

## ABSTRACT

DENIZ ALEMDAR TUCK. "Wounded Earth, Groaning Nature: Milton's Ecotheological Hermeneutics in *Paradise Lost*." (Under the direction of Professor John N. Wall.)

Despite the thorough attention to green issues in *Paradise Lost* within the last ten years, critics have yet to widely discuss the relationship between the poem's ecological features and Milton's unique theological views. Specifically, current studies, in tending to read Milton greenly, have overlooked how *Paradise Lost* shows Milton reading Scripture greenly. This paper explores how *Paradise Lost* demonstrates the interactivity between Milton's green aesthetics and his green reading of the Bible. In his depiction of the Fall and the *eschaton* as significant events to both humanity and the natural world, Milton employs an ecotheological hermeneutic that interprets the Bible as a textual basis for a positive view of the environment. Milton's interpretation of the scope of the Fall and the *eschaton*, in particular, illustrates his ecotheological engagement with Chapter 8 of Paul's Epistle to the Romans. Interpreting the Greek word *ktisis* ("creature") as inclusive of human beings and the natural world, Milton articulates a view that coincides with a momentous shift in the historical tradition of exegesis on Romans 8:19-23: a shift away from anthropocentrism toward a more integrative, environmental theology of the cosmos. Departing from the patristic and medieval traditions before him, Milton argues that the natural world is included in God's end-time project of redemption and renewal. Significantly, this crucial turn in natural theology corresponds with a critical change in natural philosophy. In a time when the dualist-mechanists of the New Science dissociated mind from matter, Milton maintained the monistic-vitalist view that all things proceed from God and that no thing can be completely annihilated. Overall, in his belief that humans have eschatological and ontological solidarity with nature, Milton functions as a precursor to the ecotheologians of the twenty-first century. His poetic response to the major ecological

problems of his day models one way in which the Bible can be interpreted to support an ethic of environmental care.