

“Your bodies may at last turn all to spirit”: Medical Science and the *Anatomia Animata* in Milton's *Paradise Lost*

Submitted by Charlotte Mai Nicholls to the University of Exeter  
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## Abstract

### “Your bodies may at last turn all to spirit”: Medical Science and the *Anatomia Animata* in Milton's *Paradise Lost*

This thesis takes issue with the standard critical attribution to Milton of a backward Aristotelian scientific paradigm for his work, demonstrating that body and soul represented in *Paradise Lost* are inscribed in terms of radical contemporary medical theories of vitalism. Milton's close friendship with his doctor, Nathan Paget, links him to Paget's colleague, Francis Glisson, Regius Professor of Physic at Cambridge University, an academic and practising physician who was closely involved in cutting-edge contemporary medical research. Not only can Glisson's heretical notion of the energetic, living nature of substance be seen to match the dynamic scale of nature represented in *Paradise Lost*, but in fact Milton's animist materialism corresponds *precisely* to the chemical innovations made by Glisson in the anatomy of blood and bodily fluids and spirits.

Exploring Milton's representation of body and soul, spirit and matter, in the light of these contemporary medical innovations, this thesis focuses upon the way that his theodicy is supported by this most heretical natural philosophy. Milton's vital *anatomia animata* is shown to be central to the harmonious integration of science and theology in *Paradise Lost*; it complements the literalism of the poem and provides a non-satanic logic of self-determination. Beginning with the basic evidence of Milton's materialism of the soul in the *Christian Doctrine*, the first chapter correlates the theological assertions made with the language of natural philosophy that Milton uses to make them. The next chapter addresses the problem of the antinomy between the material soul proposed by Milton and the Aristotelian terminology with which he describes it, arguing that the latter is more heterogeneous than literary critics have acknowledged. The third chapter examines several versions of vitalism in order to delineate a working, medical model of the active matter presupposed by Milton's body-soul composites and the wider natural philosophy of *Paradise Lost*. This model of active matter and spirit is then used in chapter four to illuminate the representation of Creation, demonstrating the acute accuracy with which Milton's Creation draws upon contemporary medical research into conception. Chapter five extends the analysis to compare early notions of chemical digestion with the metabolic transformations of paradise. The final chapter demonstrates that the physiological and psychological corruptions of the Fall correspond to the effects of the putrid or poisonous ferment, while Milton's representation of regeneration calls upon the vital, generative *anatomia animata*.

This work is dedicated to my parents in loving recognition of their long years of caring.

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