that Satan understands that power too is a prerequisite for divinity. This interpretation of events is what causes Satan to embrace his role as God's adversary and leads him to make evil his good (IV.110). Though this seems to be Satan's true interpretation of God, this is also the narrative that he uses to convince both others and himself that this is his cause.

In order to fully understand Satan's view of God, it is necessary to look at passages where Milton reveals things about his Satan to the reader, without having Satan speak to characters that he is trying to influence, including himself. Even though it is something that Satan never admits to other characters, there are multiple instances where the reader finds Satan capable of remorse. The best example of one of such instances is at the beginning of book IV, where Satan is overcome with doubt.

> Which way I fly is Hell; myself am Hell;
>
> And in the lowest deep a lower deep
>
> Still threat'ning to devour me opens wide,
>
> To which the Hell I suffer seems a Heav'n.
>
> O then at last relent: is there no place
>
> Left for repentance, none for pardon left? (IV.75-80).

This passage shows that Satan does want to repent for his sins against God, for this life is eternal torment. However, a few lines later, Satan admits that even if he were to repent and swear submission to God, this would never last.

> What feigned submission swore: ease would recant
>
> Vows made in pain, as violent and void.
>
> For never can true reconcilement grow
>
> Where wounds of deadly hate have pierced so deep:
>
> Which would but lead me to a worse relapse
>
> And heavier fall (IV.96-101).

Through these different passages, it becomes clear that Satan understands that he can never defeat God, and believes God to be omnipotent. Yet, he also still believes God to be a tyrant who does not allow for any insubordination. Satan's understanding of God seems clear: God is the omnipotent Creator and tyrant of the universe.

In his epic, Milton presents more adversaries to God than just Satan. Earlier in this chapter, I have established the implications of understanding Chaos as good, yet there is reason in *PL* to believe otherwise. Moreover, Milton also presents his readers with the characters Sin and Death. In the previous analysis of Chaos, I used Rumrich's work to establish Chaos as a part of God. However, now I want to analyse why Chaos can be seen as the enemy of God. In book X, Sin and Death have created a bridge through Chaos, making it easier for the devils to travel between hell and earth. If Chaos is indeed a part of God, though left to its own devices, this must mean, Sin and Death have the authority to

create from Chaos, just as God. This can mean either one of two things, either Sin and Death are part of God, in which case God is not purely good, or Sin and Death are gods themselves. Judging from the fact that Christianity is a monotheistic religion, and Milton was a Christian, the first option seems more likely. This is also in line with the earlier conclusion that God has to create evil in order to create good. Therefore, God is not purely good, but rather an entity that knows of both good and evil and knows that in order to create good, that good must also know evil in order to not be a slave to His laws.

Therefore, Satan understands God as the omnipotent creator. However, Sin and Death have similar powers, namely being able to create from Chaos. If that does not make them gods, this must mean that power is not the only prerequisite for divinity. What this does imply, however, is that Sin and Death are fragments of God, therefore rejecting the notion that God is purely good. This is the understanding of godhood that the adversaries of God in Milton's poem provide.

1.4: Conclusion

Milton's epic features many different characters, of which some have different beliefs regarding godhood than others. In this chapter, I have attempted to give an account of all of these different beliefs that are present in *PL*. In doing so, I have analysed the different understandings of godhood as presented by Raphael, Adam, Eve, Satan, and even God. One major takeaway from these analyses are the prerequisites for godhood. Satan presents the only requisites to be being fair and having god-like knowledge. However, what Satan does not explain to Eve, yet does explain to the reader, is that a God should have power as well. This is what Adam and Eve lack and why they do not ascend to godhood after eating from the fruit.

All characters in *PL* that I have analysed here seem to share the idea that God is omnipotent. However, the opinions on whether God is good or evil are divided. Milton ultimately shows his critique on the goodness of God through his portrayal of Chaos. Chaos is depicted to be a part of God, yet also able to be influenced by both Sin and Death. However, if God is the sole creator, Sin and Death should not be able to create from Chaos, unless they too are a part of God. "God is the first, absolute and sole

cause of all things" (qtd. In "Things of Darkness: Sin, Death, Chaos" 39). Thus, God is not just good, but rather God is all, therefore he knows of both good and evil and creates both in order for His creations to be able to make the same choice that He did. He knew of both good and evil, and chose good over evil, yet He also knows that one can only truly be good if one gets to make this decision for oneself. In conclusion, Milton's God is good, yet it is not all He is. This is my understanding of Milton's critique on the Christian notion of godhood; good cannot exist without evil and, therefore, God is both. This critique on the duality of God may have been met with a lot of criticism from early-modern readers, yet Milton's critique fits perfectly in the modern debate of conflict-dualism in religion.

CHAPTER 2: *THE ELDER SCROLLS'* GODHEAD, APOTHEOSIS, AND MATERIALITY

In the previous chapter I have analysed how Milton's early modern view of the duality of the Christian God delivers a critique on this premodern notion of Godhood as described in the Bible. In this chapter I will analyse how the postmodern view of godhood, as it is presented in *TES,* relates to the modern critique of Milton. *TES'* postmodern view is in line with other postmodern views on religion, yet it presents its postmodern elements in a more explicit and sophisticated manner than other texts in the postmodern medium that is video games, making *TES* exceptional and therefore relevant. In this chapter, I will first do an analysis of the postmodern *TES* Godhead, and compare it to the Christian Godhead. Secondly, I will analyse the means of apotheosis as they are present in *TES.* Thirdly, I will do an analysis of the heart of Lorkhan and its implications for *TES* godhood. By analysing the concepts of the Godhead, as well as apotheosis, and the heart of Lorkhan, I aim to give an insight in the TES relations to postmodernism as well as occultist materiality.

One of the major difficulties in any attempt to analyse *TES* lore is that, much like history and religion in the real world, the different people of the mortal world, which is known as Nirn, have different beliefs and opinions. This makes it impossible to discuss the implications of godhood in *TES* by purely analysing the truth as presented in the games, for, in most cases, there is not one truth. *TES* lore is deliberately vague and complex, and is created from all kinds of intertextual references nobody fully understands; it is not even really important to understand all these, as the function of these concepts is to suggest a highly complex occultist lore. Yet, this is what makes *TES* a postmodern text; there is no grand narrative, there are only many conflicting stories. Though we also find conflicting views, ambiguity, and paradox in *PL,* there is a grand narrative. This is why both texts are relevant examples of respectively modern and postmodern views of godhood. Whenever I discuss a topic that does have multiple different possibilities for the in-game truth, I will mention this and explain why I have chosen a certain view for my analysis.

Not only do the games themselves provide conflicting stories and inconsistent theories, those who study *TES* lore often disagree with each other on a variety of subjects, which is similar to real-life

religious debates. Most of this confusion stems from the fact that one of the persons who had a huge impact on the lore of *Morrowind* and *Oblivion*, the third and fourth instalments of the series, left Bethesda Studios during the production of *Morrowind* ("But MK doesn't have anything to do with Bethesda"). This man, named Michael Kirkbride, however, is still hired by Bethesda as an in-house lore specialist and has even designed a lot of lore for the fifth game in the series titled *Skyrim* (*But MK doesn't have anything to do with Bethesda*). This legitimisation from Bethesda and his recognition within the community makes it so that many of those who are well-versed in *TES* lore, also known as lorebeards or loremasters, accept anything that he says or writes on the matter to be canon, even if this information is not available in the games. Moreover, Kirkbride has also stated that he considers any *TES* fanfiction to be canon (Zaric, 1). Therefore, some loremasters that follow Kirkbride believe that all fanfiction is canon. However, due to the fact that not everything that anyone writes is actually good material, many people, amongst whom many loremasters, disagree with this notion that anything ever written on *TES* can be considered canon. Therefore, there is a debate on whether fanfiction should be accepted as canon, and if so, to what extent. For my research I will try to keep as close to the in-game material as possible, yet I will use out of game texts whenever I find they provide interesting material for my analyses. Due to the expansiveness of *TES* lore, and therefore my lack of knowledge, I will use the explanations of other, more knowledgeable, people as the basis for my analysis. At times in my analyses I will use names of beings or concepts in *TES* that will sound completely unfamiliar to those who are not well-versed in *TES* lore. I will provide concise explanations in the footnotes whenever necessary.

2.1: The Godhead in *The Elder Scrolls*

Previously, I have discussed the representations of the Christian Godhead in *PL*. In this paragraph, I will analyse how the Godhead is presented in the postmodern *TES*. With this analyses I aim to give an insight in both the continuities as well as the discontinuities between the early modern *PL* and the postmodern *TES* regarding their views of their respective Godheads.

Before starting my analysis of the *TES* Godhead, I will give a brief explanation of this Godhead. In constructing *TES* lore, Kirkbride and his colleagues researched many different cultures and religions with the intent of drawing inspiration, or sometimes almost literally copying, certain beliefs, as is common within postmodern neomedievalist works such as many fantasy RPG's (Robinson and Clements 67). The *TES* understanding of the Godhead is one of the instances of almost blatant copying, as they took the Hindu Godhead and put it in their game. Similarly to the Hindu belief, the *TES* Godhead is the god that dreams the world. The Godhead is asleep and the whole universe only exists within his dream. I am aware of the fact that I am simplifying the Hindu belief here, as it is a very complicated religion, but this is the way that *TES* adapted the Hindu Godhead. Therefore, the Godhead is both the beginning and the end, and everything in between. Yet, it is unaware of all of this, for it is asleep. Therefore, everything in the *TES* universe, even the universe itself, is but a dream of the Godhead.

This additional level that the *TES* Godhead adds to the *TES* universe, is a postmodern trait. Due to the Godhead dreaming the universe, the science of the universe becomes questionable, sometimes causing a lack of temporal succession, much like is often the case in dreams. On the one hand the existence of this Godhead seems to insinuate a premodern type of grand narrative, one based solely on the will of a God. However, on the other hand, the fact that this narrative is a dream, makes it unpredictable, inexplicable, and, most importantly, a creation of the Godhead's subconscious rather than its will. Therefore, this dream-narrative adds a postmodern layer to the *TES* cosmology that allows for discontinuity in both the physical as well as the spiritual laws of the *TES* universe.

However, this also means that the *TES* and the Christian Godheads are entirely different, as the Christian God performed his acts of creation consciously, whereas the *TES* Godhead did so subconsciously. The *TES* Godhead does not actively dictate whether he creates good or evil, but the Christian God does. This is why my analysis focusses more on the *TES* gods that are not the Godhead, as they have an active role in the creation of their universe, and are faced with similar choices between good and evil that both Milton's God and Satan are faced with.

2.2: Apotheosis in *The Elder Scrolls*, or: the six walking ways

In my analysis of godhood in *PL,* I have shown that though Eve is tempted with the idea of apotheosis, this concept does not fully exist in Christianity, as it is a monotheistic religion. Therefore, the existence of apotheosis within a belief system changes the inherent notion of godhood within that religion. In my next analysis I will focus on the concept of ascension to godhood and how it influences the *TES* concept of godhood. I will use significant threads on the teslore subreddit as the basis for these analyses. With these analyses I aim to gain a better understanding of the postmodern elements of religion as they are present in *TES*.

Before starting my analysis, it is important that I provide you with a provisional definition of the Christian God as found in religious handbooks, so that I can refer to this later. For this purpose I will use "An Introduction to Christian Theology*"* from *The Boisi Center Papers on Religion in the United States*. I will now cite a part of their explanation of the Christian God that briefly describes His characteristics.

> Christians believe in a God who is omnipresent. This God is understood as both immanent, or present within the world, and transcendent, having an existence far beyond the world and beyond human imagination and experience. Christians believe that individual persons and groups can enjoy a personal relationship with God, but that God always remains a mystery beyond human understanding. (Boisi 7).

According to *TES* lore, there are six ways to ascend to godhood, also known as the six walking ways, or the six ways of reaching heaven by violence (*The 36 Lessons of Vivec*). Once again, this is a subject that is heavily debated in the community, as not all of these walking ways are clearly explained in in-game sources, and are therefore not fully understood.

That being said, however, I will attempt to give very short explanations of all of them, following explanations on the *TES* lore subreddit (*The six walking ways*). While it is true that these explanations assume a syncretic narrative, and therefore one truth, and, thus, disregard the postmodern nature of

TES, an understanding of at least one of the narratives on the six walking ways is mandatory for understanding my following analysis.

The first way to ascension is called the Prolix Tower, which is the method of assuming certain aspects of a god, though keeping your own identity, so that eventually you can displace that god.

[T]he Prolix Tower is reaching heaven by talking yourself into the story of a godly Oversoul yet remaining a distinct identity somewhat independent of that Oversoul. Basically, it's godhood by becoming an universal legend. (*The Prolix Tower and Dracochrysalis Analyzed*).

The second way is called the Psijic Endeavor, which describes that one can reach godhood by having so much influence on the mortal world, that one's actions, and therefore one's being, become essential to the story of Aurbis[2], thus ascending that person to godhood.

The third way is Tonal Manipulation. The theory behind this is that the *TES* universe is a musical universe, where every force and being is a tone and together they form a symphony. Gods have much more prevalent and lasting tones than mortals, and the concept of Tonal Manipulation is using certain tools to change your tone into that of a god.

The fourth way is mantling, which is assuming the identity of a god so perfectly, through mimicking their actions, that eventually people believe that you are indeed that god. The difference between the Prolix Tower and mantling is that when one achieves godhood through the Prolix Tower they take on certain aspects and powers from an existing god, yet do become a god with their own identity. Yet, when one achieves godhood through mantling, they become synonymous with the god that they mantled and as such become one with that god and that god becomes one with them; it is walking the way of a god until the Godhead can no longer tell the difference between you and that god; "walk like them until they must walk like you" (*Nu-Hatta of the Sphinxmoth Inquiry Tree*).

The fifth way to ascend to godhood is called CHIM, which is that a person obtains the knowledge that the entire universe is just a dream of the Godhead, and that they do not actually exist.

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[2] "Aurbis is the name for the universe. It includes Mundus, Oblivion, Aetherius, and the Void. It is the overlap of the two cosmic forces: Anu and Padomay" (*Aurbis*).

However, when one manages to assert that they do in fact exist, they achieve CHIM. If one becomes too overwhelmed with the realization that they do not exist, and thus accept this fact, they indeed cease to exist and vanish in thin air. When one achieves CHIM, one gains the power to control the dream, as if they were lucid dreaming. However, influencing the dream from within carries the risk of disturbing the dream so much that the Godhead awakens, thus destroying the entire universe. Therefore, those who achieve CHIM have unlimited power, yet they can only use a fraction of it to keep from destroying the universe.

The sixth and final way to achieve ascension is the fusion of souls. This theory reads that if enough souls are fused together, they will amount to a power so big that it becomes similar to that of a god.

An analysis of these walking ways can be used to ascertain what the term godhood in *TES* means. In my analysis of godhood in *PL* I have argued that both power and knowledge are needed to reach divinity, yet the *TES* god Vivec calls the walking ways "the six ways of reaching heaven by violence", hence implying that one only needs power. If we then delve into the walking ways, we find that most ways are manipulative rather than violent. The Psijic Endeavor is arguably the only walking way that likely includes violence, as such great actions as described there are often violent ones. The way of CHIM seems to be completely based on knowledge that in turn grants power, and the fusion of souls as a means of apotheosis suggests that power is the only prerequisite for godhood. The other three walking ways, The Prolix Tower, Mantling, and Tonal Manipulation, seem to relate to neither knowledge nor power; they are ways to manipulate the universe, or the Godhead. In fact, I would also add the Psijic Endeavor to this list, as it too is about manipulating the Godhead. If I interpret this manipulation of the nature of the universe similarly to how Bacon interpreted science, torturing nature until it gives up its secrets, then these walking ways become a means of obtaining knowledge by violence. This links these walking ways to both power as well as knowledge. This interpretation would explain why Vivec calls the walking ways the ways of reaching heaven by violence. Moreover, it would reassert that the two requisites for godhood are both knowledge and power. Though this is not directly

reflected in the walking way of fusion of souls as I have described it above, note that this particular description reads "similar to that of a god". To me, either of the following two explanations for this makes the most sense. Either, the sixth walking way is a means to reaching god-like power, yet not to reaching divinity per se. Or, this description of the sixth walking way is inaccurate. Yet, either of these theories still allows for my interpretation that the walking ways prove that *TES* godhood is a combination of both power and knowledge.

Godhood in *TES*, however, is different from how it is described in *PL.* In *PL*, though Milton presents the notion of the possibility of multiple gods as false, the *TES* universe contains many gods. The term godhood in *TES* is therefore inherently different. The most concise definition of a god in *TES* that I can provide here is that a god in *TES* is a certain being that has more power over-, and more knowledge of, the world around it than regular mortals, who then becomes so important to a certain culture that the people in that culture start worshipping that being as a god, thus making that being a god. This sometimes results in certain peoples of Nirn worshipping a being as a god, whereas other peoples do not recognise that being as a god. I will come back to this description in my third chapter. Whereas the existence of different religions with different gods is similar to religion in the real world, the postmodern aspect of this is that, in *TES,* as contradictory as some of these religions may be, due to the postmodern nature of the universe, all these narratives are simultaneously true and untrue. This makes religion in *TES* so different from religion in the real world, as followers of real world religions often claim that theirs is the one true religion, or the one true God.

In my analysis of godhood in *PL*, I mentioned that the possibility for ascending to godhood changes the concept of godhood. This is due to the fact that being able to ascend to godhood inherently means that it is not only the creator of the world that can be called God; it can be anyone that performs certain actions. Then the question becomes what these actions are. In analysing the six walking ways, and the way that Satan explains the concept of multiple gods to Eve, I have come to the conclusion that they all have in common that that act must result in that person obtaining both the power and the knowledge to significantly change the world around them.

However, in applying this theory to Christianity, I would argue that this would also make Satan a god, which is completely untrue according to the Christian belief. This is because Christianity is a monotheistic religion that believes that there are beings that are more powerful and knowledgeable than humans, such as angels and demons, yet that these are not gods. Whereas, in a polytheistic religions such as prevalent throughout the *TES* world, these beings would be defined as gods. This is a concept that I will come back to in my next chapter.

2.3: Materialism in *The Elder Scrolls*; The heart of Lorkhan and the forbidden fruit

For the next part of my analysis, I will analyse the heart of Lorkhan[3] and its influence on *TES* godhood. The heart of Lorkhan is important to the *TES* understanding of godhood for two main reasons. Firstly, it is an object that is known to have powers that can help an individual reach godhood. Secondly, it is a physical object that holds this power, making it a perfect example of the occultist materiality of *TES.* Moreover, the heart is intertextually linked to the forbidden fruit as Milton presents it in *PL.* This allows me to read the heart of Lorkhan as a comment on the forbidden fruit.

After Trinimac[4] ripped out Lorkhan's heart and discovered that Lorkhan and the world were one, meaning that the heart of Lorkhan is the heart of the world, Auri-El[5] used his bow to shoot the heart into the ocean, with the intent of it never being found. However, as he did so, a giant volcano

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[3] Lorkhan is the god who, together with many of his fellow Et'Ada, created Mundus, or the mortal plane. "Lorkhan is one of only two et'Ada (the other being Akatosh) to appear in every known mythology on Nirn, and the first being to be referred to as King of the Gods (the other being Akatosh). However, opinions of him vary dramatically from race to race. Generally speaking, Lorkhan is considered an enemy of the mer, and a patron and hero to men. The Cyrodilic culture calls him Shezarr, The Missing God, reflecting the fact that he alone of the Aedra has truly died and vanished" (*Lorkhan*)

[4] "Trinimac was an ancient Aedroth (Et'Ada or "Original Spirit"), Aldmeri deity, and the alleged precursor to the Daedric Prince Malacath. He is described as the strongest of the Aedra, the champion of the High Elven pantheon, and in some places more popular than Auri-El. Trinimac is referred to as the champion of Auri-El himself" (*Trinimac*)

[5] "Auri-El or Auriel is the Elven variant of Akatosh, the chief god of the Nine Divines. Auri-El is the soul of Anui-El, who in turn is the soul of Anu, the Everything. He is often seen as chief of the Aldmeri Pantheon by his followers" (*Auri-El*).

rose from the ocean, making a land mark of the resting place of the heart. This volcano is known as Red Mountain and, together with the land around it, forms the island of Vvardenfell in the middle of the province of Morrowind (*Trinimac*).

Figure 1: Map of Morrowind (The Elder Scrolls Wiki, Morrowind)

The two intelligent races that later came to inhabit Vvardenfell were the Dwemer and the Chimer. The Dwemer found the heart and started researching it, and temp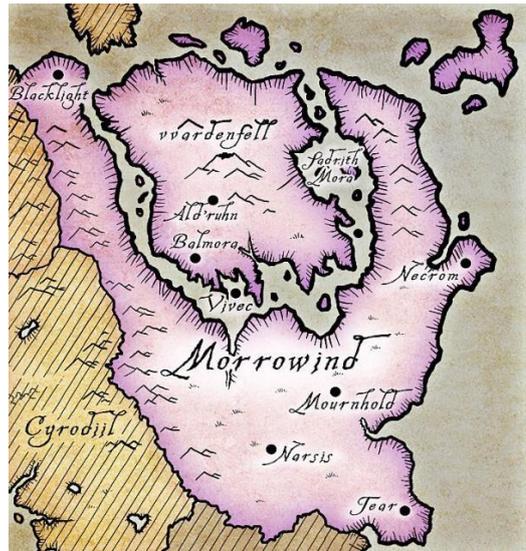ered with it. Yet, at some point, the Dwemer disappeared from existence. There are multiple theories behind the disappearance of the Dwemer. One of those theories is that they all achieved godhood through the sixth walking way, all of their souls combined into the skin of the Numidium, thus completing the god that their main engineer had been creating (*The Six Walking Ways*, Reddit).

Not only did the heart cause the disappearance of the Dwemer, it was also used by multiple individuals in the world of *TES* to ascend to godhood. The Chimer Tribunal, consisting of Almalexia, Sotha Sil, and Vivec, as well as Talos, and Dagoth Ur all used the heart as a form of catalyst in order to achieve godhood through one, or multiple, of the walking ways. Without going into any further detail on this topic, the fact that there is a physical object present in the world of *TES* that allows its inhabitants to ascend to godhood provides a completely different concept of godhood than Milton does in his adaptation of the Christian myth. However, the heart of Lorkhan seems have the exact function that Satan, though falsely, ascribes to the forbidden fruit. Satan describes the fruit to grant knowledge that ascends the bearer to godhood, and the heart can be used as a catalyst to achieve CHIM, which is a concept based on attaining certain knowledge which in turn grants power and, thus, divinity.

2.4: Conclusion

The cosmology of *TES* is extremely complex and even more in depth than I have shown in this chapter, however, what I have analysed in this chapter are a few fundamentals. In this chapter I have attempted to shed some light on different aspects of the *TES* cosmology and their relation to my key concepts of postmodernism and occultist materiality. Additionally, I have linked the *TES* concepts of the Godhead, the walking ways, and the heart of Lorkhan to similar concepts in *PL*, showing both their similarities as well as their discontinuities. However, due to the postmodern nature of *TES* as opposed to the modern nature of *PL*, most of the similarities between these concepts is but shallow.

Though both Godheads are, in different ways, the creators of their respective universes, in *TES*, the Godhead does not have an active role in the universe, whereas the Christian Godhead does. Moreover, *TES* allows for mortals to ascend to godhood, whereas the Christian doctrine does not. Though Milton's Satan tempts Eve with a concept that is very similar to the *TES* concept of CHIM, this concept does not actually exist within Christianity. The main difference between the *TES* walking way and the eating of the fruit is that CHIM is obtaining power through knowledge, whereas the latter only grants knowledge.

In the Christian belief only He who created the world can be God, yet *TES* lore suggests that anyone that obtains enough power and knowledge can ascend to godhood. This is but a matter of technicalities, because both Satan, his demons, and the angels actually do have knowledge and powers that the *TES* lore would ascribe to gods, yet they are named differently in Christianity. Though the similarities between the heart of Lorkhan and the forbidden fruit suggest the possibility of Adam and Eve ascending to godhood as they eat from the fruit, this reading is incorrect, for there is one major difference between the heart and the fruit; the heart has the ability to function as a catalyst in the process of the walking ways, thus granting both power and knowledge, whereas the fruit only grants knowledge.

TES builds upon the modern critique on the concept of godhood as it is presented in *PL*, by introducing the postmodern view by suggesting that there is not just one God, but that certain other

mythological figures in *PL* and the Christian mythology could also be viewed and revered as gods. An important final note here is that *TES*, due to its neomedievalist eclectic nature, contains many playful references to many other religions religion, and, thus, is not just a revision of modern Christianity.

CHAPTER 3: GODHOOD IN *THE ELDER SCROLLS*, *PARADISE LOST*, AND THE REAL WORLD

In this final chapter of my thesis, I will analyse how the postmodern view of godhood as it is presented in *TES* relates to the pre-modern views of godhood as they were present in the real world. Thereto, I will analyse the connections between religion in *TES*, *PL*, and the real world. To clarify these connections, I will further explore the duality of good and evil in both the Christian God as well as the *TES* gods, and the relation to gods and demons in the digital, literary and historical world. Real-world religion is a very diverse and broad subject, so I will focus on the specifics that are relevant to my analysis. To start this chapter, I will do an analysis of Ashtoreth in *PL*, who is also known as Astarte, her relations to other real-world religions, and the intertextuality between her and the *TES* Daedric Prince Azura. Then, I will do an analysis of gods and demons in *TES*, and how they generally relate, or do not relate, to the concepts of good and evil. Finally, I want to conclude this chapter with an analysis of the relation between godhood and kingship as was prevalent in Milton's England, and analyse the intertextual references between this concept of a divine ruler and *TES*' Vivec. In this way, I will be able to show the postmodern views of godhood as they are presented in *TES* in relation to-, and as a comment on, religion in the real world.

3.1 Astarte, Ashtoreth, and Azura; syncretism in *Paradise Lost* and *The Elder Scrolls*

In his epic, Milton presents a multitude of gods from different, ancient religions as devils. Thus, in my analysis of what it is that makes something a god, syncretism is an extremely important subject, as it causes certain higher beings to be known as gods in one culture, yet as devils in the other. Therefore, the next part of my analysis will focus on intertextual connections between gods from real-life religions and *TES* religions, as well as syncretism in *PL* and *TES*, and the influence of this intertextuality on the concept of godhood as presented in those works.

  Of the multitude of devils that Milton introduces in the very first book of his epic, Ashtoreth, also known as Astarte, is one of the most interesting ones for this particular analysis. Ashtoreth is a goddess that has a place in multiple real-life religions, and was the inspiration for some goddesses in

others, making her a very interesting topic of analysis from the perspective of syncretism. It has also been theorized that Astarte was used as inspiration for the *TES* Daedric Prince Azura *(Azura inspired by Ishtar)*.

I want to explain the term "Daedric Prince" first. Some et'Ada[6] were willing to help Lorkhan create the world, whereas others were not. The et'Ada who helped Lorkhan to create Mundus became known as the Aedra, which translates to 'our ancestors' in the Aldmerian tongue of *TES*. Their divine powers, however, were drained in the process and they entered a slumber. The et'Ada who did not help Lorkhan are known as the Daedra, or, 'not our ancestors'. The Daedra kept their powers and therefore have a much more active influence on Mundus than the Aedra. Though there are deviations from these definitions, these definitions apply to most Aedra and Daedra. There are countless Daedra, all varying in power, but the strongest seventeen, known as the Daedric Princes, are most important to both the games' lore and my analysis.

With that explained, let us now look at Astarte in isolation before analysing the intertextual similarities between Astarte and Azura. For my descriptions of real-world gods I am using Redfield's *Gods, A Dictionary Of The Deities Of All Lands*. Though it is an old source, from 1931, and is at some points clearly opiniated, Redfield gives concise descriptions which serve as a good starting point for my analyses. Redfield gives a concise description of the different names and worshippers of Astarte, which I will now cite in part.

> Astarte. The chief female deity of the Phoenicians, Carthaginians and Syrians. She was also worshipped as Ashtoreth by the Jews in times when idolatry prevailed … The Greeks borrowed their Aphrodite from this origin. Astarte was goddess of the moon, as Baal was god of the sun. … and finally she was conceived as the "queen of heaven" … Lucian identifies her with Selene, the goddess of the moon, and again, with the planet Venus. The Assyrian goddess Ishtar seems to have been the same as Astarte. (Redfield 47-48).

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[6] "Et'Ada, also called the "Original Spirits," are the forces perceived and revered by the mortals as gods or spirits" (*Et'Ada*).

Redfield here shows that Astarte, though under different names, was worshipped by a few different cultures and in a few different religions. The first thing that stands out to me is that she was, in certain times, worshipped by the Jews. Judaism and Christianity are two different religions, yet both share a part of their scriptures and, most importantly, are monotheistic. Therefore, it is interesting that the Jews at some point explored these other religious practices and worshipped Ashtoreth. Redfield phrases this as "in times when idolatry prevailed", which is a denigrating and normative statement. This is a quote in which it becomes clear this source is opiniated, yet the information that Redfield provides is still relevant.

Let us now have a brief look at Azura before analysing the intertextual references between Azura and Astarte.

Azura, the Queen of Dawn and Dusk, also known as Azura of the Crimson Gate, the Mother Soul, Moonshadow, Mother of the Rose, Queen of the Night Sky, and the Rim of all Holes, the Cosmic Severer, and called Azurah by the Khajit, is a Daedric Prince whose sphere is dawn and dusk – the magic in-between realms of twilight – as well as mystery and magic, fate and prophecy, and vanity and egotism. (*Lore:Azura*).

Figure 2: Statue of Azura in Skyrim (Daedric Princes)

Azura, being the "Queen of Dawn and Dusk", is sometimes portrayed with a sickled moon in her[7] right hand and an eight-pointed star in her left hand. The star in particular is "prominently used as her symbol" (*Lore:Azura*). The eight-pointed star is also a symbol of the Assyrian goddess Ishtar. As I have said before, Astarte, Ishtar, Aphrodite, and Venus are all closely connected to each other, and Azura shares similarities with all of them. The eight-pointed

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[7] Note that I use 'her' when referring to Azura, but that all Daedra are hermaphrodites and can appear as either male or female. Azura often chooses to show herself in female form, and is therefore often portrayed as a female. This is the reason that I use the female pronouns when referring to her.

star is thus similar to the symbol of Ishtar; Venus is both a morning and an evening star (Redfield 298), and Azura is the "Queen of Dawn and Dusk"; Aphrodite and Venus are both goddesses of beauty and love, and Azura is known to be the most loving Daedra.

> Azura is one of the few Daedra who maintains the appearance of being "good" by mortal standards, and reportedly feels more concern for the well-being of her mortal subjects than other Daedric Princes. It is said she wants their love above all else, and for her worshippers to love themselves; it pains her when they do not. (*Lore:Azura*).

Though my speculation that these goddesses are linked to Azura are just that, speculation, I am not the first person to suggest this. There is a post on the subreddit on *TES* lore that points out these similarities. The writer of this post also mentions "the heavy Mesopotamian influence on the culture, naming conventions, and architecture of Morrowind, which was rather heavily influenced by Azura" (Azura inspired by Ishtar). Some examples of this intertextuality are the Ashlander naming conventions. "-Ahhe, as in Asha-Ahhe Egg Mine, Ashu-Ahhe, Dun-Ahhe, Tin-Ahhe, etc.—"ahhe" is a component of the names of Assyrian and Babylonian kings, e.g. Ashur-nadin-ahhe, Marduk-nadin-ahhe", and "Foyada Ashur-Dan, Ashur-Dan, Ashir-Dan—named after three historical Assyrian kings called Ashur-Dan" (*Morrowind:Easter Eggs*). Therefore, it is likely that Azura, who plays a major role in the lore of Morrowind and the Aslanders, was also influenced by Assyrian gods.

Though Astarte, Ashtoreth, Aphrodite, Ishtar, and Venus were all known as gods in their respective cultures and religions, and Azura is also seen as a relatively good Daedra in the Dunmer society of *TES III*, Milton presents Ashtoreth as a devil rather than a god. From a Christian perspective, it is understandable that all gods other than their God were proclaimed devils, as there could only be one God and those that stood up to him were cast into hell. Milton thus toys with the idea that all other gods were once angels who, together with Satan, sought to usurp God's throne and were thus condemned to hell. The Penguin edition of *PL* contains notes by John Leonard, who supports my previous statement with his annotation of the following lines in *PL*:

And Powers that erst in Heaven sat on thrones;

> Though of their names in Heav'nly records now
>
> Be no memorial, blotted out and razed
>
> By their rebellion, from the Books of Life.
>
> Nor had they yet among the sons of Eve
>
> Got them new names, till wand'ring o'er the earth, (I.360-365).

Leonard annotates these lines with the following notes:

> Here the *new names* are those of future devils. The *blotted* angelic names never appear in *PL.*
> Cp. i 80-81, v 658, vi 373-85. For God's blotting of names, see Exod. 32. 33 and Rev. 3. 5: 'He
> that overcometh … I will not blot out his name out of the book of life'. M. has *Books* (not 'Book')
> to suggest the great number of angels. 'Blot out' implies 'annihilate, destroy' (*OED* 5), as in xi
> 891: 'to blot out mankind'. (298).

The first thing to note here is that these lines appear in Book I of *PL*, right before the introduction of the other devils aside from Satan. Milton here refers to these devils as "Powers that erst in Heaven sat on thrones", before describing the result of their rebellion. Then, when he introduces the devils, it becomes evident that they are all gods from other religions than Christianity. Therefore, Milton imagines all gods other than the Christian God to have once been angels, who "in Heaven sat on thrones", yet in their rebellion against the true God were cast in hell and changed into devils.

This change from god to devil thus resulted from gods of a polytheistic religion being taken up by a monotheistic religion. Though this transition is not as simple as I am currently describing, as there is usually a lot of politics involved, this is the change as it is presented in *PL*. However, as shown by the case of Astarte, Aphrodite, and Venus, gods from one polytheistic religion can be taken up by other polytheistic religions and still retain their status as god, even within that other religion. This is in line with the conclusion in my previous chapter that both Satan and his devils have powers that, in *TES* lore and polytheistic real-life religions, could be ascribed to gods, as some higher beings are worshipped as gods in one religion, yet seen as devils in another. In the case of *TES,* however, this raises the question whether Daedric Princes, such as Azura, are indeed considered to be gods.

3.2: The Divines and the Daedric Princes; godhood in *The Elder Scrolls*

Similarly to the real world, the world of *TES* holds many different religions cultures. These different religions often worship different gods, and may have very opposing views on the aspects of certain gods. An example of this is Lorkhan in the Altmerian pantheon as opposed to Shor[8] in the Nordic pantheon; one in-game source even claims that Lorkhan is a Daedric Prince (UESP, "Daedric Princes"). Though both religions view Lorkhan as a god, both religions describe him in completely different terms. These kind of disparities between religions are facilitated by the fact that the term god in the postmodern *TES* is in some ways different from the premodern, or even modern, understanding of the term God. Therefore, in the next part of my analysis, I will focus on the Divines and the Daedric Princes in *TES* and how they relate, or not at all relate, to the term "god".

I want to start this analysis by having a brief look at the Divines in *TES*. Even though the Divines are once again a complicated subject, with many different religions disagreeing on which beings are Divines and which are not, my analysis of them will be fairly simple. All Divines share a common aspect, namely that the religions that worship them see them as gods. This means that the aforementioned Lorkhan and Shor are both gods, and whether their respective religions believe them to be good or evil does not matter, as *TES* is filled with religions that contain gods that are considered evil. Therefore, any being that is worshipped as a god within a certain religion is in fact a god, and the clear distinction that is made between good and evil in the Christian doctrine, in terms of God and Satan, does not apply to *TES* religion. What does seem to be similar, however, is that the Divines are ascribed similar definitions as the Christian definition of God that I provided earlier. The Divines helped to create the world, and are present in it through their worship, yet are simultaneously existences far beyond the world and indeed beyond the imagination and experience of the races of Nirn. Therefore, they are described as in a way similar to the Christian God, yet without the duality of good and evil that is so predominant in the Christian religion. Though the Imperial religion sees the Divines as good and the Daedra as evil, this is not the case in all *TES* religions.

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[8] "Shor is the Nordic representation of the god Lorkhan" (*Shor*).

My next analysis will expand on this critique on the duality of God by focussing on whether the Daedric Princes are viewed as gods or not. *The Monomyth* states the following regarding this subject: "To humans these et'Ada are the Gods and Demons; to the Aldmer, the Aedra/Daedra, or the 'Ancestors'". This quote suggests that not all higher beings are per definition gods for everyone, for they could also be demons. Another in-game source, titled Varieties of *Faith in the Empire*, lists the most important spirits, excluding many Daedra that do not possess a certain cultural significance. The book lists the eight different pantheons and contains brief descriptions of all Divines and eight of the seventeen Daedric Princes. The most interesting thing about the Daedric Princes is that all that are mentioned, including Azura, are titled "gods", except for one; Herma-Mora. Herma-Mora, or Hermaeus Mora, is listed as the "Demon of Knowledge". The full description reads as follows:

> Herma-Mora (The Woodland Man): Ancient Atmoran demon who, at one time, nearly seduced the Nords into becoming Aldmer. Most Ysgramor myths are about escaping the wiles of old Herma-Mora. Also called the Demon of Knowledge, he is vaguely related to the cult origins of the Morag Tong ('Foresters Guild'), if only by association with his brother/sister, Mephala. (*Varieties of Faith in the Empire*).

The Ysgramor myth in which Herma-Mora nearly seduced the Nords (humans), into becoming Aldmer (elves) can also be found in the Imperial Library under the name of *Fragmentae Abyssum Hermaeus Morus*. Within this myth, there is an incantation to Hermeaus Mora in which the Daedric Prince is also addressed as "Demon of Knowledge". However, within the Nordic religion, Herma Mora is seen as a god. *The Nords' Totemic Religion* by Michael Kirkbride presents Herma Mora as a "Testing God". This seems similar to The House of Troubles in the Dunmeri religion;

> Among the ancient ancestral spirits who accompanied Saint Veloth and the Chimer into the promised land of Morrowind, the four Daedra Lords, Malacath, Mehrunes Dagon, Molag Bal, and Sheogorath, are known as the Four Corners of the House of Troubles. These Daedra Lords rebelled against the counsel and admonition of the Tribunal, causing great kinstrife and confusion among the clans and Great Houses. (*The House of Troubles*).

The Daedric Princes that are known as the Four Corners of the House of Troubles are seen as evil by the Dunmer, yet they do acknowledge them as gods. The Dunmer see these gods as gods that test them. *Varieties of Faith in the Empire* for instance describes that "He [Malacath] always tests the Dunmer for physical weakness". Therefore, though Hermaeus Mora is often named the "Demon of Knowledge", the Nords see him as a god in the same way that the Four Corners of the House of Troubles are gods in the Dunmeri religion. Therefore, gods in *TES* are not bound by the duality of good and evil, or even the duality of demons and gods, as Hermaeus Mora is known as both even within the same religion. Rather, they are defined as gods by certain cultures because they are beings of higher power and knowledge that are significant to that culture's set of beliefs and practices.

The nine Daedric Princes that "Varieties of Faith in the Empire" does not list, however, are harder to define. Often-times, the pages in the Imperial Library, as well as the Unofficial Elder Scrolls Pages (UESP), as well as the Fandom Wiki do not define them as either god or demon, but rather refer to them by their titles as Daedric Princes, Lords, and Ladies. The exceptions are Nocturnal and Sanguine, who, in the Khajiti religion, are respectively known as the gods Noctra and Sangiin (*Lore:Nocturnal, Lore:Sanguin*), and Clavicus Vile, who the UESP calls "Child-god of the Morningstar" (*Lore:Clavicus Vile*). Noctra and Sangiin are important within the Khajiti culture, and are therefore revered as gods within their belief-system.

Clavicus Vile is particularly interesting for my analysis, as he is in some ways similar to Milton's Satan. The first similarity is that he is called "Child-god of the Morningstar", for the Morningstar refers to the aforementioned evening- and morning stars of Venus, whose morning star is called Lucifer, which was Satan's name before his fall. Moreover, Clavicus Vile's other titles are "Prince of Trickery and Bargains" and "Master of Insidious Wishes" (Lore:Clavicus Vile), and Milton's Satan is also known as the "Great Deceiver" and the "Infernal Tempter", which are all fairy similar in meaning. An important thing to note here is that almost all Daedra are associated with trickery and deceit, yet these aforementioned titles are specific to Clavicus Vile, making them relevant for this reading. Even though Clavicus Vile is to an extent similar to Milton's Satan, he is acknowledged as a god in the *TES* universe.

This reinforces my earlier statement that in polytheistic religions, such as those prevalent throughout the *TES* universe, a being such as Milton's Satan could be a god.

The Monomyth mentions both gods and demons, yet the Daedric Prince Hermeaus Mora is referred to as both, even within the same religion, suggesting that there is no clear distinction between the two. Additionally, there are Daedric Princes who are not referred to as gods or as demons, yet they are higher beings, these are Jyggalag, Meridia, Namira, Peryite and Vaermina. This suggests that there is no clear distinction between gods, demons, and other higher beings, apart from the cultural and political reasons of the mortal races that influence whether a being, of sufficient knowledge and power, is described as a god or not.

3.3: Godhood and kingship in English history and *The Elder Scrolls*

The problem with this previous conclusion is that some gods in *TES* proclaim their own godhood, rather than having it ascribed to them. The perfect example of this is the aforementioned Vivec, who does not only ascend to godhood, but uses his[9] status as god for political power. The relation between political power and divinity has a long history in our world and is therefore an interesting topic of analysis. Therefore, this final part of my analysis will focus on godhood as ascribed to English kings and the intertextuality between that concept and Vivec. Thereto, I will first provide an analysis of the concept of an anointed king in medieval England following *The King's Two Bodies* by Ernst Kantorowicz (1957), which is one of the most famous books of this influential, twentieth century historian. I will then follow this by my analysis of how Vivec relates to this concept of the gemination of kings. Finally, I will describe how these analyses change my previously established notion of godhood in both *TES* and real-life.

> We thus have to recognize [in the king] a twin person, one descending from nature, the other
>
> from grace. . . . One through which, by the condition of nature, he conformed with other men:

---

[9] Note that Vivec is a hermaphrodite, yet is most often referred to as male, which is why I use the male pronouns when referring to him.

another through which, by the eminence of [his] deification and by the power of the sacrament

[of consecration], he excelled all others. Concerning one personality, he was, by nature, an

individual man: concerning his other personality, he was, by grace, a Christus, that is, a God-

man. (qtd. in Kantorowicz, 46).

In the above quote, Kantorowicz quotes the Norman Anonymous' description of the

anointment of Israel's kings, which is also applicable to other Christian kings. The author here describes

the duality of kings; on the one hand, they are by nature men, yet, on the other hand, they are God-

men by the grace of God. The Norman Anonymous later explains this concept of God by grace further.

The power of the king is the power of God. This power, namely, is God's by nature, and the

king's by grace. Hence, the king, too, is God and Christ, but by grace; and whatsoever he does,

he does not simply as a man, but as one who has become God and Christ by grace. (qtd. in

Kantorowicz, 48).

The author here explains that the power that is granted to the king does not come from the king's

nature, but rather by the grace, or will, of God; God allows the king to become a God-man.

Kantorowicz states that "[t]he legal concept of the King's Two Bodies cannot … be separated

form Shakespeare" for "[i]t is he who eternalized that metaphor" (26). Kantorowicz here talks about

Shakespeare's use of this concept of kingship in *The Life and Death of King Richard the Second*. He even

goes as far to call it "the tragedy of the King's Two Bodies" (26). It is interesting to analyse how

Shakespeare presents the influence of this type of godhood on the political power of the king.

Kantorowicz argues that throughout Shakespeare's play, the narrative of the king as God-man breaks

down. In the play, Richard II is portrayed to have faith in this narrative, as he has lines such as "The

breath of worldly man cannot depose / The deputy elected by the Lord" (*RII*.III.ii.51-52). Yet, as he

slowly comes to realize that Bolingbroke, later Henry V, will usurp his throne, this narrative falls apart

for him. Richard finally realizes that the God-man part of a king will always live on, yet that the natural

body of kings will always die. This is solidified in his speech in the third act of the play where "[t]he king

that "never dies" … has been replaced by the king that always dies and suffers death more cruelly than

other mortals" (Kantorowicz 30). Richard here reveals the true "feeble human nature of a king" (Kantorowicz 30), thus separating the two bodies of a king and realizing that the individual man is mortal and the God and Christ by grace is merely temporary, for this will be taken on by the next king on his coronation. Henry V later reasserts this when he says that "I Richard's body have interrèd new" (*HV*.IV.i.251). Therefore, in Shakespeare's *Richard II* and *Henry V*, the plays present the view that the two bodies of kings are separate bodies that briefly come together in the lifespan of a certain king, yet the natural body is replaceable. This idea is supported by Kantorowicz's following statements:

> It is well known that in 1601, on the eve of his unsuccessful rebellion against the Queen, the Earl of Essex ordered a special performance of Richard II to be played in the Globe Theatre before his supporters and the people of London. (Kantorowicz 41).

And "It would not be surprising at all had Charles I himself thought of his tragic fate in terms of Shakespeare's Richard II and of the king's twin-born being" (Kantorowicz 41). These statements suggest that the monarchs of England, in Elizabethan times, agreed with the notion of kingship as it was portrayed in *The Life and Death of King Richard the Second*. Kantorowicz also states the following:

> While undoubtedly it is true that the legal fiction of the King's Two Bodies was a distinctive feature of English political thought in the age of Elizabeth and the early Stuarts, it would be unfortunate to imply that those speculations were restricted to the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries or were lacking antecedents. (42).

Therefore, the concept of the king as a dual entity, consisting of two separate bodies: the natural, mortal individual, and the God and Christ by the grace of God, is an important concept throughout the history of England, and not just there. This divine right to rule is a concept that has been used in many different cultures and societies around the globe. Due to the scope of this thesis, I will not go in further detail on the interpretations of this concept in other cultures. The reason that I have chosen to explore the English understanding of this concept is that a large part of my analyses in this thesis is based on *Paradise Lost* and is therefore related to English literature.

Additionally, the "King's Two Bodies", as Kantorowicz phrases it, is a very interesting concept to use as a reference point when analysing kingship and godhood in *TES*. The reason for this is that the *TES* god Vivec, after his ascension to godhood, seized political control over the Chimer of Morrowind, and is, in a way, two-bodied. Before ascending to godhood, Vivec killed Nerevar, king, or "hortator", of the Chimer, who was a champion of Azura. "As punishment, Azura cursed the golden-skinned Chimer to become the ash-skinned, red-eyed Dunmer" (Fandom Wiki, "Azura"). Vivec, however, did not fully become ash-skinned, but half of his body

Figure 3: Vivec in his temple (Vivec)

remained golden whereas the other half became ashen. The two differently coloured halves of Vivec represent not only his Chimer/Dunmer identity, but, due to Vivec's androgynous being, is also a reference to the Hindu deity Adhanarishvara, Sanskrit for "Lord Who Is Half Woman" (*Ardhanarishvara*). This physical duality can be read as an intertextual reference to the concept of the King's Two Bodies as described by the Norman Anonymous and Kantorowicz. Vivec's two coloured halves do not literally relate to his being as both mortal and god, yet I find it interesting that Kantorowicz refers to this gemination of kings as the king having two bodies, which is literally present in the character of Vivec, whose body consist of two very different halves. Therefore, I read Vivec's double Chimer/Dunmer, Shiva/Parvati-identity as a reference to Kantorowicz's concept of "The King's Two Bodies".

In my discussion of the six walking ways I used a source titled "The 36 Lessons of Vivec", also known as the 36 sermons of Vivec. The sermons are an in-game source written by Vivec himself and tell the story of how he came to be. Most importantly, these sermons explain how Vivec was created as a god, rather than ascending to one later in his life. On the one hand, this is simply untrue, for there

are sources that display Vivec before his apotheosis, such as "What My Beloved Taught Me" by Michael Kirkbride, which is not an in-game source but can be regarded as canon due to my previously explained looseness of what is considered *TES* canon and what is not. On the other hand, Vivec used the Dragon Break[10] that occurred during the battle of Red Mountain to rewrite his own history, therefore turning the sermons into the truth about his existence.

Though one could write an entire thesis on the sermons of Vivec, for the sake of my analysis I want to zoom in on sermon four, as Vivec here makes statements regarding both godhood and kingship.

Vivec knew that to retain his divinity that he must make a strong argument against luck. He said:

'Is not the sudden revelation of corresponding conditions and disparate elements that gel at the moment of coincidence one of the prerequisites to being, in fact, coincidental? Synchronicity comes out of repeated coincidences at the lowest level. Further examination shows it is the utter power of sheer number of coincidences that leads one to the idea that synchronicity is guided by something more than chance. Therefore, synchronicity ends up invalidating the concept of the coincidental, even though they are symptomatic signs that bring it to the surface.'

Thus was coincidence destroyed in the land of the Velothi. (New Whirling School, "Lesson Four").

The "New Whirling School" is a project by well-known *TES* loremasters who go by the names of Rotten Deadite and BuckneyBos, in which they annotate the 36 sermons of Vivec. Currently, only the first 23 are annotated. The authors make some interesting comments regarding Vivec's divinity in this part of

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[10] "A Dragon Break, sometimes referred to as an un-time, is a temporal phenomenon that involves a splitting of the natural timeline which results in branching parallel realities where the same events occur differently, or not at all. This results in a return to the non-linear timeline of the Dawn Era. At the end of a Dragon Break, the timeline reconnects making all possibilities and outcomes truth, though contradictory to each other. The "Dragon" that is mentioned is in reference towards Akatosh, the Dragon God of Time" (Fandom Wiki, "Dragon Break"). These mostly serve to validate all different outcomes of each game, for the Dragon Break allows for all possible outcomes to be both true and untrue at the same time.

the sermon. The sentence "Vivec knew … against luck" is annotated with, among other things, the following explanation.

> So now we see that Vivec's divinity is not a natural state, an inevitable ascension, but rather something at risk. Here, ze sees a challenge, an argument, which Vivec must win in order to maintain hir status as a God. (New Whirling School, "Lesson Four").

The fact that Rotten Deadite here refers to "natural state" is very interesting, as it can be read as an intertextual reference to the natural state of kings as man. This reading suggests that Vivec's natural state is not that of a god, but rather of a mortal. The challenge that is proposed to him is what he needs to overcome in order to maintain his status as a god, meaning that he needs to win this argument to become, or stay, a God-man, or God-mer (God-elf), by grace. Additionally, "sudden revelation of corresponding conditions" is annotated with the following explanation:

> Basically the argument here is that "coincidence" is an illusion of perception. Ze argues that events that appear to correlate are just selected by the viewer from a bottomless sea of events, and any pattern that is assigned to them is assigned from our perception, which by definition is the exact opposite of coincidence. Therefore, as ze puts it, "synchronicity ends up invalidating the concept of the coincidental."

> The very act of perceiving a supposedly synchronous event is itself the act of observing the will of God. (New Whirling School, "Lesson Four").

Vivec here mimics Carl Jung's theory of synchronicity and argues that coincidence does not exist. The annotation explains that Vivec here argues that every event is coordinated by the will of God, which is reminiscent of the Christian, monotheistic, premodern understanding of godhood. With his understanding of godhood being so similar to the Christian notion of godhood, it is perhaps not surprising that he continues this sermon with likening himself to a king rather than a god; for Christian kings are God-men.

> "At this the Old Bone folded unto itself twenty times until it became akin to milk, which Vivec drank, becoming a ruling king of the world" (New Whirling School, "Lesson Four"). The "Old Bone''

most likely here refers to an Earthbone, an et'Ada that willingly gave itself to Nirn and became a force of nature. In drinking a condensed version of the Earthbone, Vivec thus inherits some form of god-like power similar to that of the forces of nature. The part "ruling king" is annotated with the following:

By absorbing the essence of an Old Bone, Vivec becomes something called a "Ruling King." The exact definition of what a Ruling King is, or what one can do, is not provided. But we can assume that at the very least, a Ruling King is a being of immense power and responsibility. Considering the influences of other fictional and religious sources on the 36 Lessons, I suspect it's likely that a Ruling King is in some way related to an enlightened scholar of Eastern cultures. Depending on the specific source, this could mean a person of incredible wisdom and knowledge, or a magnificent Demi-God of unfathomable power. (New Whirling School, "Lesson Four").

Though Rotten Deadite here suggests that the concept of the Ruling King is likely connected to Eastern cultures, it could just as well be connected to the Western understanding of the two-bodied king, for the Ruling King here is argued to be a being with god-like wisdom, knowledge, and/or power, in other words a God-man.

Simpson, in her blog titled "The Metaphysics of Morrowind", discusses the topic of the fourth wall in relation to Vivec. In this blog, she, among other things, delves into the concept of the "ruling king". Simpson argues that Vivec is aware that the world is a construction and that, through CHIM, he is in a meta-position and thus can manipulate the world. Simpson also argues that the player is the second Ruling King, for Vivec understands that the player is also more than just an NPC in the game; that the player is able to influence the world as much as he is through metaphysical means, for example through loading previous save-files or adding mods to the game. Simpson also argues that a Ruling King always exists in relation to the rebel.

"If there is to be an end I must be removed. The ruling king must know this, and I will test him. I will murder him time and again until he knows this. I am the defender of the last and the last. To remove me is to refill the heart that lay dormant at the center [sic] that cannot hold. … The

ruling king is to stand against me and then before me. He is to learn from my punishment. I

will mark him to know. He is to come as male or female. I am the form he must acquire. Because

a ruling king that sees in another his equivalent rules nothing. (Sermon 13, qtd. in Simpson).

The player here is the rebel that can come as either male or female and is to kill Vivec. Through my

analysis I have found that a god is a being that is vastly superior to mortals in both power and

knowledge, and has become so important to a culture that the people of that culture call that being

god. The godhood that Vivec had obtained through the heart of Lorkhan slowly fades over time, and,

though his status of ruling king through CHIM does grant him great knowledge, it does not make him

immortal. In fact, he can even be killed by a mortal, such as the player, suggesting that he lacks power.

Therefore, Simpson argues that the state of a ruling king is one of enlightenment rather than godhood.

This argument by Simpson touches upon the similarities between *TES* enlightenment and the

experience of gaming, for Vivec recognises the player as a ruling king due to the player's existence

outside of their avatars in the game. In the Bible, divinity is closely intertwined with the arts of

speaking and writing. Therefore, it is interesting to see that the postmodern narrative that is presented

in *TES* divinity seems to be closely intertwined with the technologies of our current age, namely the

experience of gaming.

The fourth sermon of Vivec is extremely concerned with the gemination of kings. It first

explains that Vivec's godhood is not his natural state, but rather something that he can lose. This is

similar to how Kantorowicz explains Richard's realisation that his God-man status is only by the grace

of God and can be lost. Later in the sermon Vivec calls himself a "Ruling King", which seems to be

synonymous with having reached a form of enlightenment, or meta-physical state. Therefore, Vivec

argues that a king is not necessarily a god, yet Vivec himself is, for he achieved his godhood through

the heart of Lorkhan. The gemination of Vivec is visually represented through his half golden- half

ashen skin. Moreover, the concept of "twin-born" that Shakespeare mentions is also literally

represented in Vivec in that he was born in two different ways; namely as a "gutter-get" (What My

Beloved Taught Me), or a natural mer (elf), and as a god as he rewrote his own history. Therefore, Vivec is the ultimate representation of the two-bodied king that Kantorowicz describes in his book.

The difference between Christian kings and Vivec is that the former are God-men by grace of God, whereas the latter reached heaven by violence. The six walking ways are also known as the six ways to reach heaven by violence, and I have previously established that these are what Vivec used to ascend to godhood. Though Vivec's state of godhood is not his natural state of being, Vivec forced himself into this role of god and then later rewrote his history to make it so that it is, in fact, his natural state. Though Vivec eventually loses his god-like powers, he was never a god by grace, but rather by force, granting him the power to rule Vvardenfell.

3.4: Conclusion

In this chapter I have attempted to further define the concept of godhood as it is presented in the postmodern *TES* in relation to its representation in the early-modern *PL* and the premodern real world. In analysing syncretic movement of gods from one religion to another, I have found that beings that are revered as gods in one religion are likely to be seen as demons from another, Christian perspective, as they threaten the monotheistic understanding of God. However, when gods from a polytheistic religion are taken up by another polytheistic religion, they often retain their status as god. *TES* does not seem to make these clear distinctions between gods and demons, as some beings, such as Hermeaus Mora, are known as both a god and a demon even within the same religion. This likely stems from the polytheistic nature of *TES* religions, as a polytheistic religion allows for both good and evil gods to exist alongside each other. The main difference between the premodern notions of religion and the postmodern as they are presented in *TES* is that, in premodern religion, a being is either a god or a demon, yet can never be both. The postmodern aspect of *TES* allows for a being to be both a god and a demon at the same time. This means that whether a being is a god, a demon, or even something else entirely, solely depends on the mortals that believe in these beings of superior knowledge and power, and decide to name them gods or other. Which is one of the postmodern traits of *TES*, as this

denies the existence of a grand narrative. What does seem to be similar, however, is the description of gods outside of the duality of good and evil. For both the Christian God as well as the *TES* gods are beings that are omnipresent within their worlds, yet are at the same time beings far outside the physical world, and the understandings of its inhabitants.

The problem with this conclusion is that some gods are physically present on earth, thus enforcing mortal belief in them. In *TES*, where occultist materialism plays a huge role, the Daedric Princes often physically appear on Nirn, yet in the real world, this does not happen. What does happen in the real world is the gemination of kings. Therefore, gods have walked this earth, more specifically, the Christian God who is embodied in living kings and Christ. Shakespeare cemented this concept in English history with his plays *Richard II* and *Henry V.* Shakespeare, however, separates the two bodies of kings and focussed on the tragic, human, part. The God-man narrative starts to break down as Richard realises that the mortal body of the king is replaceable and that only the immortal, God-man part will live on. *TES* comments on this concept by means of Vivec, whose state is also represented to be one of duality; half Chimer and half Dunmer, once born as mortal and once as god. Yet, Vivec was never a god by grace, but rather by force. Due to the similarities between Vivec and English monarchs, this reaching heaven by violence can be read as a critique on the two bodies of kings; through Vivec, *TES* here suggests that these English monarchs have, in fact, never been god by grace, but rather by force. These kings claim to be God-men in an attempt to justify their rule, thus forcibly displacing God. Such a political interpretation is in line with the postmodern philosophy.

CONCLUSIONS

In my thesis I have attempted to show how contemporary popular culture, in the form of *TES*, engages with past literature and theology, more specifically, how *TES,* in combining occultism and postmodernism, can be read to comment on previous notions of godhood as they are presented in the early-modern *PL* and some pre-modern religions. Through these analyses, I have obtained a clearer insight in the development of notions of godhood throughout the course of European history. The pre-modern, scattered polytheistic religions were replaced by monotheistic beliefs, which has since then become more and more scrutinized, with Milton being an early-modern example of such critique. In our current society we can now see a shift away from these monotheistic religions an increasing percentage of the populace is turning to atheism and new spiritual and esoteric movements. This is in line with the postmodernist view that "[i]nstead of making cathedrals out of Christ, man or "life," we are making them out of ourselves, out of our own feelings" (Newman, qtd. in Hart 5).

In *PL*, Milton presents a multitude of different understandings of godhood through multiple characters. Though these understandings vary at certain points, they all see God as the omnipotent creator. However, in his depiction of Chaos, and specifically the ability to create from Chaos, Milton can be read to deliver a critique on the duality of the Christian God. The Christian understanding of God is that He is both omnipotent and good, Milton questions these principles. Milton presents Chaos to be a part of God, yet Sin and Death also have the ability to bend Chaos to their will, meaning that, if "God is the first, absolute and sole cause of all things" (Rumrich 2014, 39-40), Sin and Death are but parts of God. Moreover, for good to exist, there needs to be evil, therefore, in attempting to create good, God inevitably also creates evil.

TES, with its polytheistic religions, then delivers a critique on the idea of a single God. Through the different gods of *TES* and the paths to ascension, *TES* presents an understanding of godhood that, when applied to *PL*, suggests that Satan, his demons, and the angels can be perceived as gods. Moreover, the occultism that is present throughout all of *TES* provide a materialistic understanding of godhood. This is represented in the heart of Lorkhan, which can be used to ascend a person to

godhood. The results of this apotheosis as described in *TES* are similar to how Milton's Satan explains the workings of the forbidden fruit to Eve.

Additionally, *TES* expands the critique on the duality of God through its representations of gods and demons. Milton already toys with the idea that the gods in ancient real world religions other than Christianity were all angels who, together with Satan, revolted against the one true God and were thus cast into hell and turned into demons. Therefore, Milton suggests that the description of either god or demon is dependent on the dominant culture at a certain point in time. *TES* goes even further in suggesting that a being can even be a demon and a god at the same time in the same religion, as the description of god or demon is ambivalent. *TES* gods are higher beings that have a certain cultural and political significance, and are therefore labelled as gods; whether they are good or evil in nature is of no significance. Yet, outside of this duality of good and evil, the understanding of what a god is in *TES* as opposed to the Christian God is fairly similar, as both are beings that, on the one hand, exist within the world through either their worship or, as in *TES*, through their materialisations in the world. On the other hand, both are also beings that exist far outside of the mortal worlds and the imagination and understanding of its inhabitants.

However, the Christian God has walked this earth; or rather Christian kings that are God-men by grace. *TES* god Vivec is in many ways intertextually related to these Christian kings, which is why I read *TES* god Vivec as a comment on these Christian God-men. Vivec is no god by grace, but rather by violence, and used his godlike power as a means to political power. I interpret this as the critique on Christian kings that Christian kings are in fact not at all God-men by grace, but rather they claimed this identity of God-men in order to justify their rule, thereby forcibly displacing god for political reasons.

In conclusion, the modern critique on the Christian God as it is presented in *PL* is focussed on the paradoxical nature of God and His duality. In our current, postmodern age, this critique has been expanded upon to the point where Christianity is declining. The rise of postmodernism is visible in popular culture such as *TES*, which, through many possible intertextual references, presents the good

or evil of a god as ambivalent for its classification as god, and ultimately presents the playful postmodern view that we should "mak[e] cathedrals … out of ourselves, out of our own feelings".

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