

MILTON'S IMAGE AND POETICS OF HUMANITY

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A Dissertation by Walter Gardner Campbell

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ABSTRACT

Milton's image of humanity is a poetics of humanity: a dynamic, dialogic image that multiplies and explores what Nicolas of Cusa calls "conjectural otherness," a poetics fully responsive to the pathos and ironic complexities of human existence. Critics tend to dismiss Milton's image of humanity as an inferior element of his poetic achievement, usually because they force Milton's texts into a premature or inadequate univocality. In fact, however, an insistent binarism of emphatic alterity, an agonizing, transformative approach of opposites, pervades and characterizes Milton's work. I find four interpretive analogues of Milton's image of humanity in Blake's "contraries," Kierkegaard's revision of Socrates, Valesio's rhetorics, and Bakhtin's dialogics.

L'Allegro and *Il Penseroso*, two strenuously opposed "companions," are the first extended examples of Milton's image of humanity. Their exaggerated opposition is an exercise neither in renunciation nor in static synthesis, but instead a piercing counterpoint, a music of opposition and alterity sounding within and between them.

A confrontational dialogic also characterizes Satan's progress in *Paradise Lost*. Here a provocative God con-

tinually confronts Satan with gracious opportunities for redemption: the renewal of heaven that precedes his fall, the "Jacob's ladder" that dares him to reascend to heaven, the Sun/Son that he lands on then bitterly renounces, and the moment in which he is struck "stupidly good" before a solitary Eve. Milton's Arminianism and Origen's doctrine of apocatastasis suggest that Satan may not be finally damned until Eve falls.

Prelapsarian Adam and Eve are also continually tempted by "contrarieties": they wrestle with God, the Son, an angel, a devil, each other, the Tree of Knowledge, even Paradise itself, all of which are "provoking objects." Yet Paradise's surprising hazards, its "enormous bliss," its prohibitions, and its defeats (save one), can quicken its keepers toward the glory for which they are created. One of the most provocative and difficult opportunities in Paradise is Adam and Eve's dialogue of gender differentiation and marriage, especially in Book 9's separation scene.

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To my mother and father, my mother-in-law and my father-in-law, and most of all to my wife Alice, without a doubt my most resembling unlikeness and my most unlike resemblance, I owe a debt I cannot name or repay. Their unflaggingly patient love has made this possible; their faith in me has not been in vain.

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FOR MY MOTHER, WHO TAUGHT ME JOY
FOR MY FATHER, WHO TAUGHT ME WONDER
FOR ALICE, WHO TAUGHT ME *AMOR VINCIT OMNIA*

S. D. G.

Chapter 1

The Image of Humanity

In his *Renaissance Concepts of Man*, Paul Kristeller retells Petrarch's account of a mountaintop transfiguration. Petrarch had climbed Mount Ventoux and found the view at the top overwhelming. At that emotional moment,

he took his copy of Augustine's *Confessions* out of his pocket, opened it at random, and came upon the following passage: 'Men go to admire the heights of mountains, the great floods of the sea, the courses of rivers, the shores of the ocean, and the orbits of the stars, and neglect themselves.'

Petrarch's response, Kristeller tells us, was one of anger and shame that this spectacle of natural sublimity had caused him to forget the fundamental truth that "man and his soul are the truly important subjects of our thought," a truth, tellingly, Petrarch found both in the Christian St. Augustine and the pagan Seneca.¹ In coming to himself in this way, Petrarch becomes a true Renaissance man, standing near the headwaters of a current of Man-centered thought that comes to define the Renaissance for its inhabitants and its scholars.² As Thomas Greene puts it,

¹ Paul O. Kristeller, *Renaissance Concepts of Man* (New York: Harper & Row, 1972) 6-7.

² Jacob Burckhardt's *The Civilization of the Renaissance in Italy* (1860) is perhaps the best known scholarly treatment of the theme of the Renaissance as an age that believed the proper study of Man was Man.

Petrarch at this moment gives us "literature growing out of an existential impulse," an impulse that Burckhardt also judges a cornerstone of the Renaissance.³ In James

Although many subsequent studies have complicated and supplemented Burckhardt's often idealized view of the Italian Renaissance as a Golden Age of human optimism and accomplishment, none has supplanted his central thesis: the Renaissance is strikingly, characteristically preoccupied with Man in a newly intense way. In Burckhardt's words, the "inward development of the individual" in the Renaissance "corresponds [to] a new sort of outward distinction--the modern form of glory" (for which, of course, pagan antiquity was the model) (108). For a sympathetic analysis and supplement of Burckhardt, see William Kerrigan and Gordon Braden, *The Idea of the Renaissance* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1989) 3-69.

³ Thomas M. Greene, *The Light in Troy: Imitation and Discovery in Renaissance Poetry* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1982) 104. Charles Trinkhaus reaffirms Petrarch's judgment of Augustine's *Confessions*: "There the self, Augustine's self, is made manifest as pure subject in search of a vision of the world that corresponds to its own inner experience of truth.... Petrarch ... imitated Augustine both in the poignancy of his own search for wholeness and serenity and in his use of his own experiences as a guide for his brothers." See *In Our Image and Likeness: Humanity and Divinity in Italian Humanist Thought* (London: Constable Press, 1970) 18-19. Coming from a different angle, Greene argues that Petrarch's attempt at *imitatio* is poignant because it fails: "the passage from Augustine's text can only serve to underscore the pathos of the repetition's inadequacy" (111). See also Burckhardt, *The Civilization of the Renaissance in Italy* (1860; New York: Random House, 1954) 100: "In the Middle Ages both sides of human consciousness--that which was turned within as that which was turned without--lay dreaming or half awake beneath a common veil.... In Italy this veil first melted into air.... The subjective side .. asserted itself ... man became a spiritual individual, and recognized himself as such." Burckhardt's account of medieval humanity is distorted

Nohrnberg's words:

If we were to attempt to summarize the burden of Renaissance literature as a whole, we might say that it takes its birth from an expansionary ideal of human virtuosity, and then exposes the resulting myth--the myth of an awakening or potential godhood as available to man--to the profound critique of human subjectivity that seems to emerge as a rival for the myth itself.⁴

I. The Image of Milton

How very odd and ironic, then, that the Englishman who represents the last, fullest flowering of Renaissance Christian humanism, John Milton, should be thought by many readers to have ascended the most sublime peaks of vision and wonder of any English poet, yet also to achieved that virtuosity at the expense of a profound examination of human experience. For such readers, Milton's account of the subject is entirely, even obstinately inadequate; Petrarch's "existential impulse" at the headwaters of the Renaissance irrigates a fertile plain of vast extent--but

by our standards, but perhaps not so much by the Renaissance's.

⁴ James Nohrnberg, *The Analogy of The Faerie Queene* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1979) 788.

Milton's towering achievement stands high and dry, compelling and arid. Virginia Woolf's comments on *Paradise Lost* are squarely in this critical tradition:

I am struck by the extreme difference between this poem & any other. It lies, I think, in the sublime aloofness of the emotions. The substance of Milton is all made of wonderful, beautiful, & masterly descriptions of angelic bodies, battles, fights, dwelling places. He deals in horror & immensity & squalor & sublimity, but never in the passions of the human heart. Has any great poem ever let in so little light upon one's own joys & sorrows? I get no help in judging life; I scarcely feel that Milton lived or knew men & women.... But how smooth, strong & elaborate it all is! What poetry. I can conceive that even Shakespeare after this would seem a little troubled, personal, hot & imperfect. I can conceive that this is the essence, of which almost all other poetry's the dilution. The inexpressible fineness of the style, in which shade after shade is perceptible, would alone keep one gazing into it long after the surface business in progress has been despatched. Deep down one catches still further combinations, rejections, felicities, & masteries. Moreover, though there is nothing like Lady Macbeth's terror or Hamlet's cry, no pity or sympathy or intuition, the figures are majestic; in them is summed up much of what men thought of our place in the universe, of our duty to God, our religion.

Later Woolf notes that Walter de La Mare "could never recognize his own emotions [in Milton's poetry]. Milton's woodbine was not his woodbine, nor this Eve his Eve.

Yeats said he could not get satisfaction from Milton; it

was Latinized poetry...."⁵

The critical tradition readers are forging today brings Woolf's complaints into new contexts. Mary Nyquist and Margaret Ferguson, editors of a recent volume of criticism entitled *Re-membering Milton*, assert that "Milton continues to enjoy the status of the most monumentally unified author in the canon." While Nyquist's and Ferguson's express purpose is to "re-member," re-assemble, a Milton who has "always already" suffered "certain forms of figurative dismemberment or dispersal," the re-membering assumes the polemical function of "actively expos[ing]" that "the figure of Milton the author is itself the product of a certain self-construction," a self-construction that in turn inspires the "motivated self-constitution" one finds "in the various critical and cultural traditions in which Milton enjoys an afterlife" (a tradition both of "Miltonoclasts" and "Miltonolaters"). Again we find Milton's monumentality--what a previous age, equally uncritically, called "sublimity" or "majesty"--to be the provocation to which some articulate readers respond:

⁵ Virginia Woolf, *The Diaries of Virginia Woolf*, ed. Anne O. Bell. 5 vols. (London: Hogarth Press, 1980) 1: 192-3, 3: 330.

Milton is of course not the only Renaissance writer to identify himself with the figure of the author or to inscribe in published works a history of his personal and authorial development. He is, however, perhaps the most *impressive and notorious* of self-authored authors, partly as a result of the sheer variety of the contexts in which a voice that is self-consciously or markedly 'his' appears, but even more obviously because these contexts--from the *Reason of Church Government* to the invocation in Book VII of *Paradise Lost*--are so *highly charged, politically....* Milton's self-authorship both participates in his political and religious radicalism and reveals features of an emerging bourgeois class-consciousness in ways that have yet to be fully explored. The distinctiveness of Milton's self-presentations, however, is complexly and problematically inter-related with the numerous representations of him to be found throughout the last three centuries.⁶

⁶ Mary Nyquist and Margaret Ferguson, eds., *Remembering Milton* (New York: Methuen, 1987) xii-xiii, my emphasis. One may be permitted to wonder whether Nyquist and Ferguson consider their own representation of Milton to be as historically determined as the ones they use to "re-member" Milton; some covert truth-claims may be inescapable, however ideologically aware the writer. Certainly Nyquist's and Ferguson's own ideologies lead them to some implausible readings: they insist, for example, that Woolf's diary entry above reveals that she "subtly identifies her critical activity as a reader of the poetry of *Paradise Lost* with Eve's self-mirroring gaze at her 'watry image.'" The difference between Woolf and Eve, Nyquist and Ferguson conclude, is that Woolf "takes liberties with the surface, liberties that Milton's Eve is denied. And in doing so she casts an admiring but unbedazzled eye on just the features of the author's poetic practice ... that a post-Saussurian and post-structuralist literary criticism is perhaps in a privileged position to observe" (xiv).

Nyquist and Ferguson accuse "Milton apologists" and "Miltonists" of a relentlessly professional contextualization when their oxes are being

Words like "highly charged," "impressive," and "notorious" are emotional markers indicating an experience much like Woolf's: Milton is in some ways admirable, but he does not speak directly or authentically (or legitimately) to our experience as subjects, however one chooses to construe the reality, or illusion, or construction of subjectivity. Even if the "figure of a strongly individualized member of a privileged élite" Milton inhabits is in fact a projection of "the academy" that serves as his guardians, as the editors of *Re-membering Milton* appear to believe, the fact remains that the editors (and they are not alone) imply rather strongly that Milton himself some-

gored: "Perhaps especially in North America, so much writing on Milton has become so narrowly professionalized that the very weight of its authority tends to crush any efforts not appearing to conform to its standards" (xv). Apparently a complementary impulse to de-contextualize and carefully select one's proof-texts is awakened when one's axe is being ground: Nyquist and Ferguson (as do most readers of this passage from Woolf's diary) resolutely ignore Woolf's admission of hurried reading, her utterly conventional praise of Milton's "majesty," and--most tellingly--the male voices who, in Woolf's account, join with her in expressing displeasure with Milton's sterile sublimity. Of course, understanding Woolf's particular complaint in the light of modernism's generally rigorous suspicion of the sublime, heroic, and theocentric would tend to blunt her ideological usefulness for recent critics, although it would arguably be more accountable to Woolf's text.

how invites, perhaps compels, the impression of his work as somehow monolithic, impervious, cold. Indeed, Mary Nyquist's essay "The genesis of gendered subjectivity in the divorce tracts and in *Paradise Lost*" seeks to reveal the blindness of the liberal-humanist tradition by demonstrating that the apparent subjectivity Milton grants Eve in *Paradise Lost* is merely so much fodder for Adam's superior subjectivity--which, in Nyquist's analysis, is primarily the experience of divinely-sanctioned selfishness and patriarchal power, a thinly-cloaked *Wille zur Macht*:

if Eve is created to satisfy the psychological needs of a lonely Adam, then it is necessary that *Paradise Lost*'s readers experience her from the start as expressing an intimately subjective sense of self.... Grounded in illusion [the awakening at the lake], Eve's desire for an other self is therefore throughout appropriated by a patriarchal order....⁷

Even when subjectivity enters Milton's poetic repertoire, it seems, it is only a disguise for (choose one) male, Christian, egocentric, phallogocentric, neo-Christian, neo-theological, logocentric (these last four are Nyquist's and Ferguson's) self-constitution, either Milton's or his critics' (with the appropriate exceptions, of course).

⁷ *Re-membering Milton* 119, 122.

Even Milton's re-memberers--or, we may say, rescuers--see as one of their primary tasks the duty of saving Milton from himself.⁸

These responses to *Paradise Lost* are increasingly sophisticated, perhaps, but not essentially new. Samuel Johnson's famous essay on Milton, for example, contains precisely those objections and uneases Woolf's diary entry reveals. Like Nyquist and Ferguson, Johnson finds Milton's self-construction impressive and (already) notorious. Like Woolf, he maintains that no English poetry has the overwhelming, and unfortunate, power and sublimity of Milton's:

The characteristick quality of his poem
[*Paradise Lost*] is sublimity. He sometimes

⁸ One of the most extreme "rescues" of Milton to appear recently is Richard Corum's "*Paradise Lost* and Milton's Ideas of Women," which concludes with this urgent paragraph:

In conclusion, Milton's motive for poetry is that he has one parent [God], but had two. What I have tried to do in this 'writing' of *Paradise Lost*'s white ink is to suggest that the unsubmitive part of him would have us switch these verbs, and admit that monotheism, a narcissistic translation of parenting into a regressive, sadomasochistic dependency upon the 'kidnapped' son's endlessly grateful submission, tragically violates inalienable human rights--Eve's, Milton's, and our own.

See Julia Walker, ed., *Milton and the Idea of Woman* (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1988) 141-42.

descends to the elegant, but his element is the great. He can occasionally invest himself with grace; but his natural port is gigantick loftiness. He can please when pleasure is required; but it is his peculiar power to astonish.⁹

Yet if sublimity is Milton's greatest asset, once again his greatest liability is, as Woolf complained, the absence of "pity or sympathy or intuition" in his poetry, particularly in *Paradise Lost*. Here is a sampling of Dr. Johnson's objections:

Such is the original formulation of this poem, that as it admits no human manners till the Fall, it can give little assistance to human conduct....
Milton's delight was to sport in the wide regions of possibility; reality was a scene too narrow for his mind....
As human passions did not enter the world before the Fall, there is in the *Paradise Lost* little opportunity for the pathetick ... the passions are moved only on one occasion....
The plan of *Paradise Lost* has this inconvenience, that it comprises neither human actions nor human manners....
... [O]riginal deficiency cannot be supplied. The want of human interest is always felt. *Paradise Lost* is one of the books which the reader admires and lays down, and forgets to take up again ... we desert our master, and seek for companions....
... [H]e has unhappily perplexed his poetry with his philosophy....
Milton would not have excelled in dramatick writing; he knew human nature only in the gross, and had never studied the shades of character,

⁹ Samuel Johnson, "Milton," from *The Lives of the English Poets, Milton Criticism: A Selection From Four Centuries*, ed. James Thorpe (1950; New York: Collier Books, 1969) 77.

nor the combinations of concurring, or the perplexity of contending passions. He had read much, and knew what books could teach; but had mingled little in the world, and was deficient in the knowledge which experience must confer....¹⁰

Such a critical consensus, or dis-ease, is compelling, especially as it unites voices across many years and (we may infer) differing temperaments. It is inescapably true that many readers, professional and amateur, weigh Milton in the balance of knowledge-of-the-human-heart and for one reason or another find him wanting. These readers may admire and even enjoy Milton's "style" and his "majestic figures" (Milton's venerable "organ music"). They may applaud his deft poetic summation of a Renaissance he had already outlived (and thus recall Raleigh's description of the poem as "a monument to dead ideas"). But they nearly always conclude that Milton's poetry can give us anything we want and fill it with glory, except the thing his age and ours value most: genuine insight into humanity's nature, life, and destiny.

One may wonder at another irony: how can a "sublime aloofness of emotion" be true of Milton's poetry when he, far from neglecting himself or his passions, is constantly

¹⁰ Johnson, *Lives*, in Thorpe, ed., 76, 77, 79, 80, 81, 82, 85.

personalizing his greatest poem with references to himself as author, penitent, prophet, and victim? No other epic poet is so free with autobiographical interjections: in William Kerrigan's words, "he prefigures the Romantics in making it impossible to comment on his work without commenting on his own development...."¹¹ Again, many critics of widely varying methodologies and historical contexts agree: Milton was obsessively concerned with himself and his poetic career to the exclusion of his fellow human beings. He lived and worked in a haughty isolation, believing that Man equals Milton, or should--a belief that is either nobly (if at last pathetically) ingenuous or suspiciously narcissistic--"educated, white, and phallocratic...."¹²

Of course, the educated whites of this century have, ironically, criticized a Milton whose "haughtiness" they judged with severity--sometimes as unfavorably as Virginia Woolf did. E. M. W. Tillyard, for example, is generous, but often witheringly so: he describes Milton as "proud, intolerant of mediocrity, and with an aristocratic preference for the intelligent few. But he is also extremely

¹¹ William Kerrigan, private correspondence.

¹² *Re-membering Milton* xv.

simple-minded and candid ... [there is an] engaging innocence that often redeems Milton's less amiable qualities."¹³ Thus we may forgive, even pity Milton's ignorance of the human heart: after all, here is a man who didn't know human nature any better than to defend himself in prose in ways that could only provoke further attacks. How may we doubt such a *naif's* sincerity? Again, the theme finds its close: Tillyard finds in Milton "an unusually sanguine temperament exaggerated by an unusual ignorance of the nature of common humanity."¹⁴

John Carey's assessment of the causes of Milton's "ignorance of the nature of common humanity" is less forgiving: Milton had

small regard for those of different make-up from himself.... It was his constant belief that most men are 'weakly, or falsely principled' and when he agitated for liberty, it meant liberty for himself. This is plain even in *Areopagitica*. He wrote it because he had been refused a licence for his first divorce tract.... Seen in his true colors, Milton is nearer to fascism than to democracy.¹⁵

¹³ E. M. W. Tillyard, *Milton*, rev. ed. (New York: Barnes and Noble, 1967) 15, 18.

¹⁴ Tillyard, *Milton* 104. Tillyard believes this ignorance was tempered by Milton's experiences after the Restoration.

¹⁵ John Carey, *Milton* (New York: Arco Press, 1970) 64-5.

Here Milton the radical disappears into a demonic elitism, a relentlessly self-serving pretense of religion and civic high-mindedness. Seen in this light, the miracle of Milton's career is that such a man (or such a baby) left us anything of permanent value.

Whether excoriating or condescending, these responses to Milton's understanding and portrayal of humanity clearly do not belong to any one era, school, or even gender. Charles Williams, in his 1940 introduction to the World's Classics edition of Milton's poems, summarizes well this tradition of Milton devaluation:

The general opposition resolved itself into four statements: (i) that Milton was a bad man; (ii) that Milton was, especially, a proud man and was continually writing approvingly about his own pride (Blake's incorrect epigram--that Milton 'was of the devil's party without knowing it'--was generally used here); (iii) that Milton's verse is hard, sonorous, and insensitive; (iv) that Milton's subject was remote and uninteresting. This being almost exactly what the orthodox party had been, for centuries, saying with admiration, they were quite helpless when they found it said with contempt.

Williams then comments on the specific charge this work examines:

I have said nothing here against the explicit denial to Milton of any drama or of any humanity. Those denials, as well as the others, had been consecrated by custom and a false *pietas*. Yet there was no need for them. The

great and sensitive poetry of that august genius
had escaped his admirers.¹⁶

Not even those who cry (of whatever élite or marginalized class or gender) "Milton, Milton" are thereby among the few and fit.

Thus for many critics Milton's "ignorance of human nature," is regrettable, understandable, perhaps damning, but certain. We may, with Woolf, de la Mare, Yeats, Tillyard, Waldock, Eliot, and others patronize, more or less sympathetically, the cloistered poet's inability to understand humanity. We may agree with Carey that this inability stems from a gross defect of character aggravated by a militantly arrogant personality and a fatally patriarchal politics, as many recent critics do.¹⁷ Or we may simply shrug and agree with Douglas Bush:

¹⁶ Charles Williams, "An Introduction To Milton's Poems," from *The English Poems of John Milton*, The World's Classics (London: Oxford University Press, 1940), rpt. Thorpe 254, 255.

¹⁷ One example, especially apt in light of the quotation from Virginia Woolf above, is Sandra M. Gilbert's "Patriarchal Poetry and Women Readers: Reflections on Milton's Bogey," *PMLA* 93 (1978) 368-82, as well as its expanded expression in Gilbert and Gubar's *Madwoman In the Attic* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1979) 187-212, germinal works that lead to much of the feminist and new-historicist work in collections like *Re-membering Milton* and *Milton and the Idea of Woman*.

Milton is too big, too sternly strenuous, to allow us to feel at ease in his presence.... Like Dante, Milton is not what P. G. Wodehouse would call a 'matey' person. Put beside Chaucer or Shakespeare, with their crowd of human characters, with their benevolent interest, half humorous, half divine, in the stuff of common life, Milton seems cold, inhuman, an unapproachable Jehovah of poetry.... Among the various reasons for Milton's unpopularity doubtless the chief one is that in his major poems he treated on a heroic scale, and with a too confident simplicity, themes and problems which seem remote and no longer of vital concern to us. We think in purely human terms....¹⁸

And Milton, Bush implies, cannot.

Whatever our reasons, the consequences of asserting Milton's ignorance of, or disdain for, humanity are severe. We are forced to discard his human characters as flat, superficially drawn, and uninvolved--or as ideological masks. This inadequacy in turn calls Milton's dramatic skill into doubt, as Dr. Johnson noted. We will then be very hard pressed to find interest or value in Milton's pronouncements and speculations on ethics and psychology. As we shall see, we must reject most of what Milton believed himself to be about as a poet. If Milton

¹⁸ Douglas Bush, *The Renaissance and English Humanism* (1939; Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1956) 102-3. Interestingly, however, Tillyard is at pains to show Milton surrounded by friends throughout his life--a matey person indeed, given the right mates (Tillyard, *Milton* 112).

knows nothing, or not enough, about human nature, how can he draw a plausible human character, create a plausible drama, work out a persuasive ethic, or speak to us in a way we take for granted that Shakespeare does?¹⁹

Moreover, we must deny Milton's greatness as an epic poet if he lacked the comprehensive knowledge of human behavior and experience he and other students and practitioners of the genre thought necessary for the successful epic poet. Aristotle says that epic, like tragedy, "must be ... a story of character or one of suffering." He offers the *Odyssey* as an example of the former and the

¹⁹ It is worth noting Denis Saurat's surprising reversal of the usual hierarchy:

"Let me hide here in a footnote a sentiment that will be considered by many as blasphemy. In the abstract (leaving aside a perhaps greater power of expression on Shakespeare's part) Milton is a greater poet than Shakespeare on this theme of human nature. For Shakespeare gets his effects at times of crisis and tragedy, when effects grow cheap, whereas Milton reaches his on ordinary themes, common to the whole of mankind, in ordinary circumstances not peculiar to haughty aristocrats of the spirit."

One may certainly insist that the Garden of Eden hardly qualifies as "ordinary circumstances," and that the mighty effect of Milton's Satan is at least partially that of a "haughty aristocrat of the spirit," but it is nevertheless true that Saurat echoes critics such as Addison (see below) who find in Milton's poetry--especially *Paradise Lost*--a breadth of concern exceptionally inclusive of human experience. To put it in Aristotelian terms, epic is a fuller genre than tragedy. See Denis Saurat, *Milton: Man and Thinker* (New York: Dial Press, 1925) 163 n.38.

Iliad as an example of the latter.²⁰ One might say *Paradise Lost* unites the two, thus needing even more knowledge of humanity than Homer or Virgil required for their epics.²¹ For a later opinion, we have Coleridge's testimony that the epic poet must "thoroughly know ... the mind of man--then the minds of men--in all Travels, Voyages, and Histories."²² Milton himself insisted that a knowledge of humanity was essential for the epic poet: his comment in *The Reason of Church Government* that "nature" enriches the art of epic if the writer "know[s]

²⁰ Aristotle, *Poetics*, 24, II, 8-9, quoted in *Philosophies of Art and Beauty*, ed. Albert Hofstadter and Richard Kuhns (New York: The Modern Library, 1964) 120.

²¹ Although C. S. Lewis finds Milton more Virgilian than Homeric (*A Preface to Paradise Lost* [1942; New York: Oxford University Press, 1961] 33-39), others think Homer a more compelling model for Milton's work--see for example the introduction to John Peter Rumrich's recent *Matter Of Glory: A New Preface To Paradise Lost* (Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania: University of Pittsburgh Press, 1987). Also, William Kerrigan and Gordon Braden have asserted that *Paradise Lost* is the "first and last epic since the *Odyssey* able to render its love story both genuinely and positively heroic" (in "Milton's Coy Eve: *Paradise Lost* and Renaissance Love Poetry," *ELH* 53, no. 1 [Spring 1986] 27).

²² quoted in Joseph Wittreich, *The Romantics on Milton* (Cleveland, Ohio: Case Western Reserve University Press, 1970) 159. Coleridge's distinction between psychological and historico-sociological knowledge of the human mind parallels Milton's understanding of epic as both chronicle and drama.

art and use[s] judgment" means that the inclusion of elements from what we would call the "real world" is vital to an epic's greatness.²³ Later in the same pamphlet, as Milton states his highest poetic goal, he includes "paint[ing] out and describ[ing] ... with a solid and treatable smoothness ... the wily subtleties and reflexes of man's thoughts from within..." (emphasis added).²⁴

If we embrace the idea that Milton was an inadequate, indifferent, or disingenuous (or even "conflicted") student of human nature, we must therefore concentrate solely on his sublimity of conception, form, and style--if we wish to praise him. We will acknowledge these to be his "redeeming qualities" while perhaps deploring his arrogance, simplicity, or (to put it plainly) bumbling. We may salute him, or enjoy him in a frosty Apollonian way. But we must never forget that, in this estimation of Milton, we are admiring local successes within a general failure. "[A]s Dr. Johnson did, if we dismiss the human

²³John Milton, *The Reason of Church Government*, in *John Milton: Complete Poems and Major Prose*, ed. Merritt Y. Hughes (Indianapolis: Odyssey Press, 1957) 668 (hereinafter cited as "ed. Hughes." Hughes suggests that by "nature" Milton means "resemblance to actual experience." (ed. Hughes 668, n.165)

²⁴ *The Reason of Church Government*, in ed. Hughes 670.

interest of Milton's epic, we violate its poetic integrity."²⁵ Indeed, if Milton's epic or his poetry in general has only sublime effects and no human interest, it has no poetic integrity.

I would suggest, in opposition to the critical views outlined above, that perhaps the richest, most complexly rewarding element of Milton's achievement comes from his lifelong obsession with humanity. In his prose and his poetry, Milton is always trying to work out what it means to be human. The proper end of human existence in solitude, community, and relationship to God, the purpose and character of government, marriage, heroism, education, foreign and domestic policy--yes, even the passions of the human heart--all these are issues crucial to human existence, and all are questions Milton devoted his life to exploring. We no doubt remember that *Paradise Lost* was written to "justify the ways of God to man." I would argue that the epic, like most of Milton's work, is at least as concerned with anthropology as theodicy.²⁶

²⁵ A. G. George, *Milton and the Nature of Man* (New York, Asia Publishing House, 1974) 17.

²⁶ Of course I do not mean anthropology in a modern, technical sense; rather, I use the term to suggest the broadest possible study of man, including religion, psychology, sociology, history, and any other man-centered inquiry--not that Milton would have seen any essential dividing lines among these "separate"

Indeed, one may ask whether a theodicy could be plausible, satisfying, or persuasive if the ways of men and women were ignored or treated superficially.

Not all readers of Milton, of course, have discounted the poet's "human interest." One of Milton's earliest critics thought *Paradise Lost* greater than Virgil or even Homer in its human characters and their interest for and relevance to the reader:

If we look into the characters of Milton, we shall find that he has introduced all the variety his fable was capable of receiving. The whole species of mankind was in two persons at the time to which the subject of his poem is confined. We have, however, four distinct characters in these two persons. We see man and woman in the highest innocence and perfection, and in the most abject state of guilt and infirmity. The two last characters are, indeed, very common and obvious; but the two first are not only more magnificent, but more new, than any characters either in Virgil or Homer, or indeed in the whole circle of nature.

Joseph Addison continues by noting that Satan and his demons, Raphael and the angels, and the Godhead itself are memorable and interesting characters. Then, turning again to Adam and Eve's primary role within the epic, Addison finds Milton again superior to Homer and Virgil in his heroes and heroines:

fields.

Milton's poem is admirable in this respect, since it is impossible for any of its readers, whatever nation, country, or people he may belong to, not to be related to the persons who are the principal actors in it; but what is still infinitely more to its advantage, the principal actors in this poem are not only our progenitors, but our representatives. *We have an actual interest in everything they do, and no less than our utmost happiness is concerned and lies at stake in their behaviour.* (emphasis added)²⁷

Addison's diction here may surprise us, sounding almost as if the outcome of Adam and Eve's story is in doubt.

Surely Milton's art does manage to raise the reader's hopes only to dash them with knell of "no more" at the outset of Book 9; the wonder of the preceding eight books may in fact distract us from what we know will follow. Yet perhaps Addison means more than our temporarily forgetting the story's foregone conclusion. Addison's emphasis on *unfallen* Adam and Eve as the most original and interesting characters in Milton's epic (a thesis only now regaining some popularity) implies he believes Milton's portrayal of our grand parents to be as *psychologically* and *emotionally* involving as it is aesthetically,

²⁷ Joseph Addison, *Spectator Paper* 273 (Jan. 12, 1712), Thorpe, ed. 31-32.

stylistically, or politically interesting (or troublesome).²⁸

II. The Renaissance Image of Man

Yet even for those readers who value it, Milton's "doctrine of human nature" is not easily articulated or understood. The Renaissance itself, although often considered casually as a monolith of self-advancement and self-regard, had conflicting or uneasily co-existing views on human nature. Perhaps Burckhardt was right to say that the Renaissance was the first age to discover the "full, whole nature of man."²⁹ The nature of that nature,

²⁸ Johnson grants the permanent relevance of Adam and Eve to the reader, but he cannot find them interesting or engaging; they are too foreign from our experience, except during the Fall itself (*Lives*, Thorpe, ed. 76-80). One critic who has tried to restore Eden to the reader as a place of urgent emotion and intensely dynamic beauty is Diane Kelsey McColley: see her *Milton's Eve* (Urbana: Univ. of Illinois Press, 1983) and especially her recent article "Eve and the Arts of Eden," in *Milton and the Idea of Woman* 100-119. And William Kerrigan's *The Sacred Complex: On the Psychogenesis of "Paradise Lost"* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1983) is devoted to the study of a Milton who "invent[ed] in Renaissance terms the unconscious mind" (229)--not a likely achievement for a poet ignorant of humanity.

²⁹ Burckhardt 225.

however, was constantly debated. Even as Renaissance artists and writers paid more and closer attention to everyday life as part of their humanist study of man, they differed considerably on what explained the behavior they scrutinized. The issues of astrology and magic are famous examples, and directly relevant to Renaissance ideas about human nature; for in the Renaissance human nature, however free it might seem, still co-exists with a universe almost oppressively extra-human.³⁰

In his essay "Old Learning and New Ignorance," C. S. Lewis demonstrates that medieval religious "superstition" gave way to a Renaissance war between the older paganisms of magic and astrology, a war whose central issue was how much power a man actually has in the universe.³¹ What was the mechanism of human glorification, the destiny Ficino and Pico so memorably insisted on? Astrology and magic, even tempered and modified by Christianity, seemed part of

³⁰ It is ironic, of course, that the supernatural "oppression" that co-exists with the Renaissance's image of liberated, "reawakened" humanity will yield to the natural "oppression" of a scientific age in which destiny becomes both more amenable and more resistant to human will. (One might call this the Law of the Conservation of Despair.)

³¹ C. S. Lewis, *English Literature in the Sixteenth Century Excluding Drama* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1954) 4-9.

the machinery of human ascent. Yet although each could co-exist with Christianity, astrology and magic could not co-exist with each other, or not very well. Guido Bonatto restored astrology to a position of importance in the thirteenth century. Petrarch attacked it not a hundred years later. The great Florentine Platonist Ficino was a defender of astrology, but his pupil Pico della Mirandola composed a famous treatise whose Fourth Book sets forth "a positive Christian doctrine of the freedom of the will and the government of the universe...."³² Yet Pico believed in magic, man's ability to control the animistic forces that inhabited the material world.³³ This looked like incipient anarchy to Pomponazzi, who believed that magic

³² Burckhardt, 389.

³³ Lewis, "Old Learning" 5. Lewis points out that the *magia* Pico and his contemporaries believed in, while it may have been a precursor to scientific investigations, was itself a daemonological "dream of power" rather than a truly empirical tendency of mind. (See D. P. Walker, *Spiritual and Demonic Magic from Ficino to Campanella* [London: The Warburg Institute, 1958] for a full discussion of this Renaissance Neoplatonic daemonology and its relationship to Renaissance Christianity.) Cassirer plausibly maintains that pure *mathematics*, not astrology or the alchemist's laboratory or even magic, was the father of the scientific method and an empirical understanding of nature and our relation to it (see Ernst Cassirer, *The Individual and the Cosmos in Renaissance Philosophy*, translated with an introduction by Mario Domandi [New York: Barnes and Noble, 1963] 50-54, 149-55).

and cosmic law were incompatible. Unfortunately, Pomponazzi's cosmic law turned out to be celestial influence--that is, astrology.³⁴ So the debate continued, and an important part of the Renaissance study of man remained contentious.

A related debate, even more consequential for our study of Milton, took shape between the two most famous members of the Florentine Academy. Marsilio Ficino and Pico della Mirandola certainly gave man's "dream of power" a new and more urgent expression. But they disagreed about the limits this power might have. More specifically, they disagreed about the location and destination of man's nature on the Great Chain of Being. Lewis gives us an overview of the issue:

... the time-honoured truism that Man is a microcosm who has in him a bit of everything now underwent a strange transformation. Christians had always held that a man was a composite creature, *animal rationale*, and that it lay in his own choice to be governed by his reason or his animality. But that choice could produce order or disorder only within the limits assigned to him by the hierarchy of being. He could become a saint but not an angel: a swinish man but not a pig. The Florentines, on the other hand, sometimes appear to think that Man can become any kind of creature he pleases.... [A]n earlier doctrine of Man ... had guaranteed him, on his own rung of the hierarchical ladder, his own limited freedom and efficacy: now, both the

³⁴ Lewis, "Old Learning" 4.

limit and the guarantee become uncertain-- perhaps Man can do everything, perhaps he can do nothing.³⁵

In Stevie Davies memorable phrase, these Neo-Platonists presented the prospect of man "charging up and down the Chain of Being at will." ³⁶

Paul Kristeller usefully complicates the issue.

Ficino and Pico

develop [the notion of the dignity of man] within a framework that was completely absent in the earlier humanists ... they assign to man a distinctive position within a well-developed metaphysical system of the universe, and they define and justify man's dignity in terms of his metaphysical position.

Yet that metaphysical position is problematic. Ficino stresses man's *intermediate* nature: he is beneath God and the angels, but above the rest of creation. This of course is man's traditional place on the Great Chain. Nevertheless, Ficino marries this hierarchical fixity to his Neo-Platonic thirst for infinitude; he "insists on the universality of the human mind and sees in this its basic affinity with God." The soul "tries to become all things and is capable of living the life of all things higher and

³⁵ Lewis, "Old Learning" 12, 14.

³⁶ Stevie Davies, *Renaissance Views of Man* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1978) 10.

lower," yet the soul's tendency is not the same as God's actuality, and humanity is still a link in the Chain, however peculiar its possibilities and desires: "The human soul is praised as the bond and juncture of the universe that contributes in a unique way to its unity."³⁷

Pico, by contrast, sees Man's nature as detached from the hierarchy of creation, and thus potentially more glorious.

Pico differs from Ficino at the point where the latter assigns to man and his soul a central but fixed place in the universal hierarchy of things. For Pico, man has no determined nature and no fixed place in the hierarchy of beings, but he is somehow placed outside this hierarchy.... [I]t was Pico's passionate concern with freedom (which is also apparent in several other aspects of his thought) which made the notion of a fixed though central position of man unacceptable to him and compelled him to place man outside the hierarchy.

Pico does have humanity submit to one hierarchy: not all potentialities are desirable or good; they must be ordered and chosen wisely.³⁸ Nevertheless, the diction of Pico's desire, after half a millennium, still feels like a dream of flight. Pico's *Oration* liberally announces the auda-

³⁷ Kristeller, *Renaissance Concepts of Man* 9-10.

³⁸ Kristeller 9-14.

cious scope of his doctrine of human nature. In the *Oration's* central parable, God tells Adam

[I have] placed you in the middle of the world so that you may from there the more conveniently consider whatever is in the world.... [Y]ou may form yourself in what pattern you choose. You will be able to degenerate into the lowest ranks ... you will be able to be reborn into the highest ranks....

And this imagined divine imprimatur leads Pico to an ecstasy of exhortation:

A certain sacred striving should seize the soul so that, not content with the indifferent and middling, we may pant after the highest and so (for we can if we want to) force our way up to it with all our might. Let us despise the terrestrial, be unafraid of the heavenly, and then, neglecting the things of the world, fly towards that court beyond the world nearest to God the Most High. There, as the sacred mysteries recount, the Seraphim, Cherubim, and Thrones possess the first rank. Let us, feeling ourselves incapable of giving them precedence and impatient of an inferior position, emulate their dignity and glory. If we have truly willed it, we shall be second to them in nothing.³⁹

The distinction here between Ficino's view of human potentiality and Pico's hymn of human apotheosis is important. Both men allow for human aspiration in their philosophy; both understand human nature as potentially infinite. Yet Ficino's Neo-Platonism, borrowing heavily

³⁹ Pico, *Oration*, in Davies, *Renaissance Views* 67, 69-70

as it does from Plato's parable of love and knowledge, the *Symposium*, posits Love as the engine whereby we are raised to the divine by the divine, who is himself Love.⁴⁰ Pico, on the other hand, does not pause to adore the temple; he storms it. We almost seem to be reading a Renaissance manual of conquest, advice to would-be (and in Pico's mind, should-be) invaders.

To complicate matters even further, it is worth noting that there is also Scriptural warrant for abject humility and brash ambition. Psalm 8, for instance, careens from one extreme to the other:

When I consider the heavens, the work of thy fingers, the moon and the stars, which thou hast ordained;

What is man, that thou art mindful of him?
and the son of man, that thou visitest him?
For thou hast made him a little lower than the angels, and hast crowned him with glory and honor.

⁴⁰ Cassirer 131-136. Cassirer notes that Ficino's doctrine of Eros is based on its reciprocal nature: the lower desires the higher as much as the higher desires the lower. Yet Cassirer admits that Ficino, and Pico after him, could not but Christianize the underlying Platonic doctrine, which would necessarily tend to interrupt, if not overpower, the self-sufficient circularity Cassirer praises in Ficino's doctrine of Eros. Such a Christianization is surely at work both in Milton's companion poems and in *Paradise Lost*: love as desire, desire as provocation, provocation as a call to perfection.

Thou madest him to have dominion over the
works of thy hands; thou hast put all things
under his feet. (Psalm 8:3-6)⁴¹

The central question in this passage has a peculiar double tinge, colored both by the traditionally humbling celestial spectacle and the confidently imperial self-assessment which follows. Indeed, when we read the passage a second time it may seem as if contemplating the heavens, far from humbling us, is the best way to be proud of ourselves: see, all this is ours!⁴² And by the time we reach the New Testament, we find St. Paul exhorting the early Christians to keep their grievances out of civil courts, for "know ye not that we shall judge angels?" (1 Corinthians 6:3a).

Considering varying Neo-Platonic accounts of man's nature may at first seem only tangentially relevant to Woolf's complaints or Milton's achievement. Nevertheless, it is out of Milton's heritage of such humanist debate, as well as out of his intimacy with Scripture, one so intense it almost amounts to fusion with it (or so the poet might

⁴¹ Unless otherwise noted, all references to Scripture are to the Authorized Version of 1611.

⁴² The Revised Standard Version translates Psalm 8:5 even more temptingly: "Yet thou hast made him little less than God...."

have hoped), that the poet's doctrine of man must be understood. Too, we may learn from the humanists' fervent expositions that mixing philosophy and anthropology does not necessarily yield aloof emotions.

Indeed, we may return to Petrarch on Mount Ventoux, this time to Thomas Greene's description of the climactic moment:

The various flights of the conflicted, volatile, self-scrutinizing mind are recorded in detail, and they culminate in the impulse to open a copy of Saint Augustine's *Confessions*. Petrarch opens and reads.... Stung by this new rebuke and certain that the words had been written for him, Petrarch descends with contrition....⁴³

Greene goes on to discuss the divisions and struggles within Petrarch, divisions and struggles that are ironically *exemplified* in the very moment of Petrarch's "realization" or "conversion" on the mountaintop:

All of these conflicts fall short of resolution in the letter [describing the ascent] as they do repeatedly in Petrarch's life. They contribute to the sense of *oxymoronic* irresolutions that seems to govern so much of his work, a coexistence of opposites that seldom find an equilibrium, giving way one to the other in a fatal succession which Petrarch's art can render brilliantly but not bring to rest.⁴⁴

⁴³ Greene, *Light in Troy* 108.

⁴⁴ Greene, *Light in Troy* 108-9.

A fatal succession of oxymoronic irresolutions looks more familiar to our eyes in the last decade of the twentieth century than Ficino or perhaps even ambitious Pico's Neoplatonic explorations of human capacity; but a closer look reveals that one man's oxymoron is another's paradox--and that Renaissance unrest is behind all these conflicts, struggles, and ambitions.⁴⁵ Moreover, one must also concede that Renaissance unrest is in some respects a heightened form of conflicts between obedience and aspiration found in--*encouraged by*--the Christian tradition itself. If Milton in his Christianity and monumentality remained untouched by the newly insistent ontological, and thus existential, pathos the other inhabitants of the Renaissance found within themselves, his ego must have been "rocklike" indeed:

John Milton never stumbled about in a cosmological emptiness stretching between truth and meaning. He enjoyed the possession of a rocklike ego, as was persuaded that he incarnated truth,

⁴⁵ Edward W. Tayler, comparing a modern connoisseur of oxymoronic irresolution to Milton, makes this observation: "What [Roland] Barthes sees as equivocation, partial answer, and enigma Milton knew as paradox or 'brotherly dissimilitude'...." See *Milton's Poetry: Its Development in Time* (Pittsburgh: Duquesne University Press, 1979) 190.

so that his life was rammed with meaning.⁴⁶

Perhaps there is another alternative. Perhaps the dichotomy of Milton-as-unsuspecting-Petrarch (conflicted and contradictory and oxymoronically irresolute) and Milton-as-Satan-as-God-as-Muse-as-Monument (Woolf's Milton, the one the Miltonoclasts seek to break and some of the neo-Christians seek to restore) is a false dichotomy. Perhaps we may admit that Milton is wiser than this dichotomy and is in fact at his strongest moments its master. Milton is no doubt vulnerable to the same mistakes about himself and his creations that his many admirers, detractors, and interrogators are. Yet the unusual *thickness*, to borrow William Kerrigan's word, of Milton's understanding of the subject, its nature, and its relationships ought to give us pause--and time for a re-examination of this aspect of Milton's art.

III. Milton's Poetics of Humanity

What, then, is Milton's man, and Milton's woman, that we should be mindful of them? Different readers may sense

⁴⁶ Harold Bloom, *Ruin the Sacred Truths* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1989) 91.

different doctrines within the poet, to which we can say, "Milton is large; he contains multitudes." Out of these multitudes we may hope to become acquainted with at least the most important citizens of his psyche. Or, if the allusion to Whitman is too jarringly anachronistic, we can speak of the "tensions and contradictions in Milton ... a figure divided ... in every work and at every level."⁴⁷ Yet despite the rich confusion of his culture, creeds, heresies, and philosophies there remains the voice of Milton, writing (or speaking in order to write, as he perforce did in composing his mature poems) words plangent enough to echo through more than three tumultuous centuries. How can one deny that echo's authenticity, and its answering chime within our human hearts? Milton's doctrine of human nature was alive in play and in earnest in his three major poems as well as in many of his minor works. His doctrine of human nature, however common or recondite its sources, issues in poetry that shows men and women whose human hearts and human lives involve the reader profoundly if read aright.

⁴⁷ David Lowenstein and James Grantham Turner, "Labouring in the Word," in *Politics, poetics, and hermeneutics in Milton's prose*, ed. Lowenstein and Turner (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990) 6.

I am less interested in the conflicted Milton (undeniably present) than in Milton's uses and celebrations of conflict--existential, theological, epistemological--in his image of humanity. This study argues that Milton understood human nature, fallen and unfallen, as dynamic and progressive, ascending--or perhaps stretching--from earth to heaven by means of a complex play and battle of contraries. This "play and battle" may be understood as a kind of dialectic, itself a crucial concept in Milton studies. Milton's love of dialectic and his binary habit of mind are, of course, not new ideas. Michael Lieb discusses the "dialectic of creation" in *Paradise Lost*.⁴⁸ Mary Ann Radzinowicz proposes an even more inclusive thesis:

Milton's epistemology and psychology both hinge upon the natural tendency of the mind to polarize and then to resolve into harmonious synthesis.... [T]here was present to him the idea that the mind can be tempered and harmonized only through debate and dialectic, that argument is the means by which the truth must be reached.⁴⁹

⁴⁸ Michael Lieb, *The Dialectics of Creation: Patterns of Birth and Regeneration in "Paradise Lost"* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1970).

⁴⁹ Mary Ann Radzinowicz, *Toward "Samson Agonistes": The Growth of Milton's Mind* (Princeton, N. J.: Princeton University Press, 1978) 4-5. In contrast to Radzinowicz' assertion, as I will explain below and in Chapter 2, I maintain that "harmony" did not denote "resolution" for Milton.

This is Milton's version in *Areopagitica*:

I cannot praise a fugitive and cloistered
virtue, unexercised and unbreathed, that never
sallies out and sees her adversary, but slinks
out of the race where that immortal garland is
to be run for, not without dust and heat.
Assuredly, we bring not innocence into the
world, we bring impurity much rather: that
which purifies us is trial, and trial is by what
is contrary.⁵⁰

Here Milton describes *postlapsarian* human nature, tainted by original sin, bringing "impurity" into the world. Yet this praise of "trial" is often used as a gloss upon the separation scene in Book 9 of *Paradise Lost*, as an ironic justification of Eve's negotiations with Adam over independent gardening. If we accept Milton's premise that Adam and Eve are unfallen until they eat the forbidden fruit, we must ask what place this trial "by what is contrary" has in a *prelapsarian* Eden. Adam says, do not expose yourself to temptation unnecessarily. Eve says, to live and grow we cannot do otherwise. Does Milton think

⁵⁰ ed. Hughes 728. Kerrigan notes that Milton's syntax appears to make virtue our natural adversary here (not, as one might expect, an ally), and thus "overturms the intended sense..." (Kerrigan, *Sacred Complex* 15). I am not sure Milton's syntax is not deliberate here: Milton's imagination of grace and succor could be no less adversarial than his imagination of rage and damnation, as we shall see in Chapter 3.

"trial" part of the unfallen creation, too, a principle inherent in the very essence of our sublunary world?

A passage from *The Reason of Church Government* seems to indicate just such a belief in Milton's mind: he speaks of such a process as inherent not only in thought but in the very nature of change and growth itself:

For if we look but on the nature of elemental and mixed things, we know they cannot suffer any change of one kind or quality into another without the struggle of contrarieties.⁵¹

Moreover, the theory of struggle Milton develops throughout his poetry is an unusual dialectic. As Sanford Budick argues, although Milton does believe in a "dialectic of contraries that can perfect man's soul," he insists on an unusual variety of dialectical process: "though it seems to suggest familiar models of dialectical resolution, it is in fact sharply distinguished by continuous formal separation."⁵² The Miltonic "dialectic" is gener-

⁵¹ ed. Hughes 662. Hughes' note indicates Milton is speaking about the four elements of earth, air, fire, and water in the primeval chaos warring "against each other and against all order." Yet Milton's statement seems more Baconian than cosmological here: he is making an empiric observation about chemical reactions. "Change in kind or quality" sounds more like a description of, say, ice melting than of ancient wisdom about the process of creation.

⁵² Sanford Budick, *The Dividing Muse: Images of Sacred Disjunction in Milton's Poetry* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1985) 42, 36. See also Thomas O. Sloane's analysis in *Donne, Milton, and the End of*

ative and dynamic, not static; the "help in judging life" Woolf could not find in what she calls the "sublime aloofness" of *Paradise Lost* is in fact everywhere present. Indeed, this dialectic, put into practice, is a model for moral education and the strengthening of virtue, as we see in another famous passage from *Areopagitica*:

He that can apprehend and consider vice with all her baits and seeming pleasures, and yet abstain, and yet distinguish, and yet prefer that which is truly better, he is the true war-faring Christian.⁵³

Apprehend and consider, yet abstain, yet distinguish (impossible without a risky engagement, if only with the object in thought), yet prefer--Milton's enterprise here is a dialectical dilation of self, in which theses and antitheses are not synthesized but multiplied and stacked atop one another to enable choice, which might also be called wise desire. And the education of desire would, presumably, entail a repetition of this ironic dialectic in which the rhythms of contiguity and detachment strengthen the moral muscle. Struggle, in other words, is not subsumed by mere resolution or synthesis. Struggle is

Humanist Rhetoric (Berkeley, California: University of California Press, 1985) xiii-xiv.

⁵³ in Hughes 728.

resolved in struggle, or in relationship, another word for struggle. One must apparently forge a relationship with everything; then, to every thing, turn turn turn. For Milton, the "struggle of contrarieties" was the ongoing essence of creation and his basic model for understanding humanity.

It must be noted that this "struggle of contrarieties" is a high standard of receptivity and challenge that Milton was not always up to. Witness the thesis of Chapter 1 of *The Doctrine and Discipline of Divorce*:

That indisposition, unfitness, or contrariety of mind, arising from a cause in nature unchangable, hindring and ever likely to hinder the main benefits of conjugall society, which are solace and peace, is a greater reason of divorce than naturall frigidity, especially if there be no children, and that there be mutuall consent.⁵⁴

Compare this passage with its restatement in *Colasterion*, in which Milton rebuts his attacker's argument that "diet and physic" may remedy "contrariety in nature."⁵⁵ Milton

⁵⁴ from *The Complete Prose Works of John Milton*, ed. Don M. Wolfe et al. (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1959-1973) 2: 242. This edition of Milton's prose will be referred to hereafter as *YE*, with the appropriate volume and page numbers following.

⁵⁵ *YE* 2: 736-40.

ridicules the notion of a medical or dietary rearrangement of humors; points out that the change, if it were possible, would probably be for the worse, not the better; and reasserts his claim that "solace and peace" are the "main end[s] of marriage." Yet this "solace and peace" soon turns into a "conversing solace," an "amiable and attractive society of conjugal love," and a "pleasing conversation" that reawakens erotic desire. Clearly the "contrariety of mind" Milton asserts as the most valid ground for divorce is subtly, but significantly, different from the "contrarities" that yield progress and herald, in postlapsarian life, the "birth of reformation." The contrariety of mind that leads to divorce is static, oppressive, intractable: there is in fact no fruitful collision since the husband and wife find themselves in utterly separate worlds which do not correspond at any point.⁵⁶

Along with this static, hateful contrariety Milton's divorce tracts describe and decry in his young bride's absence, the pleasures of generative contrariety also assert themselves to his mind and heart:

No mortal nature can endure either in the
actions of Religion, or study of wisdom,

⁵⁶ YE 2: 736-41.

without sometime slackening the cords of intense thought and labour: which lest we should think faulty, God himself conceals us not his own recreations before the world was built; *I was, saith the eternall wisdome, dayly his delight, playing alwayes before him.* And to him indeed wisdom is a high tower of pleasure.... We cannot therefore always be contemplative, or pragmaticall abroad, but have need of some delightfull intermissions, wherein the enlarg'd soul may leav off a while her severe schooling, and like a glad youth in wandring vacancy, may keep her hoolidaies to joy and harmless pastime: which as she cannot do well without company, so in no company so well as where the different sexe in most resembling unlikeness, and most unlike resemblance cannot but please best and be pleas'd in the aptitude of that variety. Wherof lest we should be too timorous, in the aw that our flat sages would form us and dresse us, wisest *Salomon* among his gravest Proverbs countenances a kinde of ravishment and erring fondnes in the entertainment of wedded leisures; and in the Song of Songs, which is generally beleev'd, even in the jolliest expressions to figure the spousals of the Church with Christ, sings of a thousand raptures between those two lovely ones farr on the hither side of carnall enjoyment.⁵⁷

We must be as sensitive as Milton is to do justice to his revisions and ecstasies in this passage: we must realize that every move away from one kind of contrariety is a move toward another kind, and that every move toward a momentary (and perhaps only apparent) devaluation of the "recreation" conjugal society affords men and women exists in a context that asserts with thrilling, visionary

⁵⁷ YE 2: 596-7.

audacity the transcendent power and worth of the union--and contrariety--of male and female. God sports with wisdom and shows us those recreations.⁵⁸ A man's "delightful intermissions" for the sake of his "enlarg'd soul" may sound merely "amiable" and thus trivial, but read on--and find that the "wandring vacancy" becomes "ravishment and erring fondnes" advised by wise Solomon himself, the poet of the apocalyptic consummation of Christ and his Church, an "amiable society" of which "even ... the jolliest expressions" of Solomon's Song of Songs "sings of a thousand raptures farre on the hither side of carnall enjoyment." To complain, as Mary Nyquist does, that Milton systematically resists the contest of gendered subjectivities implicit in any relationship between men and women, but especially in marriage, is to refuse the vision Milton allows us to see of his own desire for the Beloved who is *not* himself--and not a merely "amiable," bourgeois,

⁵⁸ Cf. Adam's praise of Eve's society as one in which "all higher knowledge falls / Degraded ... Authority and Reason on her wait ... and to consummate all, / Greatness of mind and nobleness their seat / Build in her loveliest, and create an awe / About her, as a guard Angelic plac't" (*Paradise Lost* 8.551-559). I discuss this passage, and the way in which fruitful contrariety leads to change and enlargement of being (unlike Raphael's "contracted brow" in 8.560), in Chapter 4.

sentimental little lady, either.⁵⁹

This "struggle of contrarities" may seem at first glance nothing more than the *discordia concors* that defines the Metaphysical poetics of the earlier seventeenth century, a poetic that finds its paradigm in John Donne. This specifically metaphysical habit of mind is

⁵⁹ See Nyquist, "The genesis of gendered subjectivity," in which she argues that Milton's apparent wish for "mutuality" in the divorce tracts is overwhelmed by what is really "the self-consistent outcome of the deeply masculinist assumptions at work in Milton's articulation of a radically bourgeois view of marriage" (106). Quoting very selectively from the long passage from *Tetrachordon* I quote in full, Nyquist concludes: "It should go without saying that man can have this need for companionship remedied, can intend to enjoy 'lightsome conversation' as opposed to 'grave freindship,' only if woman is constituted as less grave, more attractive, more lightsome and more amiable than her male counterpart; and if both she and marriage itself are associated with a world apart" (112). As I have argued above, and will argue again, putting marriage in "a world apart" is in Nyquist's sense (i.e., belittling it and removing it from the world of phallogocentric significance) may be understood as the "contrariety" Milton considers grounds for divorce. On the other hand, putting marriage in "a world apart" is precisely what Milton desires for it, what he cannot find in mere male friendship--a sacramental figure for the consummation of history and its Creator and Redeemer, and for the gracious re-creations of God himself. Surely this "world apart" is one ordinarily "invisible to mortal sight" that only the Holy Spirit, or the Muse, or the genuinely companionate marriage Milton's best and most thorough imaginings reveal with eloquent abandon, can bring before our eyes.

usually thought to be absent from Milton's mature work.⁶⁰ While I would argue that Milton's witty play yields nothing to Donne in love, air, or angels, it is nevertheless true that *discordia concors* could hardly be an adequate description of Milton's poetics. Milton is interested less in sudden, startlingly incongruous comparisons as a display of wit (even in its profounder sense) than in the approach, collision, friction, and contiguity of opposites and apparent opposites. We may see this interest in Milton's habitual double negatives, his insistence in *Areopagitica* that good and evil "in the field of this world grow up almost inseparably" (the "almost" being the qualification that brings hope close enough to despair to dance with it), in the companion poems' explicit imitation and rejection of each other, in the Lady of *Comus*' innocence which is somehow nevertheless not unaffected, in Eve's "sweet reluctant amorous delay," in Adam's warning

⁶⁰ Eliot, of course, in tracing the dissociation of sensibility to Milton's bad example, denies Milton the full poetic capacity he ascribes to Donne. Most critics believe any traces of the school of Donne in Milton are to be found only in the early poems, most notably "On the Death of a Fair Infant Dying of a Cough" and the notorious "Sun in bed" passage in "On the Morning of Christ's Nativity." See Sloane for an intricate analysis of the relationship of Milton's poetry to Donne's.

Eve that temptation is no sin yet fearing (irrationally, as Eve notes, but compellingly) that temptation is a slur upon the tempted one, in the very way "attempt" in *Paradise Lost* keeps the chime of "tempt" ringing in our ears, in the semantic confusion at the end of Satan's struggle with Christ in *Paradise Regained*, in Samson's agonized sifting of prophecy from guilt, failure from redemption, and his fall from fortune from his fortunate fall.

Edward Tayler's *Milton's Poetry: Its Development in Time* ends with a chapter entitled "Some Conclusions," a witty allusion to the resolute irresolution Tayler finds in the maturing Milton's understanding of Time (that is, anthropological or experiential time) and Eternity (that is, theological time). Tayler considers *Areopagitica*, as I do, a powerful, liberating, and elusive instance of Milton's "play of contrarieties"--and a clear demonstration of Milton's full participation in the pathos of the age. Writing about Milton's claim that sin "is a huge heap increasing under the very act of diminishing," Tayler says:

Contradictions, antithetical images, and powerful antitheses find expression, at points like these, in paradox, which is man's response in language to human and divine "mystery".... Although this awareness of antinomy in the moral life seems to have come almost easily to Browne, Milton's hard-won acceptance of the equivocalities of human experience must have had its

origin in a nature at least unconsciously receptive to contrary alternatives.⁶¹

Or, as Tayler says in his explication of Raphael's

"ontological vegetable" in *Paradise Lost* 5.469-90:

The effect of all this is to grant degree and hierarchy, to recognize that "it cannot be united into a continuity, it can but be contiguous in this world"; and yet at the same time to assert a covert continuity underlying the various kinds that differ in degree, simultaneously preserving the "dissimilitudes" of being while whispering that the differences must be considered "neighborly" or "brotherly."⁶²

This habit of mind is essential to Milton's anthropology, or what I call Milton's poetics of humanity. Although Milton was a lover of dialectic from his days at Cambridge through his period as a controversialist, he was first and last a poet, as he himself insisted. It is in poetry alone that the "wily subtleties and reflexes" of

⁶¹ Tayler 197. Like Tayler, I see Milton's career reaching toward an ever-richer examination of the "equivocalities of human experience"; unlike Tayler, I find important, extended instances of Milton's poetics of humanity as early as the companion poems, as I will discuss in Chapter 2. I also disagree with Tayler's claim that that experiential equivocality for Milton is a result of the Fall: *Areopagitica* may describe one apple that, eaten, gives birth to the duality of good and evil, but as I hope to demonstrate in Chapters 4 and 5, the unequivocal prohibition in *Paradise Lost*--that is, the apple *uneaten*--releases a universe of fruitful equivocalities and contrarities.

⁶² Tayler 212.

the human heart find a medium supple and expressive enough to do justice to our experience of ourselves and our fellow human beings. Milton's image of humanity (and thus, implicitly, of himself) is thus a poetics of humanity that at once expresses and explores its subject and its object, that finds its *telos* in the Love that is God, the place from which it comes and to which it goes by means of oxymoronic play, a particular attraction and repulsion that defines the substance of our human perfection. This dynamic "struggle of contrarities" is in Milton's mind a fact of the human world no less than the chemical; the education that would repair the ruins of our first parents is not unlike the education they begin while yet unfallen. It is a counterpoint that is also a continually evolving harmony, as of course the most accomplished counterpoint always is.⁶³

⁶³ Compare Gerard Manley Hopkins' theory of poetic counterpoint in his *Preface*: "since the new or mounted rhythm is actually heard and at the same time the mind naturally supplies the natural or standard foregoing rhythm, for we do not forget what the rhythm is that by rights we should be hearing, two rhythms are in some manner running at once and we have something answerable to counterpoint in music, which is two or more strains of tune going on together, and this is Counterpoint Rhythm. Of this kind of verse Milton is the great master and the choruses of *Samson Agonistes* are written throughout in it--but with the disadvantage that he does not let the reader clearly know what the ground-rhythm is meant to be and so they have struck most readers as merely irregular." *Gerard Manley Hopkins*:

Struggling with this two-ness is Milton's monism, in which the contrarieties of dialectic and unity are themselves both a dialectic and a unity.⁶⁴ After all, this is the poet for whom the doctrine of the Trinity could not precisely or accurately describe the Godhead, one for whom the Platonic dichotomy of body and soul, and Christianity's assimilation of it into its doctrine of the immortality of the soul, was unacceptable--the poet who insisted on the formula "one first matter all" for all creation (*Paradise Lost* 5.472).⁶⁵ For this reason, call-

Poems and Prose, selected and edited by W. H. Gardner (Middlesex, England: Penguin Books, rpt. 1975) 8-9. What Hopkins detects in Milton's verse--two tunes going at once that must be distinct yet related, that make thereby a *tertium quid* that nevertheless requires the continued perception of the first two elements for its existence--is not unlike what I am arguing for in Milton's poetics of humanity. See also T. S. Eliot's 1947 essay on Milton (reprinted in Thorpe, ed. 310-332), in which his prosodic analysis of a line from *Paradise Lost* reveals a two-syllable word in which "each syllable ... [is] both long and short. The effect is like that of a tide-rip, in which a peculiar type of wave is produced by the conflict of two opposing forces" (324, n. 3).

⁶⁴A crucial explanation of this process, on which I rely heavily for my own analysis, is R. A. Shoaf's *Milton, Poet of Duality* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1985).

⁶⁵ ed. Hughes. The transcendent implications of this monism taught Adam by Raphael are movingly explored in Kerrigan's *The Sacred Complex* 193-262.

ing Milton's model of human nature simply "dialectical" is to risk reducing his rich, complex, and often paradoxical thought and expression to the tedious and inadequate formula of thesis-antithesis-synthesis.

The danger is understandable but insidious. In our time, "dialectic" has become all but synonymous with Hegel's famous analysis. And as we can see in Mary Ann Radzinowicz' remarks quoted above, this diction tends to creep into even the most insightful and detailed analyses of Milton's work.⁶⁶ Milton's profusion of binary oppositions can lead the unwary to conclude, especially in Milton's portrayal of humanity, that his sublimity of conception depended on psychologically shallow dichotomies. One might decide that the intermittent pathos of *Paradise Lost* or *Samson Agonistes* or, say, Sonnet XIII is an interruption in the grand work of cosmos-delineating on which Milton is intent, a work in which poetic imagination is close kin to Newtonian physics: everything (except of course God) has its equal (or sometimes slightly less equal) and opposite. The conflict thus is inevitable and

⁶⁶ Budick points out that Radzinowicz believes a "harmony of resolution ... more psychotherapeutic and humanistic than theological" is the "ultimate aim of Milton's handling of dialectical divisions..." (190, n.2).

the mechanism of conflict and resolution well-known. Indeed, if the Hegelian formula dominates our thinking as we read Milton, we expect and will eventually discover a self-defining, self-sustaining process that is itself a kind of resolution or stasis, with each synthesis either a new "contrariety" for the next struggle, or a dead-end (and uninteresting, uninvolving) resolution at the throne of God.

No: neither static tension nor static resolution inform the Miltonic struggle of contrarities. Rather, the struggle holds the promise of wounds and delight, pain and ecstasy. Hence the struggle is both ironic--one struggles ambivalently and with a certainly uncertain outcome in view--and perfectly, compellingly inclusive of every human thought, emotion, and sensation. To call this dialectic paradoxical is to name only one facet of its mystery. It is also dynamic, redemptive, musical, gracious.

IV. Four Analogues

Milton's poetics of humanity is in fact close kin to Mikhail Bakhtin's "dialogics," a theory of language based

on response and relationship. Bakhtin offers a wry comparison between dialectics and dialogics:

Take a dialogue and remove the voices (the partitioning of voices), remove the intonations (emotional and individualizing ones), carve out abstract concepts and judgments from living words and responses, cram everything into one abstract consciousness--and that's how you get dialectics.⁶⁷

As Bakhtin points out, such abstractions are reductionistic and hence misleading when applied to human interaction as exemplified in speech. His "dialogics" attempts to describe "the world of personal tones and nuances, [which] ... consists not in the relations among things (phenomena, concepts), but in the world of others' personalities."⁶⁸ Milton's poetics of humanity takes shape in just this world. One might even say that Milton inverts Bakhtin's description of dialectic by a process of incarnation: "concepts and judgments" find their expression and their argument in "living words and responses." The Milton whose vision unites spirit and matter also

⁶⁷ M. M. Bakhtin, *Speech Genres and Other Late Essays*, trans. Vern W. McGee, ed. Caryl Emerson and Michael Holquist (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1986), 147.

⁶⁸ Bakhtin, 154.

knows no necessary breach between concept and character, or between epistemology and psychology.

Another theorist of language, the rhetorician Paolo Valesio, also speaks of discourse in a way that may illuminate what I am claiming for Milton's anthropology:

Thus, the internal function of discourse is not basically one of straightforward cohesion--in fact, it is almost the opposite: it is that of managing a continuous battle among its components. Human discourse is the result of the delicate, uneasy, never-to-be-taken-for-granted tension between two opposite forces--one that pushes it into a compact mass (so that the discourse holds together, holds tight), the other that pulls it apart, tries to tear it to pieces, freeing its different and conflicting components. The internal battle has a parallel (not fully symmetrical, point by point) in the external one: the external functions of discourse cannot simply be reduced to rules of correct and acceptable performance (rules, let us say, of good behavior). They, too, are born out of the conflict between conformity and violation of the social patterns.⁶⁹

Milton's discourse-community is also born out of conflict; unlike Valesio's, however, Milton's conflict is not between conformity and violation of "the social patterns," but (astonishingly) between the members of the Church itself, the mystic body of Christ the Redeemer:

... there must be many schisms and many dissections made in the quarry and in the timber, ere

⁶⁹ Paulo Valesio, *Novantiqua: Rhetorics as a Contemporary Theory* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1980), 23.

the house of God can be built. And when every stone is laid artfully together, it cannot be united into a continuity, it can but be contiguous in this world; neither can every peece of the building be of one form; nay rather the perfection consists in this, that out of many moderat varieties and brotherly dissimilitudes that are not vastly disproportionall arises the goodly and the gracefull symmetry that commends the whole pile and structure. Let us therefore be more considerat builders, more wise in spiritual architecture, when great reformation is expected.⁷⁰

The energy of Milton's imagination here raises the question of whether he considers the lack of continuity in this world regrettable; perhaps what Edward Tayler calls Milton's "awareness of the complexities of choice and of the value of sect and schism" informs his imagination of existence itself.⁷¹ As we shall see in Chapters 4 and 5, Milton's prophetic anthropology comes to understand even prelapsarian Eden as a place, not of continuity, but of contiguity; the gender differentiation Milton imagines for Adam and Eve certainly qualifies as a "brotherly dissimilitude" that is not "vastly disproportionall." Indeed, one might go on to argue that Milton's subordinationism, his rejection of the Trinity, is the

⁷⁰ YE 2: 555.

⁷¹ Tayler 202

theological side of his avoidance of continuity and celebration of contiguity.

Two other writers, one a willful student of Milton, one a Danish anti-Hegelian, also propound dialectics similar enough to Milton's to illuminate our understanding of the Miltonic struggle of contrarities: William Blake, and Søren Kierkegaard. Blake's *Songs of Innocence and Experience* and *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell* demonstrate an exquisitely complex poetic insight into this struggle, and Kierkegaard's *Philosophical Fragments* uses a poetically dense and allusive argument to evoke an ironic dialectic of redemption. Both writers, like Milton, believed they were onto some essential truth about the nature of all creation and its relation to its creator.

Blake's understanding of Milton has wrought much mischief among Milton's friends and enemies. His conclusion, in *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell*, that Milton was "a true poet and of the devil's party without knowing it" seemed to announce the Satanic reading of Milton popular among the Romantics as well as to the charges of artistic incompetence summarized so scathingly by A. J. A. Waldock.⁷² Yet Blake's emphasis on contraries is

⁷² The anti-Miltonists have by no means been idle since the publication of Waldock's *Paradise Lost and its Critics* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press,

remarkably like Milton's. In Plate Three of the *Marriage* Blake states, "Without Contraries there is no progression."⁷³ However his detailed understanding of the nature and name of these contraries might differ from Milton's (or agree with the crypto-Milton's he thought he had deciphered), Blake clearly shares Milton's basic belief in their necessity and use. His "Proverbs of Hell" in their gloriously inconsistent tangle and turbulence, his separation of mankind into the Prolific and Devouring whose enmity should never be reconciled (Plate Sixteen), and his avowal that "Opposition is true Friendship" (Plate Twenty) all portray a dialectic whose aim is ascent and whose end is marriage, not resolution. (This last distinction will be laughably obvious to my married readers.) The final "Memorable Fancy" of the *Marriage* makes this clear. An Angel and a Devil consummate their argument with an incendiary embrace that results in a phoenix-like rebirth. Here, it is the prophet Elijah who rises from the ashes.

1947), but the focus seems to have shifted onto Milton's role as deliberate villain instead of unconscious rebel.

⁷³ All quotations from Blake's poetry are taken from M. H. Abrams et al., eds., *The Norton Anthology of English Literature*, 5th ed. (New York: Norton & Company, 1986), v. 2.

Granted that the angel's combustion is no surprise (since he like all the angels in the *Marriage* is a straw angel), and granted that he becomes a Devil, which one might argue removes the possibility of an ongoing struggle, the poem nevertheless ends with a dialectic that proceeds through an embrace into a prophetic transformation. As Blake abundantly makes clear, we are very far here from the dry bones of Aristotle's *Analytics* (see Plate Twenty).

Blake's vision of the struggle of contraries is even more compelling, and often less one-sided, in the two most famous poems from his *Songs of Innocence and of Experience*, "The Lamb" and "The Tyger." These two short lyrics invite ready comparison and are as clear a dichotomy as the *Songs* provide. Their opposition, however, is no easy matter, for each is inextricably implicated in the other. In these lyrics, innocence and experience are at once separate and mutually inclusive, opposites that find both their strength of opposition and their only hope of marriage in the person of their Creator. Such a creator must have an identity large enough to contain both lamb and tiger, yet a purpose righteous enough to justify prey and predator. Blake's depiction of the struggle is not entirely conclusive, perhaps, but I cannot read either poem without sensing that the central question of "Who

made you?" finds its answer in both terrible beauty and quiet reverence--a marriage of God and God, as it were, that did not comfort Job or Blake or even Milton, at times. Yet it did satisfy them.

The terrible beauty of "The Tyger" is obvious, as is the quiet reverence of the catechism "The Lamb" enacts. Yet each contains its opposite. "The Tyger," of course, names its opposite: "Did he who made the Lamb make thee?" (l. 20) If the answer to this question is "yes," as it must be for God to be God, we discover that the only being in the universe whose might was capable of creating a tiger, indeed, the only being whose Promethean presumption was outrageous enough to want to create such an animal, is also called a "lamb." The long exhalation of "dare" that begins the last line of the poem, the "dare" that is the only change from the initial stanza, contains one rebel's admiration of another, to be sure, but it also includes the hushed recognition, following the poem's penultimate question, that this Creator's nature and identity are not uncomplicated, not simply a matter of omnipotence alone. This creator apparently needs a kind of reckless artistic courage.

This courage is precisely the point of "The Lamb." From its opening question, "who made thee?", we know that

a catechism has begun; it is the first of a series of questions designed to test a young person's religious education. In this context, the figure of the Lamb, despite the lilting meter and pastoral setting, takes on more terrifying proportions: it is the *Agnus Dei, qui tolis peccata mundi*. This lamb, this creator, will be sacrificed. And identifying the child with the lamb casts a pall on the poem's innocent speaker as well, bringing to mind, in Gerard Manley Hopkins' phrase, "the blight man was born for." The rejoicing vales (l. 8) come to resemble the valley of the shadow of death, for the fact of death, the ultimate component of experience, is lodged in "The Lamb" side-by-side with the streams and the mead. An unspoken crucifixion, the blood of the lamb, is here too, along with the promise of redemption, hard won and painful. And all this is clothed in "delight, / Softest clothing wooly bright." The lamb, like the tiger, is luminous with meaning and mystery. Both are married to each other in a struggle of contraries revolving around their Maker, a struggle whose dimensions are also everywhere present in Milton, from the marriage of Adam and Eve to the contraries of *L'Allegro* and *Il Penseroso*. We are reminded that Blake's title itself expresses this union of two and one: the songs show "THE TWO CONTRARY STATES OF

THE HUMAN SOUL," in whose opposition, we may hope with Blake, is true friendship.⁷⁴

If Blake's poetry expresses the marriage of apparent opposites while it implies a heterodox doctrine of redemption, Kierkegaard's philosophy turns the dialectic of the struggle of contrarities into a mode of divine revelation and grace, while at the same time dismantling the automatic dichotomies of Hegelian logic.⁷⁵ In his *Philosophical Fragments*, Kierkegaard is at pains to show that Hegel's "absolute method" of propelling logic inexorably forward by analyzing all unified concepts into sets of contradictions cannot possibly lead to a transcen-

⁷⁴ Blake, unlike Milton, seems to argue for the necessity of evil. As will become clearer in Chapter 3, Milton is careful to distinguish between struggle and evil, just as he distinguishes stasis or passivity from good. In this way the contrarities of Adam and Eve, in an unfallen world, are no less compelling, difficult, and rewarding than the contrarities of Satan and humanity, or even Hell and Heaven--perhaps even more so. There was work to be done in Eden before Satan landed there.

⁷⁵ See the helpful commentary by Neils Thulstrup included in Søren Kierkegaard, *Philosophical Fragments, or a Fragment of Philosophy*, by Johannes Climacus. Responsible for publication, Søren Kierkegaard. Originally translated and introduced by David F. Swenson. New introduction and commentary by Niels Thulstrup. Translation revised and commentary translated by Howard V. Hong (1962; Princeton, N. J.: Princeton University Press, 1974) 158-59, 240-41.

dent God. One Hegelian synthesis is as contingent as any other, despite Hegel's effort to make thought and being ultimately co-extensive. In place of Hegelian dialectic, which he considers a poor imitation of Socratic dialectic, Kierkegaard offers a dialectic of Eternal and Temporal, of the Eternal entering history. He calls this the "Paradox," and insists that it is an absurdity: "No knowledge can have for its object the absurdity that the Eternal is the historical."⁷⁶ Yet it is Reason and the knowledge it brings that lead us to the Paradox of the Eternal in the historical--that is, God's dealings with humanity, specifically in the Incarnation of Christ. We are thus left with a dialectic, not of thesis and antithesis, but of Creator and freely willing Creature, of Teacher and utterly dependent student, of Paradox and Reason. This dialectic has its own means of uniting opposites:

This relationship of owing all to the Teacher cannot be expressed in terms of romancing and trumpeting, but only in that happy passion we call Faith, whose object is the Paradox. But the Paradox unites the contradictories, and is the historical made eternal, and the Eternal made historical.⁷⁷

⁷⁶ Kierkegaard 76.

⁷⁷ Kierkegaard 76.

Thus another series of dialectical exchanges appears, but not in any self-sustaining or self-justifying way. This Kierkegaardian dialectic, like Milton's as I will argue, is founded on relationship, not just between concepts, but between persons, and between God and the individual. The paradoxical dialectic of the Eternal (God) and the Temporal (humanity) is itself one component of the dialectic between the Paradox (which Reason cannot overcome) and Reason (which inevitably leads to the Paradox, since it cannot explain itself). This final dialectic of the Paradox and Reason, when it becomes a marriage, brings forth Faith, which can then act as the "happy passion" with which we may enter into a relationship--or dialectic--with our Creator. Most wonderful of all, this dialectic of Faith and God, like the dialectic of Creature and Creator, finds its *telos* in its origin, yet must journey to keep that truth in view:

... is not Faith as paradoxical as the Paradox? Precisely so; how else could it have the Paradox for its object, and be happy in its relation to the Paradox? Faith is itself a miracle, and all that holds true of the Paradox also hold true of Faith. But within the framework of this miracle everything is again Socratic, yet so that the miracle is never cancelled--the miracle namely, that the eternal condition is given in time. Everything is Socratic; the relation between one contemporary and another in so far as both are believers is entirely Socratic: the one owes

the other nothing, but both owe everything to the God. (emphasis added) ⁷⁸

Such circularity is frightening only to those who imagine it is avoidable otherwise. As Kierkegaard shows, the apparent linearity of Hegelian dialectic is itself merely another kind of circularity--but an airless kind in which no miracles intrude, and there is no "ready Harbinger, / With Turtle wing the amorous clouds dividing" (*On the Morning of Christ's Nativity*, ll. 49-50).

Such intrusions are at the heart of Milton's gracious dialectic, his poetics of humanity. For Milton, the struggle born of trial is a boon, for thus he will grow, as the famous passage from *Areopagitica* quoted above makes clear. Indeed, part of the poignance of the conclusion of Sonnet IX, "They also serve who only stand and wait," is not only that Milton cannot be speeding and posting "o'er Land and Ocean," busy in his King's work, but that waiting, in its absence of overt struggle, is indeed the severest trial of all for a man who relishes struggle--and thus, in a paradox Kierkegaard would admire, also the most glorious trial of all.⁷⁹

⁷⁸ Kierkegaard 81.

⁷⁹ See also Budick (51) for an acute analysis of the way Milton "elevates and redeems the shattering disruption of life and creativity by suggestively incorporating it within God's own pattern of immobility

Bakhtin, Valesio, Kierkegaard, and Blake: all offer us models of a "struggle of contrarities" that may help us go beyond an arid Hegelianism--or worse yet, an endless Ramism--to a richer and more supple understanding of the "wily subtleties and refluxes" of Milton's understanding of humanity. We will do well to hold their models in mind as we move to Milton's first extended experiment in the struggle of contrarities, the poems often called "companions": *L'Allegro* and *Il Penseroso*.

within deputed motion.... For Milton, like Calvin, divine being intervenes between its emanated potencies. The contradiction of fulfilling active being in perfect stasis is resolved in a discrimination of incoincident potentialities ... an immovable band of division that subsists beyond and within the emanations of motion that constitute the created world."

Chapter 2

The Music of Opposition

But what is at variance, and yet is not unable to be
brought into agreement, it is possible to harmonize.

--Plato, *Symposium* 185B-C (trans. Rouse)

... upon the rising ground

The Poet sits: who, having tuned his strings,
Though dissonant, yet musical, thus sings.

--Ovid, *Metamorphoses* X 145-7 (trans. Sandys, 1632)

"The companion poems still resist criticism's best efforts to appraise their wealth." So Merritt Hughes concluded in 1957; so might we still conclude today. Not that critics haven't tried: *L'Allegro* and *Il Penseroso* continue to inspire critical analysis and commentary nearly on a par with the *Nativity Ode* and *Lycidas*, if only in quantity. At least since James Holly Hanford's pioneering work on Milton's early life, readers of Milton have tried not only to explain the poems' appeal but to explain their existence at all. When did Milton write these poems that, unlike his other early efforts, seem occasionless? The *Nativity Ode* marks Milton's coming-of-

age, Christ's Incarnation, and initiates an incomplete cycle of poems for the liturgical year. *Lycidas* is even more obviously occasional. Elsewhere in Milton's early work we find epitaphs, encomiums, a consolation ("On the Death of a Fair Infant"), academic exercises, Psalm paraphrases brought forth as evidence of the author's precocity, experiments and accomplishments in Italian and Latin, another birthday poem ("How Soon Hath Time")--all poems whose origins are easily found in or reliably inferred from the events of Milton's life. Yet *L'Allegro* and *Il Penseroso* seem to remain stubbornly *sui generis* among Milton's early works. He does not date them for us. There is no conclusive internal evidence of their occasion. They are missing from the Trinity MS. And they are conspicuously delightful, especially *L'Allegro*. Given the tradition of Milton studies outlined in the preceding chapter, we will not be surprised to find the particular mode of delight these poems describe and enact causing some confusion and even dismay. The problem is not only that unanimous pleasure may render criticism a superfluous annoyance, but that unanimous pleasure these poems elicit does not seem to sound the authentically Miltonic note. Where in Milton, one may hear critics say, do we find work of comparable ambition and accomplishment so apparently

untroubled and untroubling? Must we resort to the irresponsible hypothesis that Milton was, for perhaps the only time in his life, simply in a un-monumental *good mood* when he wrote *L'Allegro* and *Il Penseroso*? Could Milton be so ordinary?¹

I. The Critical Tradition

The contentious Dr. Johnson is an early example of critical flat-footedness in the presence of the companion poems:

Of the two pieces, *L'Allegro* and *Il Penseroso*, I believe opinion is uniform; every man that reads them, reads them with pleasure.... Both Mirth and Melancholy are solitary, silent inhabitants of the breast that neither receive nor transmit communication.... The seriousness does not arise from any participation of calamity, nor the gaiety from the pleasures of the bottle.... His Cheerfulness is without levity, and his Pensiveness without asperity.... Through these two poems the images are properly selected, and nicely distinguished; but the colours of the diction seem not sufficiently discriminated. I know not whether the characters are kept sufficiently apart. No mirth can, indeed, be found in his melancholy; but I am afraid that I always

¹ Douglas Bush isn't even sure the infant Milton cried. See *English Literature in the Earlier Seventeenth Century* (London: Oxford University Press, 1945) 360.

meet some melancholy in his mirth. They are two noble efforts of imagination.²

The *non sequitur* of that last sentence gives Johnson away. His analysis is as superficial as his concluding remarks would indicate: he knows the poems are good, but he doesn't know quite what to make of them. He takes them seriously, after a fashion, but his summary judgment betrays his inability to weave them into the larger fabric of Milton's career.

Some readers solve the quandary by insisting the companion poems are indeed *not* part of this larger fabric. In 1930, E. M. W. Tillyard asserts that *L'Allegro* and *Il Penseroso* are "typical of only a part, and not a large part, of [Milton's] mind. They are poems of escape, of fancy; and to take them too seriously is most unjust."³ Twenty-seven years later, Tillyard continues to speak of them as *divertissements*. The poems are parallel in structure, thought, and language, moving by "simple progressions and self-evident contrasts.... There is no thought that is not easily grasped at once." He continues:

The mood of the poems is one of an even serenity; not one of the ecstatic serenity that

² Johnson, *Lives of the Poets*, Thorpe 67-9.

³ E. M. W. Tillyard, *Milton*, rev. ed. (New York: Barnes and Noble, 1967) 57.

can follow the assuaging of a mental upheaval. They are the work of a young man free for the time from the growing-pains and fevers of youth.... [They have a] subtle friendliness of tone.... It is a commonplace that both the Cheerful and the Meditative Man are Milton, and yet there is not the least suspicion that he calls attention to himself.... He tactfully and without undue insistence invites his readers to share his experiences.⁴

Tillyard, never one to shrink from a fight, nevertheless cannot find a place for the companion poems and thus must deny their seriousness, even to the point of overlooking the emotional intensity at each poem's conclusion. Like Johnson, however, Tillyard leaves a sign that he is not altogether satisfied with his appraisal. Something is wrong. Johnson was troubled by the near-identity that persists despite the professed contrast between the Cheer-

⁴ Tillyard, *The Miltonic Setting* (London: Chatto & Windus, 1957) 9-14. A. S. P. Woodhouse insists that there is "a complete absence of the problematical" in the companion poems, no sense of Milton's "dealing with his experience.... The comparison of two ways of life does not involve ... the posing and making of a choice between them: indeed the comparison is simply a piece of patterning, with no extra-aesthetic reference" (in Woodhouse and Douglas Bush, eds., *A Variorum Commentary on The Poems of John Milton. Volume Two: The Minor English Poems, Part One* [New York: Columbia University Press, 1972] 250-1.) Woodhouse is even more dismissive of *L'Allegro*: he states that the poem is a nearly pure formal exercise, hardly more than a pattern itself (*Variorum* 25).

ful Man and Pensive Man. Tillyard can't figure out why the poems begin as they do--especially *L'Allegro*.

What possessed him that he should write such bombast? By what strange anticipation did he fall into the manner of the worst kind of eighteenth-century ode? If Milton meant to be noble, he failed dreadfully. If, however, he knew what he was doing, he can only have meant to be funny. And if he meant to be funny, to what end? There is nothing in the rest of the poem that suggests humour--at least of the burlesque sort.⁵

Tillyard's solution is that Milton was writing for the same Cambridge audience that had heard his (and other students') Prolusions; this audience would be used to such displays of hyperbole and burlesque for rhetorical effect. Perhaps Milton is indeed burlesquing his own high seriousness in poems such as *On the Fifth of November*, presumably the better to ingratiate himself with his fellows (cf. Prolusion VI). Yet Tillyard's explanation for what he takes to be Milton's low comedy is ultimately no more per-

⁵ Tillyard, *The Miltonic Setting* 9. Interestingly, Dustin Griffin (arguing against critics like Eliot and Pound) uses Milton's "anticipation ... of [the] eighteenth-century ode" as an example of his benign influence on the next century's poets. See "Milton's literary influence" in *The Cambridge Companion to Milton*, ed. Dennis Danielson (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989) 243-260.

suasive than his analysis that ignores the poems' obvious seriousness.⁶

Still other readers, in addition to appreciating the charms of *L'Allegro* and *Il Penseroso*, detect more seriousness in what seems to be the poetic portrayal of an emerging Miltonic resolve. With this *ave atque vale*, Milton takes his first steps along the road of renunciation:

We may read "L'Allegro" and "Il Penseroso" simply as tone poems, two ideal moods of a bookish and high-minded young man in the country, as lovely expressions of a serene tranquility which their militant author never again enjoyed. But these companion pieces ... we may take also as ... a half-unconscious good-bye to carefree youth and an embracing of a life of mature seriousness.⁷

We may wonder whether Milton was "half-unconscious" about any such milestone in a career shaped by milestones, but we perceive Bush's strategy nevertheless. He will grant the companion poems seriousness of purpose, however unconscious that seriousness might be for Milton, but he wants to preserve their essential (and, for this poet, peculiar)

⁶ His conclusion that the poems are offspring of Milton's first Prolusion, "That Day Is Better Than Night," with *L'Allegro* arguing for the day and *Il Penseroso* arguing for the night, has been shown to be untenable. See *Variorum* 249-252, 261-3.

⁷ Douglas Bush, *The Renaissance and English Humanism* (1939: Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1956) 106.

quality of relaxed imaginative play. Thus, for Bush, any complexity the poems possess is borrowed from our larger knowledge of Milton's career; their "tranquility" is disturbed only by their biographical import.

The critical unease over the clash of renunciation and trippingly tetrameter beauties in *L'Allegro* and *Il Penseroso* leads to other extremes of denial. James Holly Hanford, with his lifelong emphasis on the humanist Milton, finds the companion poems decidedly cool to the touch, and wholesomely didactic:

In *L'Allegro* and *Il Penseroso*, taking more than a hint from Burton, Milton amuses himself by analyzing his aesthetic reactions and classifying them in two contrasting modes. There is, of course, no question of two individuals. *L'Allegro* and *Il Penseroso* are equally Milton. To interpret the fiction otherwise is to assume that a cultivated lover of music may care only for the scherzo movement of symphonies.... It is to deny, in short, the catholicity of Milton's taste, the very thing the poems are designed to illustrate and do illustrate.... [The] two pieces taken together are, indeed, the evidence of a carefully disciplined and completely self-possessed maturity of aesthetic cultivation and of a mind free for the moment from temperamental bias of any sort. The poems are studiously objective, even the effects of his reading being represented as elements in an impersonal experience. The element of sex, moreover, is carefully excluded..... [T]he writing of poems like *L'Allegro* and *Il Penseroso*, however exquisite the result, was in a sense a *tour de force*.⁸

⁸ James Holly Hanford, *John Milton: Poet and Humanist* (Cleveland: Western Reserve University Press,

A Milton free from "temperamental bias of any sort," interested in "impersonal experience," and writing from a "completely self-possessed maturity of aesthetic cultivation" is a peculiar Milton indeed, not to say a peculiar *man*, almost an *Übermensch*--in fact, not unlike the Miltonic Monument that so troubles some readers. Who wouldn't be troubled by such a monolith? Who could gain a purchase on the polished facets of such an accomplishment?

More recently, Stanley Fish has argued for another, somewhat subtler version of Miltonic manipulation in *L'Allegro* and *Il Penseroso*, no less coldly formal but somewhat more pleasant than what Hanford suggests. In "What It's Like to Read *L'Allegro* and *Il Penseroso*," Fish contends that both poems simply enact their meaning:

In short, the poems mean the experience they give; and because they so mean, the conditional with which they end are false ... because the conditions they specify have already been met. The delights and pleasures of Mirth and Melancholy are even now ours, for in the very act of reading we have been theirs.⁹

1966) 44. That Hanford was grossly mistaken about Milton's exclusion of sex from these poems will, I hope, become clear from my analysis below.

⁹ Stanley Fish, "What It's Like to Read *L'Allegro* and *Il Penseroso*," *Milton Studies* 7: 95.

In the case of *L'Allegro*, the delights of Mirth are expressed in a poem whose syntactical ambiguity is deliberate and, Fish insists, liberating:

In *Il Penseroso* Milton can exploit the traditions his verse invades; in *L'Allegro* he must simultaneously introduce them and denude them of their implications, employing a diction and vocabulary rich in complex associations without the slightest gesture in the direction of that complexity. In *L'Allegro* it is not so much what the images do, but what they do not do. The poem is a triumph of absence.... [I]nterpretation is precisely what it does not invite, because its parts are arranged in such a way as to exert no interpretive pressures.... [*L'Allegro*] is striking for the absence of mind; there is, it would seem, no one at home.¹⁰

Fish is brought to this assertion by the controversy he wittily summarizes over who comes to *L'Allegro's* window in lines 45-46. Nevertheless, his thesis regarding *L'Allegro* (and *Il Penseroso*, whose theme and effect, according to Fish, is the continuing pressure of consciousness) allies him with the earlier critics who find the companion poems to be less demanding and thus (especially in *L'Allegro's* case) less serious than the later poems. Their court is a moot court, their battles merely feigned.

The alternative, of course, is to insist that conflict and strenuous renunciation are precisely Milton's

¹⁰ Fish 85, 87, 94.

project in the companion poems. There is no half-unconscious goodbye here. Milton is deliberate and determined, writing his poetic career into being:

We sense from "L'Allegro" and "Il Penseroso," stylized as they are, that Milton hoped to conclude his youth with a gesture of great finality, abandoning one sort of life in the act of embracing another. Critics speak sensibly of the necessary reconciliations of the two goddesses in any reasonable life, including Milton's, but the disjunctive foundation of the poems tells its own tale. Fidelity to one goddess requires a scornful exorcism of the other. After drawing up a long optative catalogue of expected rewards, the poet twice offers his contract: if you give me my wish, I in return will make my home with you. Although their content is rearranged somewhat, these mutually exclusive pledges shape the temptation resolved in *Comus*. The Lady of the work is a monument left by a choice, an early crystallization of Milton's identity as man and poet.¹¹

Kerrigan's reading sounds the authentically Miltonic war-faring blast. A Milton made of choice, of "gestures of great finality," of abandonment and embrace, has features we recognize. We do not have to grant him a peculiar aesthetic detachment he will never again possess. There is no rent in the fabric of his career. Yet this reading offers a curious repetition of the reading that denies a conflict between the two poems. Words like "finality," "monument," and "crystallization" connote a self-

¹¹ Kerrigan, *The Sacred Complex* 20.

possession hardly less complete than that which Hanford ascribes to Milton. Moreover, what readers like Bush, Tillyard, and Hanford feared most has occurred: the pleasures of the companions are overwhelmed by that strident, militantly Puritan Milton who scatters even the faithful before him.

One can try to have it both ways, although those who do often underestimate the complexity of such a maneuver and end up having it more one way than another. D. C. Allen, for example, rejects the "trite notion" that everything in *L'Allegro* and *Il Penseroso* "is on the surface," or that we enjoy them "because they have none of the vexing subtilities that obscure Milton's other works...."¹² He tries to restore *L'Allegro* to a worthy though subordinate role, calling it "the rise of the step but not the tread." Soon enough, however, Allen (and, implicitly, Milton) leaves *L'Allegro* behind:

The dream of "L'Allegro" is slighter in substance, common in poetic experience, and it leads to the sham reality of the theater and the "wanton heed" and "giddy cunning" of Lydian music. The dream of "Il Penseroso" is of a far higher order, a "strange mysterious dream" which is succeeded by a mysterious music, "above, about, or underneath." This music, unlike that

¹² Don Cameron Allen, *The Harmonious Vision: Studies in Milton's Poetry*, Enlarged Edition (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1970) 12.

which arouses Orpheus from his "golden slumber," cannot be identified or localized. It may be the music of the spheres. It may be the song of Apollo. The poet does not know....¹³

Rosemond Tuve, on the other hand, tries to read *L'Allegro* and *Il Penseroso* so as to preserve their seriousness of purpose without erasing their charm or renouncing the pleasures either has to offer:

[We need not ask] whether these two are "opposites," "contrasts," "diagonally contrasted," "balanced," "merged," and the like, whether Milton is "both" *L'Allegro* and *Il Penseroso*. What man is not? We need make no trouble about a division, no fanfare about a unification, that every man daily makes within the bounds of his own personality. Not by the reconciling of things opposed, but by the comprehending of things different, and not in a pattern of the antitheses but in a living and experiencing mind.¹⁴

Yet the question of what this living and experiencing mind is like, and why Milton's would have been drawn to this poetic experiment, is left open. Moreover, Milton *characteristically* makes trouble about division and fanfare about unification. Prolusion VI is one early example:

And then no small inducement and attraction to this business has been your recent show of kindness to me ... quite against my expectation and

¹³ Allen 21.

¹⁴ Rosemond Tuve, "Structural Figures of *L'Allegro* and *Il Penseroso*," *Milton: Modern Essays in Criticism*, ed. Arthur E. Barker (New York: Oxford University Press, 1965) 61.

quite against any glimmering hope of mine, as I learned, or rather as I myself felt, my efforts were received with great applause from you all, and especially from those who once had been irritated and hostile to me on account of some disagreements....¹⁵

Paradise Lost is another example. Milton's living and experiencing mind continually unites and divides and makes a great deal of trouble and fanfare about both operations. Despite Tuve's odd reluctance to grant emotional and intellectual weight to those divisions and unifications "every man daily makes within the bounds of his own personality," her observation that this process is what Milton is about in *L'Allegro* and *Il Penseroso* is provocative. As the last sentence in the quotation above brilliantly sets forth, it is indeed the "living and experiencing mind" Milton explores, examines, and portrays in these companion poems--"not by the reconciling of things opposed ... and not by a pattern of antitheses ... but by the comprehending of things different."

In other words, by a gracious dialectic, a poetics of humanity, a liberation and use and enjoyment of conflict, Milton shows a profound account of the training of the desiring self. For these companion poems are indeed in

¹⁵ ed. Hughes 613.

conflict, even an exaggerated conflict. Tillyard's complaint is not so far off the mark: there is a furious hyperbole about those opening lines that cannot be ignored. To say that the apparent conflict in these poems is either an illusion or merely an aesthetic device is to find serenity amid "horrid shapes, and shrieks, and sights unholy," as well as a most un-Miltonic bland universality among bastard "vain deluding joys." Opposition and unity are always energizing principles in Milton's mind, particularly in his understanding of humanity:

From the beginning his poetry activates and endeavors to resolve conflicts between wish and necessity ... [such as in] the complex bargaining for diverse wishes in the companion poems and in *Comus*....¹⁶

My argument, briefly put, is that the bargaining for diverse wishes in the companion poems is indeed complex, more complex than is often realized; that the bargaining is in both jest and earnest, an endeavor to release and use and delight in conflict, not resolve or annihilate it; and that in this endeavor *L'Allegro* and *Il Penseroso* are an important window onto the mature Milton's poetics of humanity.

¹⁶ Kerrigan, *Sacred Complex* 215.

II. Opposition and Counterpoint

Those readers who do grant serious purpose to the companion poems and recognize the complex bargaining *L'Allegro* and *Il Penseroso* enact do not necessarily agree on the terms or the outcome of the bargaining, as we have seen. Leonard Nathanson outlines three camps into which most of these readers fall: those who find them to present "mutually exclusive choices," those who believe them to be a "complementary relation of equal 'goods,'" and those who discover in them a "hierarchical ascent from a lesser good to a higher."¹⁷ As most readers who find the choices mutually exclusive also find that Milton chooses the life of the pensive man and renounces (in whole or in part) the life of the cheerful man, Nathanson's first and third categories are essentially identical.¹⁸ Greg Zacharias' analysis of these critical positions is more cogent. He names the two ways of reading the relationship

¹⁷ Leonard Nathanson, "*L'Allegro* and *Il Penseroso*," *Milton's English Poetry, Being Entries from "A Milton Encyclopedia"* (Lewisburg, Pennsylvania: Bucknell University Press, 1986) 37.

¹⁸ Ironically, Nathanson elsewhere in his essay states that "Compared to Milton's other poems, *L'Allegro* and *Il Penseroso* would appear to offer few obstacles to appreciation and comprehension" (35).

between *L'Allegro* and *Il Penseroso* "serialist" and the "complementarist."¹⁹ The serialist reader sees Milton moving, more or less completely or vehemently, from a lesser way of life to a greater. He may see that move as one from "youthful hedonism toward the philosophic, contemplative mind," in Louis Martz' words.²⁰ Or he may bring the poems closer together, as we have seen D. C. Allen do. Nevertheless, for the serialist, whether the gesture is repeated or singular, Milton definitely rejects one poem's promises and pleasures for the other.

The attractions of the serial reading are obvious. Milton is in control, firmly in control, even to the extent of presenting us with a heartbreakingly charming vision (in *L'Allegro*) of what he might have enjoyed as a youth but must now reject. His rejection of those "vain deluding joys" is all the more affecting for the sympathetic, even moving portrait he draws of them. The themes of loss and renunciation felt by many readers to be at the heart of Milton's poetic imagination--perhaps his

¹⁹ Greg W. Zacharias, "Young Milton's Equipment for Living: *L'Allegro* and *Il Penseroso*," in *Milton Studies* 24: 3-15.

²⁰ See Martz' *Poet of Exile: A Study of Milton's Poetry* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1980) 46.

character, too--are strikingly evident even at the outset. And most importantly, it is Milton's hand that proffers the evidence. That deliberate control Milton's defenders ascribed to the poet in the face of the Romantic-Satanist critique (of a Milton unconscious of his own allegiances) is thus intact, even strengthened.

The difficulty with the serial position is that Milton's own words belie the interpretation. Zacharias' analysis is apt:

... the serial conception of the poems necessarily subordinates *L'Allegro* to *Il Penseroso* morally as well as poetically. This subordination forces Milton to make an unfair and unlikely choice between two ways of living. By giving moral value to the intellectual and isolated *Il Penseroso*, the serial view of the poems debases the sensuous and social *L'Allegro*. Evidence in Milton's writing outside the two poems, especially *Early Prolusion*, the *Sixth Prolusion*, a letter to Diodati, *The Reason of Church Government, Of Education, Tetrachordon*, and Book IV of *Paradise Regained*, suggests that Milton himself believed in the complementarity of leisure to work, sense to intellect, and society to contemplation rather than in the subordination of one to the other.²¹

To which list we might add the *Seventh Prolusion*, "Learning Makes Men Happier Than Does Ignorance," which is in

²¹ Zacharias 3. I am not sure I understand (or agree with) what Zacharias means by "unfair," although I do second the rest of his argument here.

substantial agreement with the Sixth Prolusion, despite a marked shift in tone towards seriousness:

The truth is that nothing has fed my mind or contributed more to its health than intelligent and liberal leisure have done--quite contrary to our experience with the body.... For my own part I appeal to the groves and streams and the dear village elms under which in the summer now just over I remember that I enjoyed supreme happiness with the Muses (if it is lawful to speak of the secrets of the goddesses). There among the fields and in the depths of the woods I seemed to myself to have achieved some real growth in the season of seclusion.²²

Nor was Milton's youth the only season of leisure for the poet. Blindness, middle age, even civil service do not change Milton's mind--as Sonnet 21, addressed to his former pupil Cyriack Skinner, makes clear:

Today deep thoughts resolve with me to drench
 In mirth, that after no repenting draws;
 Let *Euclid* rest and *Archimedes* pause,
 And what the Swede intend, and what the
French.
 To measure life learn thou betimes, and know
 Toward solid good what leads the nearest way;
 For other things mild Heav'n a time ordains,
 And disapproves that care, though wise in show,
 That with superfluous burden loads the day,
 And when God sends a cheerful hour, refrains.
 (5-14)

²² ed. Hughes 622. Interestingly, such a landscape seems to mingle those of *L'Allegro* (the "dear village elms," the "groves and streams") and *Il Penseroso* ("among the fields and in the depths of the woods").

The wisdom of leisure, a true wisdom: found, where Milton finds all true wisdom, in obedience. God has sent the cheerful hour, and only false piety, false dedication, will spurn the gracious gift. Nor does the tone of devotion with which the sonnet concludes negate the note of mirth the poet intends to sound. Milton's egalitarian resolution floods deep thoughts, thinker, devotion, and all--and no hangovers allowed.

Sonnet 20 provides an even more apposite example of the wise leisure a mature Milton imagines. The Horatian vision of *otium* melds with the faithful carelessness of God's creation to yield a vision of almost Keatsian intensity.

Lawrence of virtuous Father virtuous Son,
 Now that the Fields are dank and ways are mire,
 Where shall we sometimes meet and by the fire
 Help waste a sullen day, what may be won
 From the hard Season gaining? Time will run
 On smoother till *Favonius* re-inspire
 The frozen earth, and clothe in fresh attire
 The Lily and Rose, that neither sow'd nor spun.
 What neat repast shall feast us, light and
 choice,
 Of Attic taste, with Wine, whence we may rise
 To hear the Lute well toucht, or artful voice
 Warble immortal Notes and *Tuscan* Air?
 He who of those delights can judge and spare
 To interpose them oft, is not unwise. (1-14)

Here the young and struggling Commonwealth, Milton's Italian journey, spring, Eden, and the New Jerusalem merge in a scene invested with all the poet's longing--a longing

which includes the hunger to share these delights and enthusiasms with a friend. The tension, one might even say the friction between "delights," "judge," "spare," "interpose" and "oft" makes the final line's medial caesura an almost unbearable interposition whose release is thrillingly modulated by the concluding double negative. The languages of discipline, liberty, and pleasure run together like *L'Allegro's* melting voice, until we cannot tell which is more difficult or more lovely. And the consummate judge who knows when to interpose those delights--and who knows how justly to make that "when" into "oft"--is, we may imagine Milton breathing with those blind eyes only half-closed, "not unwise." Not for the last time, Milton is the consummate poet of "sweet reluctant amorous delay." The critical controversy over what Milton means in the last two lines of this sonnet--not unlike the debate over the relationship of *L'Allegro* to *Il Penseroso* and the relationship of both to Milton's poetic career--is another eloquent proof of Milton's habit of weaving yearning tensions into his depictions of pleasure, making conflict, tension, and struggle into the stuff of rapture. This habit is part of the essence of Milton's

poetics of humanity.²³

As we can see, the serial critics' insistence that Milton celebrates but then abandons the mirth of *L'Allegro* for the prophetic career of *Il Penseroso* has the difficulty that Milton does not in fact reject those "unreproved pleasures free." If we turn from internal evidence to biography, moreover, we have the testimony of Edward Phillips that Milton would keep a "gawdy-day" every three weeks or so with "some young sparks of his acquaintance." Aubrey tells us Milton was a pleasant though "satirical" conversationalist, and that he "would

²³ For the controversy regarding "spare"--and the tonalities of Sonnets 20 and 21--see Edward S. LeComte, *Yet Once More: Verbal and Psychological Pattern in Milton* (1953; New York: AMS Press, 1969) 145-8. LeComte argues "spare" means "forbear," disputing Elizabeth Jackson (*PMLA*, LXV [1950] 328-29), Fraser Neiman ("Milton's Sonnet XX," *PMLA*, LXIV [1949] 480-483), and Northrop Frye (in his edition of *Paradise Lost and Selected Poetry and Prose* [New York, 1951] 584). Hughes cites Jackson and Neiman's opinion with approval, adding his own observation that reading "spare" as "afford" is "in harmony with the spirit of the sonnet and the O.E.D. definitions of the word..." (ed. Hughes 169 n.13). LeComte's argument that "spare temperance" is Milton's "constant message" is typical of many Miltonists, and a tenuous generalization, especially, as Jackson points out, when one considers Milton's enjoyment of music (Jackson 328, in LeComte 188-9 n.8).

be cheerful even in his gout fits, and sing."²⁴ (It is helpful to remember that Milton died of one of those gout fits. His singing was indeed an act of cheerful will.) As the closer analysis below will show, *L'Allegro* never left its place in this poet's heart or imagination.

Yet the alternative to a serial reading of the companion poems is in its way equally unsatisfying, for it removes the elements of contest and choice with which Milton frames *L'Allegro* and *Il Penseroso*. While the banishment of the "vain deluding joys" at the beginning of *Il Penseroso* may have struck Tillyard as less "burlesque" and thus more serious than the "bombast" at the outset of *L'Allegro*, it is still true that the banishments are exact formal parallels, one inescapably recalling the other. They drive each other out, a fact that makes any "victory" inconclusive, and any peaceful coexistence unlikely. Unfortunately, such a non-aggression pact between the companion poems is just what most complementarist critics explicitly or implicitly propose. We have already seen how Hanford dismisses the very possibility of struggle between these alternatives, and how Tuve insists there is

²⁴ For these early biographies of Milton, see ed. Hughes 1021-1044.

no choice to be made, or at least no fuss to be made about the choosing (even though *Il Penseroso* ends with the words "choose to live"). Another widespread complementarist reading is that the poems' beginnings reject not each other, but parodies of each other. Relying on Burton's *Anatomy of Melancholy*, especially "The Author's Abstract of Melancholy," these critics insist *L'Allegro* banishes *bad* melancholy, while *Il Penseroso* invokes *good* melancholy.²⁵ Thus the conflict between the companion poems is not only a mere show--it is, strictly speaking, not there at all, not even feigned. If shots are fired they are fired in the same direction, at versions of the same enemy.²⁶ In this humanist paradise, Milton the Puritan and Milton the Jonsonian and Milton the Italianate live a friction-less life together with the over-Milton supervis-

²⁵ *Variorum* 231-241. Woodhouse goes so far as to link specific lines from this "Author's Abstract" with both *L'Allegro* and *Il Penseroso*--sometimes confusingly so, as when he finds verbal parallels to *both* poems in Burton's initial praise of good melancholy (*Variorum* 232-3).

²⁶ Leonard Nathanson has noted one insuperable difficulty with this particular reading: no one has proposed "concomitant polarities for Mirth, which is seen in *L'Allegro* as the innocent spirit of delight and in *Il Penseroso* as pleasure judged to be empty and frivolous." See *Milton's English Poetry* 36. Kerrigan's warning in the *Sacred Complex* is also apposite here: see above.

ing and presenting little mock-conflicts to satisfy our hunger for drama. (The Athenian temptation in *Paradise Regained* is perhaps the supreme test of this view of Milton.)

Even Greg Zacharias, the complementarist critic whose reading is perhaps closest to my own, reduces his own "dramatistic" reading of *L'Allegro* and *Il Penseroso* (using a term he borrows from Kenneth Burke) to a smooth and relatively pallid homeostasis. Zacharias begins with the promising statement that "... in *L'Allegro* and *Il Penseroso* Milton is writing about his struggle to maintain a special internal order that would nourish both mind and body in order to support what the poet articulates later as the 'whole man.'²⁷ Later in his essay, however, the struggle between the companion poems has become "circular and complementary...." The image of the circle essentially removes *L'Allegro* and *Il Penseroso* from the arena of genuine dialectic--that is, where something is at stake, where the contraries are truly opposed. We are left, even in Zacharias' "dramatistic" reading (and here the coinage reveals what it lacks) with an object (the dramatistic circle) and not a process:

²⁷ Zacharias 6.

Together, then, the poems can be read as Milton's attempt as he begins his poetic career to express symbolically his strategy to control the full range of experience, from the sensuousness our parents enjoyed in Eden to the arduous task of trying to recover that individual Paradise which he, and we, take up daily.²⁸

Despite the insight into pre- and post-lapsarian existence Zacharias demonstrates in himself and his poet, the "strategy" of "control" leads us back to the Apollonian Milton, where complementary and serial critics of *L'Allegro* and *Il Penseroso* meet. Both schools see the companion poems as essentially presentational: they are alternatives (or apparent alternatives) Milton places before us and himself, as if in a glass case, from which he either chooses one (as the serialists believe) or of which he pronounces, God-like, "they are both good." The serialists find a personal drama of choice in the poems, but they slay the affable Milton in order to erect the "sublime" Milton. The complementarists, on the other hand, erase most or all of the tension between *L'Allegro* and *Il Penseroso* in their efforts to establish a balanced humanist Milton instead of a renunciatory Puritan Milton. In both serial and complementary readings, tension is

²⁸ Zacharias 10, 13.

finally eased, conflict ebbs, replaced by equilibrium--or our realization that there never was any conflict at all.

What if both readings are wrong--or both are right? What if *L'Allegro* and *Il Penseroso* represent Milton's first poetic experiment in the human dialectic I outlined in the preceding chapter? The companion poems seem to present us with an either-or as well as a both-and, choice as a lifelong culling and choice as a lifelong embracing. The very fact that the poems--and Milton's subsequent life and work--can support both readings tends to suggest a deeper, more difficult relationship than has heretofore been proposed. Milton's poetics of humanity is at work in *L'Allegro* and *Il Penseroso*, considered individually and as companions. The poems demonstrate the tension that informs the young Milton's life, the "young poet's developing vision of living."²⁹ Yet the demonstration is not, as Zacharias states, simply a means to an "artful strategy for living."³⁰ Milton does indeed decide he

²⁹ Zacharias 5.

³⁰ For Zacharias' "control" (in the passage quoted above) I would substitute "embrace"; I would replace "strategy" with the more Miltonic "resolve." See my discussion of Sonnet 21, above.

needs both Mirth and Melancholy, wants both Mirth and Melancholy (with all the desires that verb implies), in order to be a "whole man." Yet he also wants the debate to continue. The poems do not resolve. They do not form a circle. They continue. And there is an important part of Milton, a part immersed in the contrarities of the human condition, of the lives we all experience, that grows and glories in the struggle between *L'Allegro* and *Il Penseroso*. He finds in the music of their opposition a contrapuntal (point against point) harmony of Mirth and Melancholy, Liberty and Prophecy, erotic surrender and epiphanic deliquescence. Each pleasure is honed against the other. As the Milton of *Lycidas*, *Comus*, the divorce tracts, and the three great mature poems knew well, "without contrarities there is no progression."³¹ The

³¹ In his article exploring William Blake's illustrations for *L'Allegro* and *Il Penseroso*, Stephen Behrendt allows this knowledge to Blake while denying it to Milton:

Unlike the puritan moralist, Blake recognized that the world of Mirth and her companions is not wholly to be damned, regardless of its ties with Experience. 'Mirth,' in all its versions, depicts a 'State': one of the contrary states of the human soul; the other is embodied in 'Melancholy.' Despite all their individual limitations, both states are absolutely essential. Each has its damning and redeeming aspects, but it is only through the interaction of the two states within the imaginative consciousness of the individual that progress can take place, for 'Without Contraries is no progression.'

relationship Milton seeks to establish between *L'Allegro* and *Il Penseroso* is one of harmony, yes, but close harmony, a harmony in which dissonance is savored like consonance, in which, say, a "C^{13b7}" never becomes simply "Cmaj." Struggle and surrender are played against each other in each poem and in the relationship between the

Behrendt's thesis depends on Blake's perception outstripping Milton's, a thesis that leads him to conclude that *L'Allegro* and *Il Penseroso* are Milton's songs of Innocence and Experience, but not (as one might expect) with *L'Allegro* representing Innocence and *Il Penseroso* Experience. Behrendt argues that Blake (in a characteristic move) reads *L'Allegro* as a song of Experience and *Il Penseroso* as a song of "organized Innocence." It looks at first as if Behrendt argues for a complementarist reading, for Milton and Blake's Milton: Milton's progress, it turns out, results from his correct response to the dynamic tension between the contrary states he experiences, states that are not precise opposites but are, rather, 'contraries' in the Blakean sense.

Yet Behrendt's reading of Blake's reading of Milton eventually works toward the serialist reading I reject: the "progress" Milton makes is to renounce *L'Allegro* in favor of *Il Penseroso*, a renunciation (or "correct response") that thus eliminates a tension between, as Behrendt argues, fiction and truth. Blake, then, follows Milton's renunciation, although more wisely--he rejects the "stasis" and "conventionality" of Milton's mundane *L'Allegro* for the "prophetic strain" of *Il Penseroso*. Behrendt's Blake finally makes *L'Allegro* grotesque and nearly unrecognizable: "Blake says, in effect, that Milton's orthodox pronouncements concerning sensual enjoyment are finally as foolish as those of Solomon." See Stephen C. Behrendt, "Bright Pilgrimage: William Blake's Designs for *L'Allegro* and *Il Penseroso*," in *Milton Studies* 8: 123-147.

two, and the young, puissant Milton exults in the resulting play of contrarieties.

III. The Recovery of Opposition

How, then, are we to understand the particular relations between *L'Allegro* and *Il Penseroso*, and how are we to understand the companion poems' relation to Milton's mature work? We may begin our answer with a re-examination of *L'Allegro* that may show it to be a more worthy opponent of *Il Penseroso*, and thus more fully illuminate the nature and ends of their equivocal and complex relationship. We should pay particularly close attention to both poems' beginnings and conclusions, as well as their shared figure of Orpheus (one of Fish's most serious oversights), for these are instances where their formal and verbal resemblances are most pronounced, and where their adversarial alliance is most plainly visible.³² It

³² Christopher Grose notes that "Orpheus is mentioned precisely at the moment when Milton readmits to the poem the kind of difficulty which Fish believes to be excluded by the poem's subject...." See *Milton and the Sense of Tradition* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1988) 49.

is to the poems as read through their beginnings and endings that we now turn.

We have seen that there is an inescapable disjunction between *L'Allegro* and *Il Penseroso*; the poet insists they are in conflict. They also surrender to each other. We read *L'Allegro*, which banishes a foe we have not yet met; we move to *Il Penseroso*, which rejects its companion; we then read the poems again, linking them, severing them, watching them battle and yield to each other. Naming this process "circularity" presents it to our eyes alone. Let us call this struggle, surrender, and struggle, rather, *rhythm*, one very near the rhythm of erotic love, both in Paradise and out of it, as Gordon Braden and William Kerrigan have memorably demonstrated.³³ This rhythm beats within each poem and between them, in their relationship. Indeed, they are linked by an identical initial word--"hence"--that contains a suggestive surplus of meaning, what one might even call *différance*. "Hence," of course, means "go away, go hence"; in it a description of place (or time) is telescoped into an imperative. Intriguingly, the word also means "therefore, because of this," a

³³ See William Kerrigan and Gordon Braden, "Milton's Coy Eve: *Paradise Lost* and Renaissance Love Poetry," *ELH* 53, no. 1 (Spring, 1986) 38-50.

definition evoking distance and connection: in effect, a compact syllogism.³⁴ The "brotherly dissimilitudes" of each side of this primal word may not have escaped Milton's attention.

Indeed, if there is fruitful struggle and surrender between the poems, it is born of the analogous rhythms of contest within each poem. Such rhythms may seem hard to detect in an ostensibly light-hearted *L'Allegro*, where Mirth can appear (and sometimes is) uncomplicated. Yet there is a play of alternatives and dynamism of struggle within this most engaging poem that prepare the persona and the reader for the complexly blissful climax at its conclusion. The competing genealogies for Mirth are an early example of this dialectic. The Cambridge student two terms away from his M.A. (if we accept the poems' date as the summer of 1631--see *Variorum* 224-227) reports one traditional genealogy for Euphrosyne, combining Hesiod, Horace, annotations of Virgil, even contemporary dictionaries. Although naming Venus and Bacchus as the

³⁴ Granted, the tetrameter rush of context in each poem makes it unlikely any reader would mistake the "intended" meaning of disjunction for the "unintended" meaning of conjunction. Yet Milton's habit of using such surpluses of meaning, often across etymologies in several languages, should make us attentive to all the sparks that fly from the anvil of his language.

parents of Mirth was perhaps a little unusual, it was not without precedent, and it would seem an appropriate and sufficient story of Mirth's origins: she is the "offspring of Love and Wine...."³⁵ Milton, however, proposes another genealogy, one of his own invention, and thus engenders a conflict with the first:

Or whether (as some Sager sing)
The frolic Wind that breathes the Spring,
Zephyr with Aurora playing,
As he met her once a-Maying,
There on Beds of Violet blue,
And fresh-blown Roses washt in dew,
Filled her with thee a daughter fair,
So buxom, blithe, and debonair. (17-24)

Milton will not propose simply alternate genealogies. He will have tradition's, and his own, both fully present, both answering to the occasion, and in a fine bit of self-promotion, one preferred--his own, naturally. We may find in this early egotism an echo of Milton's haste to reach a Bethlehem manger before the Magi can arrive (*On the Morning of Christ's Nativity*, 24) as well as a portent of the complexly allusive vaunt of "... with no middle flight ...

³⁵ *Variorum* 274-5. Milton's Bacchus may represent more than just "wine": it is his followers, after all, who rend poor Orpheus' body and send him to the Elysium he reclines in (Ovid, *Metamorphoses*, 11.1-43). Similarly, Love rends Orpheus' heart, sends him on his famous quest, then rends his heart again. Venus and Bacchus are both Orpheus' undoing.

pursues / Things unattempted yet in Prose or Rhyme"

(*Paradise Lost* 1.13-15). The Lady of Christ's here becomes the Sage of Christ's, not unironically. His fellow students would no doubt have appreciated the humor.³⁶

It is also interesting that the conflict of myths Milton sets in motion moves in the direction of the erotic, as the implied kinship between Mirth, her sister Graces, and Cupid propels Milton's own genealogy toward the May-revels his nation's poets celebrated so often and memorably.³⁷ The West Wind and the Dawn lie together on a bed of flowers Milton will imagine again:

Thus talking hand in hand alone they pass'd
On to thir blissful Bower ...
... the roof
Of thickest covert was inwoven shade
Laurel and Myrtle ...
... each beauteous flow'r,

³⁶ In her essay "'L'Allegro' and 'Il Penseroso': Classical Tradition and Renaissance Mythography" (*PMLA* 101:3 [1986] 338-50), Stella Revard notes that Milton's alternative genealogies for Mirth and Melancholy make them sisters (344-5). Revard's argument that *L'Allegro* invokes a Grace and *Il Penseroso* invokes a Muse (implicitly, Urania) is learnedly made, but it brings Revard to the familiar (and contradictory, and dreary) conclusions that there is "no need to choose between the two, anymore than there is a need to favor the Muses above the Graces or vice versa.... the young Allegro may become the older Penseroso. It may well be that the young Milton, having in youth mused upon the Graces, aspired to be graced by the Muses in later years" (348).

³⁷ *Variorum* 274-5.

Iris all hues, *Roses*, and *Jessamin*
 Rear'd high their flourisht heads between,
 and wrought
 Mosaic; underfoot the *Violet*,
Crocus, and *Hyacinth* with rich inlay
 Broider'd the ground, more color'd than with
 stone
 Of costliest Emblem ...
 ... Here in close recess
 With *Flowers*, *Garlands*, and sweet-smelling *Herbs*
 Espoused *Eve* deckt first her Nuptial Bed....
 Here *Love* his golden shafts imployes, here lights
 His constant *Lamp*, and waves his purple wings,
 Reigns here and revels ...
 These lull'd by *Nightingales* imbracing slept,
 And on thir naked limbs the flow'ry roof
 Show'r'd *Roses*, which the Morn repair'd.
 (*Paradise Lost* 4.689-90, 692-4, 697-703,
 708-10, 763-5, 771-3)

And *Zephyr's* dalliance with *Aurora*, *Hughes* notes, is
 echoed in *Adam's* waking of *Eve* after her troubled night of
Satan-inspired dreams:

 ...then with voice
 Mild, as when *Zephyrus* on *Flora* breathes,
 Her hand soft touching, whisper'd thus.
 Awake ...
 (*Paradise Lost* 5.14-16)³⁸

In *L'Allegro*, as in *Paradise Lost*, *Milton* does not turn
 from the erotic with prim asceticism, nor does he turn
 toward it with prurience. He manages to combine all the
 energies of strong physical desire with a tenderness and

³⁸ ed. *Hughes* 302 n.16.

awe often missing from Renaissance love poetry, especially among the Cavaliers.³⁹

The early eroticism in *L'Allegro* should awaken us to the delights that follow, delights more intense, or more intensely imagined, than many readers acknowledge. The "unreproved pleasures free" are not all simple rural pastimes, as we shall see. Michael Fixler, for example, analyzes the "equivocation" inherent in *L'Allegro* and *Il Penseroso* as a "sustained atmosphere ... in which antithetical things are created full-blown, yet at every point held in abeyance as unreal."⁴⁰ Fixler goes on to describe "Renaissance Neo-Platonism" as a discourse in which "the possibilities of close-knit relationships between astrology, music, magic, spirit-theory, and the Orphic hymns were all taken seriously." His analysis of the companion poems, especially *L'Allegro*, asserts that this Renaissance Neo-Platonism persists in Milton's thought as he composes these poems, where it "is handled

³⁹ As James Nohrnberg notes (in private correspondence), the John Donne of such poems as "The Canonization" finds a quasi-sacramental quality in eros, one that may well have influenced Milton's "high valuation" of sexual love.

⁴⁰ Michael Fixler, "The Orphic Technique of *L'Allegro* and *Il Penseroso*," *ELR* 1 (1971) 165.

with an ambivalent playfulness."⁴¹ Part of Milton's playfulness, a *serio ludere* that draws us into what Fixler calls the poems' "copulative duality," is the splitting apart of Saturn and Venus, "the presiding powers of *L'Allegro* and *Il Penseroso*": by separating Saturn/Mind from Venus/Love, Milton concentrates on both the Orphic "tonalities" of each mythological figure and on "allegorical signals of the Orphic copulative relationship secretly governing their whole mutual interaction."⁴²

Fixler's argument regarding the *animus* and *anima* of the companion poems is provocative, but for my purposes his most important assertion is that there is what we might call a tense yet tender dalliance between the two poems which is mirrored in the pleasures and delights each describes. One of those delights is that of the "half-told tale." Of *Il Penseroso*'s "memorable allusion to the suspended enchantment of Chaucer's unfinished Squire's Tale," Fixler says

The notes sounded here are associated with the magical conquest of space of the knowledge of the secrets of men and nature, all of which, as Don Cameron Allen observed, are symbols of intellectual power. But even more potent as a symbol of intellectual power is the half-told

⁴¹ Fixler 168 n.4.

⁴² Fixler 177, 171.

story itself which the reader is reminded has never been resolved in his own mind by the harmonic closure of completion and which therefore remains a potentiality that seems to verge on completion as Milton's evocation arouses the latency of a responsive energy within him.

I see the half-told tale as a kind of model of how these poems work together and upon us, for the function of the irregularly disposed related set of images within both *L'Allegro* and *Il Penseroso* is to set up certain tensions, suggesting pervasive but elusive latencies of exact correspondences the mind is attracted to complete.⁴³

The copulative duality Fixler describes between the two poems is thus repeated between the poems and their readers. These companion poems are not merely "engaging," then, but seductive.

To what, however, do *L'Allegro* and *Il Penseroso* seduce the reader? Fixler concludes that they entice us to an heightened (if unconscious) sensitivity to "the totality of the effect upon us of the harmonic resolution his important poems always aim at."⁴⁴ "Harmonic resolution" seems not apposite to "copulative duality"; Fixler's conclusion seems at odds with his argument. He substitutes a figure of cadence (A-men) for a figure of

⁴³ Fixler 173-4. Fixler's reading of *L'Allegro* and *Il Penseroso* is unusually dynamic. Only words like "complete" and "exact" intrude a hint of stasis--see below.

⁴⁴ Fixler 176.

sensual engagement, even after insisting that the latter is the means whereby the poems are fruitful and multiply their being within our consciousness. The struggle to woo and practice love's arts is not a tidy one; few struggles are. Yet the impulse toward tidiness and order--itself often a struggle--continues to assert itself in such formulas as "harmonic resolution." Even critics like Fixler who are unusually sensitive to the rhythms and tensions of Milton's dialectics seem unable to savor the sharper, more bracing pleasures Milton's contrarieties offer without proposing a resolution Milton positively avoids. The poems aim not at harmonic resolution, but at *relationship*: free wills freely constrained and attracted by the freely chosen loves without which their wills are empty and self-devouring. The persona of *L'Allegro* chooses his loves; the poet imagines the persona's pleasures by having the persona imagine (and thereby demonstrate) his enjoyments. Similarly, the persona of *Il Penseroso* chooses, imagines, and demonstrates his loves. The poet who imagines these imaginings has both pleasures, savors both, and uses their mutual exclusiveness as a contrariety. Their opposition not only brings twin pleasures but the added, transcendent pleasure of their friction, a piquant competition at once erotic, ecstatic, and moral--moral, in that Milton's best

self knew that "reason also is choice," and choice is
choosing, and choosing is final only *sub specie*
aeternitatis, a perspective not even the angels enjoy:

The companion poems are distinguished by their
teasing welcome, modulating between levels of
reality and degrees of receptivity as though
their writer understood the insidious equi-
vocality that attends the proposals we make for
union.⁴⁵

⁴⁵ Thomas M. Greene, "The Meeting Soul in Milton's
Companion Poems," *ELR* (Spring 1984), 14 (2) 174.
Greene's perceptive and profound analysis of the com-
panion poems as "a long series of objective correla-
tives to a progressively emergent consciousness," a
"consciousness ... not general but special," is not far
from my own (and, for that matter, Zacharias' and even
Tuve's) sense of their relationship. Yet Greene's
essay concludes that "the mind's serial acts of percep-
tion are self-constitutive and self-identifying" in
these poems, an assertion which collapses object into
subject and, as Greene admits, finally cuts each poem's
persona loose from any external reality. (The soul
comes genuinely to "meet" less and less.) Greene is
also troubled by the excess of the companions' parallel
concluding promises: " ... what if this third presence
has promised too much? If both the goddesses were to
provide the pleasures he wants, he would be incapable
of responding equally to both; he could only choose one
of them." Here is "a certain degree of negativity; at
the very least one of the two sets of pleasures will
have to be foregone." At the very most, presumably,
one of the two sets of pleasures will have to be
denied. Instead of Greene's statement that *L'Allegro*
and *Il Penseroso*'s "meeting soul" is a "soul ... call-
ing itself into being by means of the controlled con-
junction," I would argue that this meeting soul strug-
gles its way into maturity (nothing in Milton's
universe is self-created apart from God) and a greater,
more rewarding complexity. See Greene 163, 172. (One
might also, perhaps puckishly, call the companion poems
an exercise in potential bigamy--a practice Milton
would not condemn: see *De Doctrina Christiana* in YE 6
355-68.)

It is the relentless sensual energy of *L'Allegro* that has suffered most from the critical impulse toward resolution. How else to explain Hughes' gloss of "buxom" (line 24) as "compliant and friendly" or Verity's as "lively, brisk"?⁴⁶ LeComte points out that Milton uses "buxom" in *Paradise Lost* to mean "yielding," which preserves the erotic tone established by "a-Maying" and continued by "wanton Wiles, / Nods, and Becks...."⁴⁷ Otherwise, the "unreproved pleasures free" lose any suggestion of danger (or *daungier*). Without this suggestion and its *frisson*, I am arguing, the poem's shifts from rural storytelling to intensely personal, even private pleasure do not cohere, and the relationship between *L'Allegro* and *Il Penseroso* cannot be understood fully. *L'Allegro* can be aggressive; its delights are not all a "Sunshine Holiday," although it includes those happy pleasures, too. *L'Allegro's* is

⁴⁶ Noted in *Variorum* 276.

⁴⁷ LeComte 106. Woodhouse (*Variorum* 277) insists of "wanton Wiles" that "Milton relies on the context to relieve both words of the tone of reprobation that often accompanied them: *wanton* here has no suggestion of the undisciplined, the rebellious, or the unchaste (*OED* 1 and 2); and *Wiles* no suggestion of deceit (*OED* 1 and 2) but merely of an innocent playful trick (*ibid.* 1c)."

"Sport that Wrinkled Care *derides* / And Laughter holding both his sides" (31-2, emphasis mine). Hyperbole, yes, but hyperbole with an edge of earnestness.

The persona's imagined day in *L'Allegro* is frequently not uncomplicated. He awakens early enough to hear the Lark first "startle the dull night" and then perform a similar office at his window, where the bird bids the persona "good-morrow." This greeting has a certain pathos, for it is "in spite of sorrow," opposing its adversary, just as Sport derided wrinkled Care. The dull night's oppression has ended; it is a victim at least in part of its own complacency which, when it is startled, leaves its forces in a disarray that allows "the Cock with lively din" (the bird that we might expect to waken the persona) to rout night's occupying troops as he "Scatters the rear of darkness thin." Milton's language here echoes another rout of darkness:

So when the Sun in bed,
Curtain'd with cloudy red,
Pillows his chin upon an Orient wave,
The flocking shadows pale
Troop to th'infernal jail;
Each fetter'd Ghost slips to his several
grave,
And the yellow-skirted Fays
Fly after the Night-steeds, leaving their
Moon-loved maze.
(*On the Morning of Christ's Nativity* 229-36)

Although Tillyard's assertion that *L'Allegro* praises the day and *Il Penseroso* praises the night is not finally sound, his observation suggests the truth that *L'Allegro's* day banishes the "dull night" it imagines *Il Penseroso* bringing.⁴⁸ Indeed, it is tempting to speculate that the early lines of both *L'Allegro* and *Il Penseroso* not only banish the other's presence but seek to clear the persona's head after a round of the "wrong" (i.e., opposing) pleasures.⁴⁹

⁴⁸ Nohrnberg aptly notes that "dull" often describes "melancholy" in the Renaissance (private correspondence).

⁴⁹ The famous controversy over *L'Allegro* 45-48 is summarized in *Variorum* 281-284 (Bush concludes, "Woodhouse ended his summary without taking sides. The case for *L'Allegro* may be thought much stronger than the case for the lark") and in Fish, "What It's Like" 77-83. I justify my reading (that it is the lark that comes to the window, and not *L'Allegro*) as follows: 1) The movement of lines 41-53 is of birdsong (or "lively din") banishing darkness and bringing the salutary day (good-morrow). Interrupting this movement to have *L'Allegro* go to the window to bid the lark (or some nameless entity) "good-morrow" makes the lines more desultory than the syntax is loose. 2) It is much more likely that the lark would sing its greeting while perched in a bush or on a vine (hence "Through the Sweet-Briar, or the Vine, / Or the twisted Eglantine") than that *L'Allegro* would be peering out his window through a mass of vegetation to greet the bird (or whomever). 3) Milton's sense can usually be construed--his early editors seem to have had no problem understanding "then to come" as referring to the lark (*Variorum* 281)--even when his syntax cannot be analyzed into "harmonic resolution." Miltonic intensity often overtakes Miltonic syntax, to which one may say he was not as careful as he might have been, or

The tonal complexity of *L'Allegro's* imagined activities is heightened as he begins to journey over Mirth's landscape. He walks through that landscape "not unseen," in sight, perhaps, but teasingly so, in contrast to *Il Penseroso's* unequivocal "walk unseen" (line 65). The Miltonic double negative sets up a tension between observation and detection, reinforcing the tension between imagination and participation that informs both poems.⁵⁰ With this tonal enrichment *L'Allegro's* imagination comes

that "the language sunk beneath him." 4) No one says that the Cock or his Dames are the ones "oft list'ning" to the "hounds and horn," another sound that wakes the day, although an argument at the level of syntax might be advanced for such a reading. No one says this because the best sense of the lines is that *L'Allegro* is the one listening, despite what Milton's syntax might appear to allow. Similarly, the best sense of lines 41-48 is that the lark, in a continuous motion, startles the dull night and then wishes *L'Allegro* good-morrow, whose attitude of *listening* persists through line 56, after which he is up and walking.

⁵⁰ See Herbert J. Phelan, "What is the Persona Doing in *L'Allegro* and *Il Penseroso*?" *Milton Studies* 22: 3-20. Phelan goes to great lengths (with varying success) to clarify the issue of who does what, and to whom, in *L'Allegro* and *Il Penseroso*, as well as what activities are imagined and what are "real," or at least real within the fiction. I am less confident than Phelan about our ability precisely to determine what each poem's persona "does" and what he simply "imagines" (Phelan, for example, maintains that the persona of *L'Allegro* is not "physically present" after line 82), but I am confident that the tension is one the poet feels and shares with his readers.

fully awake and the tempo accelerates. The "great Sun," the "Plowman," the "Milkmaid," the "Mower," "every Shepherd"--all present themselves immediately to the persona's imagination; their power lies not in a realistic "particularity," but in the way their appearance hastens and strengthens the persona's imaginative career:

"Straight mine eye hath caught new pleasures / Whilst the Landscape round it measures." As the persona takes the measure of the landscape--and his imagination--his sheer capacity for delight is increased, as well as his capacity for imagining and figuring that delight. We witness the education of a poet and the demonstration of his powers simultaneously, as they occur simultaneously in his imagination.⁵¹

Il Penseroso's invocation of melancholy is no less a *tour de force* of wish and fulfillment. And it, too, has a tonal complexity born of subtle, often playful tensions. Melancholy, like God's skirts in *Paradise Lost*, is "dark with excessive bright," a teasing paradox Milton extends even to Hell's inverted "darkness visible."⁵²

Hail Divinest Melancholy,

⁵¹ Grose (42-3) catches the *accelerando* here, and notes the increased emphasis on the persona as *maker*.

⁵² *Variorum* 331.

Whose Saintly visage is too bright
To hit the Sense of human sight;
And therefore to our weaker view,
O'erlaid with black, staid Wisdom's hue.
(*Il Penseroso* 12-16)

Then Melancholy's genealogy, like Mirth's, deepens the poem's implications. Milton does not propose alternative genealogies here, but instead puns on Melancholy's complexion and the very concept of genealogy. Melancholy only looks black "to our weaker view," the poet asserts, but there is virtue in that necessity:

Black, but such as in esteem,
Prince *Memnon's* sister might beseem,
Or that Starr'd *Ethiop* Queen that strove
To set her beauty's praise above
The Sea Nymphs, and their powers offended.
(*Il Penseroso* 17-21)

The defense of black beauty includes two instances, with the latter involving a boasting match subtly recalling the "some Sager sing" of *L'Allegro's* nonce (and preferred) genealogy of Mirth.

The parallel continues with *Il Penseroso's* next line, as well: "Yet thou art higher far descended" (l. 22).

In *L'Allegro* alternative descents are offered for Mirth, the second being preferred.... Here ... only one descent is given but a comparison is retained through that descent's being *higher* far than that of the figures previously mentioned.⁵³

⁵³ *Variorum* 313.

This implicit contest, with its victor announced by "yet," is even more complex than this. The competition is about as oblique as it could be, for it is between apparent blackness that is nevertheless capable of beauty and Melancholy's genuine lineage. There is almost a sportive note in the way Milton covers all the bases here, a note accented by the near-oxymoron of "higher far descended": the elided "from" leaves the reader (and, perhaps, Melancholy) no choice but to travel from heaven to earth in a dizzying few syllables, a pace far more rapid than Milton urges upon the goddess a few lines later.

For just as in *L'Allegro*, the poet's invocation is in fact an incantation that both summons and controls the deity. The second "come" (line 37) is followed by an imperative: "but keep thy wonted state," as if Melancholy might forget herself and hasten to arrive at the poet's bidding, thereby robbing him of the measured pleasure ("ev'n step, and musing gait") he desires. There is a sense of impulse checked here, in contrast to the apparent caprice of "Haste thee, nymph, and bring with thee / Jest and youthful Jollity" (*L'Allegro*, 25-6). Even the impulse to silence is immediately qualified:

And the mute Silence hist along,
 'Less *Philomel* will deign a Song,
 In her sweetest, saddest plight....
 Sweet Bird that shunn'st the noise of folly,
 Most musical, most melancholy!

Thee Chantress oft the Woods among,
 I woo to hear thy Even-Song....
 (*Il Penseroso* 55-7, 61-4)⁵⁴

Contemplation yields to the pleasures of music, and a doubling occurs within the poem's progress. The poet's invocation of Melancholy is joined by the nightingale's "Even-Song," a chant that draws the poet into the woods that hide the bird and this new suitor who, unlike the rapacious one, must "woo" her.⁵⁵ The persona's suit, in turn, parallels his wooing of Melancholy--interestingly, the goddess is not directly addressed again until line 104. As the nightingale's song pierces the "mute silence" of contemplation's companion, the persona's invocation of Melancholy merges with that song into the larger song of

⁵⁴ *Variorum* (320) notes that "plight" may, in addition to its primary meaning of sadness (occasioned in this instance by the barbarous rape and mutilation that lead to Philomela's metamorphosis into the nightingale), carry a secondary meaning of "braid," referring here to the winding melody of the nightingale's song. This secondary meaning, if it exists here, would of course recall the "many a winding bout" of Lydian airs in *L'Allegro*. "Folly" too may have a sub-text: Erasmus names Hedone (Pleasure), Comos (Rowdiness), and Negreton Hypnon (Sweet Sleep) as "attendants" of Folly. See *The Praise of Folly*, trans. Clarence Miller (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1979) 17. I would like to thank Professor James Nohrnberg for alerting me to this possibility.

⁵⁵ There may be dissonance in this music, a slight discord formed from "the ambivalence of forbidden pleasure"--see LeComte 63.

the poem itself. Once again desire and performance are united. Invocation and manifestation, imagination and incarnation, become one.

It is every poet's fantasy. Yet Milton, for whom this fantasy was especially strong, delays each poem's consummation. The delay is felt most keenly and deliciously in *L'Allegro*. In this poem, Milton maintains and increases the tension between invocation and manifestation, between imagination, observation, and participation, even as the persona moves from delight to delight. The dynamism of this delight builds by means of subtle equivocation in the imagined pleasures. The lady lies in the tower, "perhaps" (line 79). Ironically, if she is there, she is a fixed star, the pole star, something for the (presumably) peasant neighbors to steer desire by. This erotic suggestion is deepened by the location of her tower, "Bosom'd high in tufted Trees."⁵⁶ The Lady's nature and power are not in doubt, merely--and somewhat uneasily--her presence. Her courtly allure juxtaposes sharply ("hard by") with the pleasant rural cottage, but

⁵⁶ Brooks and Hardy note that "Bosom'd" is "almost shockingly unascetic (Brooks and Hardy 137), although they do not comment on the suggestive anatomy of "tufted Trees."

the pull of her attraction may be felt in the poem's sudden shift backwards in time to an "earlier season." The "or" that introduces lines 89-116 parallels the "perhaps" of line 79; both are early instances of Milton's poetical habit of multiplying alternatives, a habit seen to greatest effect in *Paradise Lost*. Here the season and Phyllis' task are uncertain: is it time for harvest, or for prolonged cultivation? (It is precisely this uncertainty, of course, that Milton returns to in *Lycidas*.) Both are pleasures, even related pleasures, but distinguishing between them--or, as here, entertaining both *in potentia*--compounds the complexity of tone in *L'Allegro*. "Secure delight" is modified by "sometimes," and the "sunshine holiday" finds young men and women "Dancing in the Checker'd shade," both in and out of the light.⁵⁷ The happiness these lines narrate is complex,

⁵⁷ The Shakespearian parallel adduced by Richardson (*Variorum*, p. 293) is hardly less ambivalent, perhaps more so. The lines come from a speech by Queen Tamora to her beloved Aaron, an exchange whose fascinating resemblances to *L'Allegro* and *Il Penseroso* make it worth quoting in full:

Tam. My lovely Aaron, wherefore look'st thou
sad,
When every thing doth make a gleeful boast?
The birds chaunt melody on every bush,
The [snake] lies rolled in the cheerful sun,
The green leaves quiver with the cooling wind
And make a checker'd shadow on the ground.
Under their sweet shade, Aaron, let us sit,
And whilst the babbling echo mocks the

and not without pain.⁵⁸ The woman who tells of Faery

hounds,
 Replying shrilly to the well-tun'd horns,
 As if a double hunt were heard at once,
 Let us sit down and mark their yellowing
 noise;
 And after conflict such as was suppos'd
 The wand'ring prince and Dido once enjoyed,
 When with a happy storm they were surpris'd,
 And curtain'd with a counsel-keeping cave,
 We may, each wreathed in the other's arms
 (Our pastimes done), possess a golden
 slumber,
 Whiles hounds and horns and sweet melodious
 birds
 Be unto us as is a nurse's song
 Of lullaby to bring her babe asleep.
 Aar. Madam, though Venus govern your
 desires,
 Saturn is dominator over mine:
 What signifies my deadly-standing eye,
 My silence, an' my cloudy melancholy,
 My fleece of woolly hair that now uncurls,
 Even as an adder when she doth unroll
 To do some fatal execution?

(*Titus Andronicus* II, iii, 11-36. All quotations from Shakespeare are from *The Riverside Shakespeare*, ed. G. Blakemore Evans et al. [Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1974].)

The dialectic of Saturn and Venus is a striking, if disturbing, parallel (given the play's murderous bent), as are the birds (here lullabies instead of wakening sounds), hounds, horns, "double hunt," and "happy storm" that occasions the erotic "conflict" in the Virgilian allusion in Tamora's speech. These verbal and thematic parallels between *L'Allegro* and *Titus Andronicus* may indicate that the tension I detect within and between Milton's companion poems has, at least in part, a dramatic source. When Milton calls Shakespeare "fancy's child" and praises his "native Wood-notes wild," he may be meaning more than meets the ear, or eye.

⁵⁸ Although I am arguing that an odd sense of unease worms its way into *L'Allegro*'s world of Mirth, I would not go so far as Don Cameron Allen, who reads in

Mab's thefts from the dairy recalls the pinching and pulling she endured. The "Friar's Lantern" (followed by a "she" in 1645, by a "he" in 1673) is the will-o-the-wisp that leads travelers astray, here into a vision of the Puck-like prankster/worker/fiend whose beneficence is rather violently friendly. The pun on "crop" (stomach and vegetation) in "Crop-full out of doors he flings" suggests Robin's wages may have been more than a simple bowl of cream: he may in fact have eaten a fair amount of the corn he threshed. Making and taking here have a slightly sinister kinship, not unlike the affectionate terror Robin Goodfellow could inspire.⁵⁹

Even the shift from rural tale-telling to courtly intercourse does not simplify the tone. The fictive interlude of Faery Mab and Robin Goodfellow ends in a sleep that may envelop the persona as well. The "pomp, and feast, and revelry" of lines 117-130 are introduced

lines 73-4 a description of clouds that "writhe in agony on the summits of the sterile mountains." I do agree that "barren breast" and "labouring ... rest" are examples of the paradoxical or near-oxymoronic element in the poems. See Allen 5-8, 9, and ff.

⁵⁹ Robin's equivocal nature is discussed in *Variorum* 297-98.

with a "then" (line 117) whose antecedent seems to be the slumber of the rural storytellers. The vision that follows closes with another evocation of sleep: "Such sights as youthful Poets dream / On Summer eves by haunted stream" (129-130). The ladies whose "bright eyes / Rain influence" in the contest of wit and arms thus become, in their astronomical/astrological aspect ("influence" here is a Miltonic allusion to the planets' occult power over human affairs), suggestively apposite to the fairies and goblins of the preceding section, and prepare us for the fictional world of the stage that follows (131-134).⁶⁰

The daemonic/courtly/dramatic/poetic reverie the persona has described and experienced in lines 99-134 leads

⁶⁰ C. S. Lewis, among others, notes that "influence" is a more powerful, even troubling word in Milton's era than in our own:

The word *influence* in its modern sense ... is as grey an abstraction as the whole range of our language affords. We must take great care not to read this, the word's withered senility, back into its use by older poets where it is still a fully conscious metaphor from astrology. The ladies in *L'Allegro* (121) 'whose bright eyes Rain influence' are being compared with the planets. When Adam says to Eve

I from the influence of thy lookes receive
Access in every virtue. (*Paradise Lost* 9.309)
he is saying far more than a modern reader might suppose. He is making himself an Earth, and her a Jove or Venus.

See *The Discarded Image* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1964) 110-111.

to the poem's climactic moment in lines 135-150. The mystical and erotic content of this musical encounter is the heart of *L'Allegro's* desire, as well as an important precursor of the mature Milton's Edenic desire. Here Milton concentrates the whole gamut of solitary and social pleasures in the poem into a single ecstatic moment of intercourse whose seriousness may be measured by its Orphic power and by its echoes that persist into *Paradise Lost*.⁶¹

Il Penseroso's goal of "something like Prophetic strain" has tended to obscure the no less urgent desire present at the end of *L'Allegro*. The imperative "Lap me" recalls the direct invocations of Mirth that begin the poem, and quickens its emotional intensity. Moreover, the imperative mood is sharpened by its occasion: its inspiration is the thought of "eating cares," a formula

⁶¹ Tellingly, it is this very moment in *L'Allegro* that Fish (in "What It's Like") must ignore in his argument that the poem makes no demands upon the reader. In "Milton's *L'Allegro* and *Il Penseroso*" (*The Explicator*, Vol. VIII, No. 7, May, 1950, No. 49) Kester Svendsen argues that the "dynamics of the twin poem ... derive ... from the progressive emphasis in both parts on images of sound and music." Svendsen's analysis is less perceptive about *L'Allegro* than about *Il Penseroso*, but its emphasis on the dynamic musical energy at the heart of both is important, and overlooked.

which may foreshadow the "eating Death" of *Paradise Lost* 9.792. Interestingly, just as a marriage figures in the latter instance, so it does in the former. The "soft *Lydian* Airs" are married to "immortal verse," a union not much less important for Milton than that of our grand parents'.⁶² And of course "immortal verse" is exactly the kind Milton hoped to write, as we read in another marriage-account: "by labor and intense study ... joined with the strong propensity of nature, I might perhaps leave something so written to aftertimes, as they should not willingly let it die."⁶³ Now, as the *Lydian* airs

⁶² See also "At A Solemn Musick," where Milton calls on the "Sphere-born harmonious Sisters, Voice and Verse" to "Wed your divine sounds, and mixt power employ / Dead things with inbreath'd sense able to pierce" (2-4). Janet Halley, in "Female Autonomy in Milton's Sexual Poetics" (in *Milton and the Idea of Woman*), makes the interesting assertion that these Sirens, whose song destroys its hearers, exercise a malign influence upon the poet: "The suggestion of their erotic power over the poet implies an association of the power of language and female sexual power to deflect the male poet from his own course" (237). I am arguing just the opposite, that the erotic power of such a siren concert, while indeed a "mixt power" and not without its hazards (and certainly occasioning conflict in the mind of the poet), can strengthen and deepen the poet's course, to the point of granting him quasi-magical powers that outstrip even Orpheus'.

⁶³ *The Reason of Church Government*, ed. Hughes 668. Interestingly, Milton believes music may be immortal too: see Sonnet 20, line 12. Milton's musical humanism appears to go against the majority opinion, which held that "the text was much more important than the music" (D. P. Walker, *Spiritual and*

unite with the immortal verse, another union takes place, one of the more explicitly sexual in Milton's poetry. Here the poet's "strong propensity of nature" emerges in what Michael Fixler calls "a music ... uncomplicating and unravelling the secret essence of its copulative duality in a bliss of candid self-revelation":⁶⁴

And ever against eating Cares,
Lap me in soft *Lydian* Airs,
Married to immortal verse,
Such as the meeting soul may pierce
In notes, with many a winding bout
Of linked sweetness long drawn out,
With wanton heed, and giddy cunning,
The melting voice through mazes running;
Untwisting all the chains that tie
The hidden soul of harmony....

(*L'Allegro* 135-143)⁶⁵

Fixler notes that the "passively savored 'sweet music' of *Il Penseroso* lines 139-154 "subtly matches the awakening, more erotic music" of this passage from *L'Allegro*, and

Demonic Magic 20-21). Perhaps Milton was right: one notes with interest that some of John Milton, Sr.'s music is still sung today.

⁶⁴ Fixler 177.

⁶⁵ Revard, "Renaissance Mythography," asserts that the poet ("me") wants to be married to immortal verse, a reading that helps support her thesis that the companion poems are in some sense "about" poetic vocation (340, 347). Nevertheless, the context surrounding line 136 unambiguously renders "married to immortal verse" apposite to "soft *Lydian* airs," not "me"; Revard's reading is in fact a misreading.

goes on to point out the power that can "arouse Orpheus himself in Elysium."⁶⁶ The "meeting soul" is the persona's, whose receptive spirit is *pierced* "in notes," a "resonant figure of the highest natural joy in the ecstatic experience of music...."⁶⁷

⁶⁶ Fixler 171 n.7. "Arouse" is suggestive in this context, as is "highest natural joy." Mary Nyquist explores Milton's etymological possibilities for "lap" in her essay "Textual Overlapping and Dalilah's Harlot Lap," *Literary Theory/Renaissance Texts*, ed. Patricia Parker and David Quint (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1986) 352-3: "... in Renaissance England, the substantive 'lap' may have had a more explicitly sexual connotation than we now suppose, one of the obsolete meanings of 'lap' cited by the O.E.D. being the female pudendum.... Not unrelated ... are the lines ... from Milton's *L'Allegro* (135-36)."

⁶⁷ Fixler 176-77. Interestingly, Fish ("What It's Like," p. 86) complains that the apparent energy of "pierce" is deflected by the anticlimactic "in notes." Why Fish thinks *L'Allegro's* ravishing music should be less ecstatic or penetrative than the notes of choir and organ at the end of *Il Penseroso* is not clear. Christopher Grose also finds *L'Allegro's* encounter between music and listener unsatisfying, though for a different reason: "The music will have to pierce the soul in notes, but it can happen only if that soul is, literally, cooperative; the union cannot occur now, Milton suggests, unless it has somehow happened in advance--why pierce a soul that is well-met already?" (47). For the poem's evocations of experience and encounter, Grose substitutes a *fait accompli* and inexplicably turns the "meeting soul" into a "well-met" soul, an odd maneuver indeed, not unlike Greene's "meeting soul" that calls itself into being, finally meeting only itself.

There is also a forbidden, even occult aspect to this music that parallels the Neoplatonic daemonology of *Il Penseroso*, especially the nocturnal, almost Faustian requests of lines 85-120, as well as the mysterious music "Sent by some spirit to mortals good" of lines 151-3.⁶⁸ The airs are *Lydian*, a mode that Plato (and other musical theoreticians) condemned as "morally enervating."⁶⁹ While Cassiodorus' approval of the Lydian mode as "being invented against excessive cares and worries" is usually adduced as a source for *L'Allegro*'s endorsement of the mode, it is nevertheless virtually certain that Milton would have known of the Lydian mode's at best equivocal reputation, and may in fact use it here as another boldly engaged conflict between contrary values. Louis Martz makes just this point: "Milton subtly recalls the condemnation, while seeming to ignore it ... the words 'wanton,' 'giddy,' and 'melting' recall [Plato's condemna-

⁶⁸ Cf. Ficino's "music-spirit" theories, which D. P. Walker explores in *Spiritual and Demonic Magic* 3-24.

⁶⁹ ed. Hughes 71 n.133-144, and *Variorum* 304-305. Analogously, Ficino characterizes Venus' "mode" as "music which is voluptuous with wantonness and softness" (quoted in D. P. Walker, *Spiritual and Demonic Magic* 17-18).

tion in] the *Republic*."⁷⁰

The words that recall Plato look forward, as well. "Linked sweetness long drawn out" is not only another version of Milton's ideal poetry (as in "the sense variously drawn out from one Verse into another," the description of *Paradise Lost*'s "true musical delight" that Milton offers in the epic's preface regarding "The Verse"), it is a just description of Adam and Eve's sexual relationship within the Garden:

A naked man and woman arise in the morning,
intermix the duties of the day with flirtatious
venery, then consummate their love at night with
a real capture, a real yielding, and go to
sleep. This is paradise.⁷¹ 22

The unity of Milton's imagination over time is always striking, but especially when one juxtaposes these two passages, early and late

With wanton heed, and giddy cunning,
The melting voice through mazes running....
(*L'Allegro* 141-2)

Yielded with coy submission, modest pride,
And sweet reluctant amorous delay.
(*Paradise Lost* 4.310-11)

⁷⁰ Martz, *Poet of Exile* 49. Martz believes Milton means the condemnation to overrule the pleasure; I believe Milton takes on both conditions.

⁷¹ Kerrigan and Braden, *Idea* 205.

Milton's imagination of intensity, extremity, or mystery consistently turns to such oxymorons for its expression.⁷² Only the sharp tug of these apparent opposites (we might say, yoked by violence together) can evoke the friction of relationship, the piercing meeting, which is one of Milton's highest imaginable pleasures, and at the heart of his poetics of humanity.

And *L'Allegro's* version of this pleasure is indeed flush with the sensuousness of Eden.⁷³ The "melting voice" the persona hears is a vital, Adamic fluid, but it is also the exotic, wanton, enticingly serpentine tresses of Eve: those "winding bouts" of music curl and re-curl like Eve's hair.

She as a veil down to the slender waist
Her unadorned golden tresses wore
Dishevell'd, but in wanton ringlets wav'd
As the Vine curls her tendrils....
(*Paradise Lost* 4.304-7)

The erotic pull of *L'Allegro's* musical climax is not only more aesthetically intense than most commentators have realized (Fixler is the greatest exception here), it is

⁷² In his analysis of *Areopagitica*, Edward Tayler notes Milton's "eloquent cataracts of mixed metaphors" (196-6).

⁷³ Zacharias 13.

also more loving, and a worthy precursor of the sexual energy between our grand parents in the Garden.⁷⁴

The notion that such an intense energy can be contained (or released, or both) within the experience of music finds a remarkably apposite expression in Roland Barthes' essay "The Grain of the Voice," which is worth quoting at length to underscore the importance of this moment in *L'Allegro*:

The 'grain' is the body in the voice as it sings, the hand as it writes, the limb as it performs.... I am determined to listen to my relation with the body of the man or woman singing or playing and that relation is erotic.... I can hear with certainty--the certainty of the body, of thrill--that the harpsichord playing of Wanda Landowska comes from her inner body and not from the petty digital scramble of so many harpsichordists (so much so that it is a different instrument). As for piano music, I know at once which part of the body is playing--if it is the arm, too often, alas, muscled like a dancer's calves, the clutch of the finger-tips (despite the sweeping flourishes of the wrists), or if on the contrary it is the only erotic part of a pianist's body, the pad of the fingers whose 'grain' is so rarely heard....⁷⁵

⁷⁴ Nathanson praises *L'Allegro*'s music as a kind whose "peculiar power is truly to liberate us from care, and hence even from restless pursuit of further delight ... its re-creative power ... exceeds that of Orpheus..." (40-1).

⁷⁵ Roland Barthes, "The Grain of the Voice," *Image--Music--Text: Essays selected and translated by Stephen Heath* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1977) 188-9.

In the same essay, Barthes describes a singer whose performance sounds "as though a single skin lined the inner flesh of [him] and the music he sings...."⁷⁶ Such a singer serenades the persona of *L'Allegro*: she (let us say) unites him to the music even as she (in a close anagram) unties the "hidden soul of harmony."⁷⁷

⁷⁶ Barthes 182.

⁷⁷ The specific form of this music is a subject of some critical speculation, much of which is summarized in *Variorum* 306-7. I find Nan Carpenter's conjecture that Milton may "refer to the English lute song, or air," much more persuasive than Hanford and Roberts' idea that a madrigal is meant. In the lute song melody and poetry are married by one voice singing to the accompaniment of a single lute, a more intimate arrangement than in the multi-voiced madrigal. The poem's singular "melting voice" increases the likelihood that the music here is a lute song, as does the prominent figure of Orpheus, who sang to the accompaniment of his lyre. In addition, in late 16th- and early 17th-century England, musical "ayres" (or "Aires," in Milton's spelling) meant primarily "lute songs." (I am relying here on the edition of Milton's poems prepared by H. C. Beeching [Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1921], which preserves the spelling of the earliest printed editions.) Interestingly, a secondary meaning of "ayres" (found in contemporary practical music handbooks) was "key or mode," a genus of which the Lydian was a species. One may also note that these lute songs include many varieties of both erotic celebration and erotic complaint. See Willi Apel, ed., *Harvard Dictionary of Music*, 2nd ed. (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1974) 66-7. Another candidate for this music might be William Byrd's happily-named consort songs, which were "conceived for a single singer (or sometimes two), whose relatively simple melodies are contrasted with a complex contrapuntal web of melodic lines originally intended to be played by a consort [band] of viols...." See Howard M. Brown, *The Music of the Renaissance* (New

The pleasures of voice and verse can be found even in
Milton's Hell:

Others more mild,
Retreated in a silent valley, sing
With notes Angelical to many a Harp....
Thir Song was partial, but the harmony
(What could it less when Spirits immortal sing?)
Suspended Hell, and took with ravishment
The thronging audience.
(*Paradise Lost* 2.546-48, 551-55)

The word "suspended" has here, in addition to its
psychological force, its musical meaning as well: notes
held in dissonant opposition, tending to resolution, but
heard meanwhile as a piquant harmony. The ravishment such
musical suspensions cause the milder devils is itself felt
as a suspension within Hell, as this pleasure, for a

Jersey: Prentice-Hall, Inc., 1976) 329-32. Finally,
one may note two other apposite instances where Milton
writes of "aires." His Sonnet 13 is addressed "To Mr.
H. Lawes, on his Aires," and compliments his "tuneful
and well-measured song ... That with smooth aire
couldst best humor our tongue" (1, 8, ed. Beeching).
(Some of these airs, of course, were settings of
Milton's own verse in *A Mask*.) And Sonnet 20, dis-
cussed above, includes in its catalog of pleasures "To
hear the Lute well toucht, or artful voice / Warble
immortal Notes and Tuscan Ayre..." (11-12, ed. Beech-
ing). Other Miltonic references to "aire" and "aires"
are tabulated in William Ingram and Kathleen Swaim,
ed., *A Concordance to Milton's English Poetry* (Oxford:
Clarendon Press, 1972) 10-11. Cf. also *On the Morning
of Christ's Nativity*, IX-XIV, where both voice with
stringed accompaniment and choir with organ accompani-
ment sound.

moment, makes a Heaven of Hell. Milton repeats this moment in Book 9 when Satan beholds Eve at work, just before he tempts her. Here the song is ravishing without harmony; as Milton punningly elaborates, Eve a *capella* is enough to suspend Hell:

Her graceful Innocence, her every Aire
Of gesture or lest action overawd
His Malice, and with rapine sweet bereav'd
His fierceness of the fierce intent it brought:
That space the Evil one abstracted stood
From his own evil, and for the time remaind
Stupidly good....

(*Paradise Lost* 9.458-465)⁷⁸

⁷⁸ ed. Beeching. The pun on "aire" seems doubly likely in that this is its second appearance in *Paradise*: Book 4 describes it as a place where "The Birds thir quire apply; aires, vernal aires, / Breathing the smell of field and grove, attune / The trembling leaves..." (264-6, ed. Beeching). (See William Empson, "Milton and Bentley: The Pastoral of the Innocence of Man and Nature," in Louis L. Martz, ed., *Milton: A Collection of Critical Essays* [New Jersey: Prentice-Hall, Inc., 1966] 22-23, and John Milton, *Paradise Lost*, ed. Alastair Fowler [London: Longman Press, 1971] 209-10. This edition of *Paradise Lost* will hereafter be cited simply as "ed. Fowler.") One may also note that Comus, Milton's proto-Satan, is ravished by the Lady's echo-song, which he proclaims superior to the maddening beauty of siren-song: "Sure something holy lodges in that breast, / And with these raptures moves the vocal air / To testify his hidd'n residence" (*A Mask*, 246-8). While it is true that Milton does not always mean music when he writes "air" or even "aire," it is also true that the spelling, the context, Milton's habit of punning, and the fact of his musical training and responsiveness should combine to keep us alert to the possibilities of such musical references and implications.

Satan wonders "with what sweet / Compulsion thus transported" he has come to this extremity (9.473-4).⁷⁹ In *Arcades*, Milton writes that "Such sweet compulsion doth in music lie / To lull the daughters of *Necessity*" (68-9). To which we might add, returning to Satan's case, "So spake the Fiend, and with necessity, / The Tyrant's plea, excus'd his devilish deeds" (*Paradise Lost* 4.393-4).

The Edenic parallel between *L'Allegro* and *Paradise Lost* continues into the appearance of Orpheus at *L'Allegro's* end. The music the persona imagines Mirth can lead him to is superior to Orpheus'; like Milton's verse, it will endure no middle flight. Even more striking than the bested Orpheus, however, is Milton's Eurydice. Eurydice's death is caused by a snake-bite, as is, metaphorically, Eve's. In both instances a marriage is interrupted, at least temporarily.⁸⁰ Yet the figure of Eurydice in this context suggests another analogue to Eve.

⁷⁹ Nohrnberg makes the provocative observation that to imagine Eve singing at this moment is to imagine her *expressing her freedom* (private correspondence). For Milton, music's force is liberating: reason (and choice) made audibly and urgently beautiful.

⁸⁰ "The detail reminds us that the final segment of the poem involves in some definite sense a partitioning, beginning with marriage unconsummated and ending with marriage dissolved." See Grose 47-48.

Christopher Grose observes that *L'Allegro's* "half-regained *Eurydice*" has "clear affiliations" with Proserpina.⁸¹ Indeed, it is unclear in what sense Eurydice is "half-regained": although her freedom depends upon Orpheus' self-discipline, it is not otherwise conditional. If she is restored, she will be wholly restored. Conversely, her heartbreaking disappearance when Orpheus turns around makes any notion of "half-regained" specious: she was not regained at all. *Proserpina* is the woman Pluto half sets free; indeed, Ovid tells us (*Metamorphoses* X 13-39) that Orpheus pleads his case to Pluto and Proserpina, appealing to them to consider their own love as they judge his request. Milton's suggestive conflation of Eurydice with Proserpina here is another implicit link to Eve, whose first appearance in *Paradise Lost* follows a comparison between Paradise and

that fair field
Of *Enna*, where *Proserpin* gath'ring flow'rs
Herself a fairer Flow'r by gloomy *Dis*
Was gather'd, which cost *Ceres* all that pain
To seek her through the world....
(*Paradise Lost* 4.268-72)

As this passage anticipates, Eve will herself be gathered by another emissary from Hell in Book 9.

⁸¹ Grose 65-6.

Orpheus' appearance in *Il Penseroso* is less suggestive: he is one of a series of unsphered souls the persona wishes to perform for him (not unlike the pageants in Marlowe's *Doctor Faustus* IV.ii.1-70 and V.i.89-117). Yet it too is oddly equivocal. The Orpheus of *Il Penseroso*, like its Philomel, is to sing a song both beautiful and desperate. Orpheus' despair, however, is elided here:

Or bid the soul of Orpheus sing
Such notes as, warbled to the string,
Drew Iron tears down Pluto's cheek,
And made Hell grant what Love did seek.
(*Il Penseroso* 105-8)

One might expect the pathos of "half-regained Eurydice" to be part of the pensive man's cultivation of Melancholy, especially given the "sweetest, saddest plight" he recognizes in the nightingale's song. That our expectations are frustrated in this way is further evidence of Milton's care to mix elements of each poem's mode within the other.

There is also a parallel instance of what we might call musical intercourse in *Il Penseroso* whose tone matches certain elements of the musical climax of *L'Allegro*. Here, however, instead of the urgent consummation and vision of *L'Allegro*, there is the soft, voluptuous, sensuous, yet almost enervated reverie Plato supposed Lydian airs would produce:

While the Bee with Honied thigh,
That at her flow'ry work doth sing,
And the Waters murmuring

With such consort as they keep,
Entice the dewy-feather'd Sleep;
And let some strange mysterious dream
Wave at his Wings in Airy stream,
Of lively portraiture display'd,
Softly on my eyelids laid,
And as I wake, sweet music breath
Above, about, or underneath,
Sent by some spirit to mortals good,
Or th'unseen Genius of the Wood.

(*Il Penseroso* 142-54)

The buzzing bee's "honied thigh" pollinating the flowers, along with the waters and "such consort as they keep" (with Milton punning on "consort" as mate and "consort" as musical ensemble), "entice" sleep; the "strange mysterious dream," though it may be vivid, rests ever so gently on the persona's eyelids. Waking and sleeping, dream and reality become almost identical and identically pleasurable as that "sweet music" breathes "above, about, or underneath" the persona, a music so enchanting its source is nearly irrelevant. It could be some benign spirit, it could be a more specific *Waldgeist*. It doesn't much matter. Perhaps the abrupt "But" of line 155 and the sudden irruption of Christianity and the musical climax it occasions signifies the persona's recognition of the potentially dangerous languor that has fallen upon him, a languor quite unexpected within the prevailing asceticism and severity of the pensive man's experience. Just so,

the sensuous and mirthful *L'Allegro* has its own seriousness, discipline, and visionary rewards.⁸²

IV. The Music of Opposition

Far from writing *L'Allegro* as an *ave atque vale*, then, Milton composes a serious, even ecstatic meditation on the kind of happiness he never forsook, and which he was to apotheosize in his portrait of unfallen Paradise. Yet, just as in Paradise, Milton cannot rest from trial. There must be a collision or friction of opposing forces, just as the notes the persona of *L'Allegro* hears must "pierce" his meeting soul. The music of marriage is also a music of penetration and surrender, as the climax of *Il Penseroso* also demonstrates. Here, at the conclusion of a poem given mostly to "calm Peace and Quiet," "Spare Fast," "ev'n step," twilight, and shade, the persona is once again ravished by music. This music is closer to the music of the spheres than the lute-songs of *L'Allegro*, and brings forth prophetic vision instead of "linked sweetness long drawn out." In the obvious contrasts of secular and sacred, profane and prophetic, the musics of *L'Allegro*

⁸² See also Zacharias 7-8.

and *Il Penseroso* are opposed. Yet there is a curious identity between them, too:

There let the pealing Organ blow
To the full voic'd Choir below,
In Service high and Anthems clear,
As may with sweetness, through mine ear,
Dissolve me into ecstasies,
And bring all Heav'n before mine eyes.
(*Il Penseroso* 161-6)⁸³

The "sweetness" here is not "linked" or "long drawn out,"

⁸³ It is unmistakably Anglican worship Milton attends here, a fact that has caused some critics concern since it seems at odds with Milton's Puritanism, even at this early date. Other critics interpret this apparent anomaly to mean that Milton's Puritanism was as yet un- or merely half-formed: Douglas Bush (in *English Literature* 363) sighs that "For the first and last time [Milton] celebrates 'Merry England' and the Anglican ritual." Although the climactic musical moment in *Il Penseroso* without a doubt takes place in one of the Churches of England, it may be helpful to note that the "service" in "Service high and Anthems clear" probably refers more to a musical genre than to an order of worship *per se*. "Services" and "Anthems" were the two principal types of church music in the late English Renaissance. The former was a musical setting of the "morning and evening canticles ... and the Communion Service ..." A "service," musically speaking, was "the Anglican counterpart" of the Catholic Mass. Anthems, in turn, were the Anglican equivalents of the Catholic motets. The point is that the persona of *Il Penseroso* (and, by implication, Milton) is responding as much to religious *music* as to religious *ritual*. Indeed, the pairing here of "service" and "anthem" makes it likely that the music predominates. See Apel, ed. 40-1, 771-2; and Brown 329.

but its ecstatic potential is the same as *L'Allegro's*.⁸⁴ Moreover, the union of verse and voice is again the essence of the music's power, this time heard in the organ and choir. Eve, too, makes her appearance, although now it is the second Eve: the persona, like Mary, finds divine fruition in hearing. The "Ave, Maria" of the Annunciation marks the entry of the impregnating *logos* into Mary's womb by way of her ear; analogously, the "Service high and Anthems clear" enter *Il Penseroso's* persona through his ear and, undoing him in a heavenly dissolution, bring him to ecstatic vision.⁸⁵

⁸⁴ Svendsen, "*L'Allegro* and *Il Penseroso*," observes that *Il Penseroso's* "religious experience contrasts with the pagan myth at the conclusion of "*L'Allegro*," but it is in the same continuum, as it were." Of course, *Il Penseroso* ends with "pagan myth," too, as the persona hopes to "sit and rightly spell / Of every Star that Heav'n doth shew, / And every Herb that sips the dew" (170-2). The real contrast here is between secular and sacred, not simply between pagan and Christian. The Neo-Platonic daemonology that occupies *Il Penseroso*, especially in lines 86-120, is based on the pagan myths the Renaissance found so compelling (and strove to harmonize with Christianity). And even this contrast must be qualified, since *L'Allegro's* prevailingly secular tone sometimes modulates (in the wedding ceremony of lines 125-8, for instance, or in the "hidden soul of harmony" in line 144) into something quite close to pagan religious intensity.

⁸⁵ Interestingly, if it an evening worship service the persona attends, the *musical* service would very likely include a setting of the Magnificat, Mary's song of praise in response to the Annunciation. See Apel, ed. 771.

Even more striking, however, are the implied oppositions *Il Penseroso's* music shares with *L'Allegro's*. Just as the "meeting soul" in *L'Allegro* is "pierced / In notes," so too there is the suggestion of contest and union in *Il Penseroso's* pealing organ and full-voiced choir. Like the "wanton heed, and giddy cunning" of *L'Allegro's* Lydian airs, the play of contraries in *Il Penseroso* foreshadows the mature Milton's thought. Watch the play of wind, the contest of *spiritus*, here. The organ is literally blowing; the wind that gives it voice is washing out of the pipes and onto the choir below. At the same time, the choir's breath meets the organ's wind with its own forceful, melodious exhalation. As the organ blows to the choir whose voice--and thus lungs--is full, we may imagine the two currents of air meeting each other, buffeting each other, a friction of *afflatus* that is a precise physical and metaphysical analogue of the harmony is achieved--consummated--at the listening ear. And here too Milton's "one first matter all" prevails. Both the wind the organ-bellows supplies to the pipes that the pipes then expel, and the breath the singers draw in and direct out past their vocal folds, come from and

reconstitute a common atmosphere. The organ and the choir play to, even at each other, a heady conflict essential to the poet's ecstasy and prophetic vision. Yet they are also breathing into each other, quite literally inspiring each other; they meet and mate in middle air.

As do the companion poems *L'Allegro* and *Il Penseroso*. They play to and at each other, buffeting each other with mutually exclusive pledges, hyperbolic dismissals, and apparent insularity. Their conflict is ordered, but it is a conflict nonetheless. Yet they meet and mate, too.⁸⁶ The complementarist critics' emphasis on the presence and necessity of *both* Mirth and Melancholy in Milton's life and work is correct, as is the serial critics' insistence that choice and disjunction form the inescapable basis of the poem's relationship. My reading of the companion poems asserts that Milton sounds the first full chord of the music of opposition that forms the essence of his poetics of humanity, a dynamic counterpoint and ecstatic

⁸⁶ For another musical analogy, one might double the duets within and between the companion poems and think of a string quartet--say, the Guarneri String Quartet, whose music is "not only the music of Mozart, Beethoven and Schubert but also ... the music of four distinctive personalities in constantly shifting harmony and dissonance" (Joseph McLellan, "Tempo Tantrums: A String Quartet's Hard-Fought Harmony," *The Washington Post* 2 March 1990: D4).

harmony, with these two poems.⁸⁷ The poems are both complementary and disjunctive, and the images within both testify to Milton's awareness of the temperamental paradox he was exploring. Each poem tries and judges the other, and it is this *oppositional* relationship that lends fullness to the poet's life. Their struggle does not end in Milton's rejection of either, nor does it close in an easy cadence of harmonic resolution. The ongoing music of opposition Milton sounds in *L'Allegro* and *Il Penseroso* is more difficult and more delightful, like the music of Paradise. It is a music of cosmic bliss; psychological, spiritual, and moral contest; and innocent, strong erotic mutuality:

⁸⁷ In his valuable study of the companion poems from the perspective of the hermetic tradition, Gerald Cox states that "[t]he relation of the two poems ... is not that of inferior to superior but that of counterpoint: the two are unlike contraries that stand in harmonious relation," and goes on to assert that "... Milton employs the 'hidden soul of harmony'--the unifying principle of truth, proportion, and beauty--to reconcile the apparent opposition of the way of pleasure infolded in *L'Allegro* and the way of wisdom infolded in *Il Penseroso*." While my reading differs from Cox's on a number of important issues (for example, I find neither the pleasures of *L'Allegro* nor the wisdom of *Il Penseroso* unmixed with their opposites, and the idea of "apparent oppositions" runs counter to my insistence on real battle), I am indebted to many of his essay's insights. See "Unbinding 'The Hidden Soul of Harmony': *L'Allegro*, *Il Penseroso*, and the Hermetic Tradition," in *Milton Studies* 18: 45-62.

For the eternal verities of pitch and measure link music mathematically to the mystic Dance of the cosmos and to the divine forms in the mind of God, and so set the affections in right tune. And, for Galileo and Kepler, the pleasure of music was akin to the pleasure of lovemaking.... Galileo said that the interval of the fifth produces 'such a tickling and stimulation of the cartilage of the eardrum that, tempering the sweetness with a dash of sharpness, it seems delightfully to kiss and bite and the same time'....⁸⁸

The companion poems are no anomalies. They are not the products of a relaxed young Milton who will soon ossify into a Puritan sect of one. They are instead dense and broad treatments of the fruitful and enduring struggle of contraries within the fully alive human heart. These companions, with their ongoing conflict and subtle alliance, prepare us for the contrarities Milton explores in *Paradise Lost*. Tempering the sweetness with a dash of sharpness, kissing and biting at the same time, Milton's poetics of humanity within and without Paradise will continue, deepen, and complicate the music of opposition first sounded clearly in *L'Allegro* and *Il Penseroso*.

⁸⁸ Diane K. McColley, "Eve and the Arts of Eden," in *Milton and the Idea of Woman* 112.

Chapter 3

Satan Provoked

Not long after his own revival off the burning lake in Book 1 of *Paradise Lost*, Satan calls to his rebel army: "Awake, arise, or be forever fallen" (1.330).¹ These newly anonymous angels--they have lost their heavenly names, and will have no new ones until they begin to roam the earth after Adam and Eve fall--mass before us, and before their leader. Yet this muster, unlike the ones in heaven, precedes no hopeful battle, no trumpet-call to valor. Instead we see a stunned and defeated remnant assembled, assessed, and mourned by their mighty captain. As Satan prepares to address his fallen troops, Milton's diction performs an elaborate, troubling, and characteristic series of maneuvers. Qualifiers spin us this way and that as Satan gathers his words and his forces; the verse makes us feel the continuing contest Satan now illustrates with his very body. Yet, but; but, but; yet--the poise is exquisite and agonizing:

Thus far these beyond
Compare of mortal prowess, yet observed

¹ All quotations from *Paradise Lost* are taken from John Milton, *Paradise Lost*, ed. Alastair Fowler (London: Longman, 1971). Fowler's notes will be cited as "ed. Fowler," with the page number on which the note appears.

Their dread commander: he above the rest
 In shape and gesture proudly eminent
 Stood like a tower; his form had yet not lost
 All her original brightness, nor appeared
 Less than archangel ruined, and the excess
 Of glory obscured....

Darkened so, yet shone
 Above them all the archangel: but his face
 Deep scars of thunder had intrenched, and care
 Sat on his faded cheek, but under brows
 Of dauntless courage, and considerate pride
 Waiting revenge; cruel his eye, but cast
 Signs of remorse and passion to behold
 The fellows of his crime, the followers rather
 (Far other once beheld in bliss) condemned
 For ever now to have their lot in pain,
 Millions of spirits for his fault amerced
 Of heaven, and from eternal splendours flung
 For his revolt, yet faithful how they stood,
 Their glory withered.... (1.587-94, 599-612)

As we try, like Satan, to see what is before us, we find ourselves, like him, besieged with contraries: the fallen angels are mighty, but Satan is mightier; he still radiates light, but it is the darkness visible of an eclipse; he is an archangel ruined (and here the inverted syntax intensifies the shock of that ruin); dark but still brighter than the other fallen angels, yet scarred and care-worn (one almost sees, anachronistically, the field of Verdun in that word "intrenched"),² but proud and courageous; cruel but overwhelmed, moved to tears, by his

² Gordon Braden notes that "Renaissance siege operations often involved trenches" (private correspondence).

peers'--no, his disciples'--loyalty, those disciples who are steadfast in their obedience despite their great pain. This paroxysm of contraries reaches its zenith with the utterly indeterminate "far other once beheld in bliss," which may refer to the difference between angels as comrades in heaven and followers in hell, or that between Satan's former bliss and present woe, or that between the rebels' former beauty and present disfigurement. After such a dialectical whipping, it is no wonder it takes four tries for Satan, half-surrounded by his expectant audience, to choke out his first damned public address:

Thrice he essayed, and thrice in spite of scorn,
Tears such as angels weep, burst forth: at last
Words interwove with sighs found out their way.
(1.619-21)

The speech that follows is a mixture of just those contraries we have seen in Satan's person: rage, shame, honesty, lies, confusion, resolve. The fact that these contraries mix with such force, however, is a clue that Satan's character is itself still mixed, still warring with itself. Fowler even goes so far as to note that "[t]he hardening of Satan's heart is not yet complete."³

³ ed. Fowler 80. Fowler also notes the "strong shocking effect" Satan's tears would have had on Milton's first readers.

Indeed, Satan is fallen; more importantly, as Fowler implies, he is still falling. This is why his arraignment of God, while it cannot be taken, as Empson takes it, as truth, should not be wholly dismissed: Satan may yet have truth to tell, if only confusedly or unknowingly.⁴

But he who reigns
Monarch in heaven, till then as one secure
Sat on his throne, upheld by old repute,
Consent or custom, and his regal state
Put forth at full, but still his strength
concealed
Which tempted our attempt, and wrought our fall.
(1.637-42)

Satan's charge has two parts: God tempted us to attempt his overthrow, and he did it by showing us his full kingliness while concealing the true extent of his might. For the charge's second part, obviously Satan here confuses--perhaps deliberately--God's uncircumscribed retirement (which enables both creation and his creatures' free will) with provocative deception.⁵ The first part of the charge is harder to settle. Insofar as Satan tries to

⁴ See William Empson, *Milton's God* 47. Fowler rightly chastises Empson for his legalism, but commits the opposite error by righteously insisting that "[t]he error here lies in accepting Satan's reduction of life to power politics" (ed. Fowler, 81). If, as I will argue, Milton and Milton's God are careful to give the devil his due, we must do no less.

⁵ See, for example, 3.97-134, as well as the much-discussed account of creation in 7.162-173.

argue that their fall was caused by God, he is lying; indeed, he undercuts his own paeans to the rebels' valor with such a lie, implying that their "attempt" was not entirely the fruit of their own "dauntless" ambition and courage. Yet the question remains: did God somehow tempt Satan and his followers to rebel against him?⁶

Two points need to be made here. In Milton's theology, God is indeed a tempter--of a particular kind. Yet temptation is not the same as causation. For the first point we have Milton's words in the *De Doctrina*

Christiana:

To this system of providence must be referred what is called Temptation, by which God either tempts a man or allows him to be tempted by the devil or his agents.

Temptation is either good or evil....

Good temptations are those which God uses to tempt even righteous men, in order to prove them. He does this not for his own sake--as if he did not know what sort of men they would turn out to be--but either to exercise or demonstrate

⁶ Empson's argument--well-known and often refuted, yet still compelling--is precisely Satan's: God "deliberately deluded" Satan into thinking him less than Omnipotent. Empson's seems finally unable to imagine a stirring, persuasive, consistent self-delusion such as we see in Satan--this despite his observation that Milton was "scrupulously careful to give [Satan] strong arguments for his fall." The devil's alibis are of course as perfectly airtight as he could make them; he demonstrates the psychological truth that the most glaringly obvious facts are often the most easily ignored or denied. See Empson, *Milton's God* 36-90.

their faith or patience, as in the case of Abraham and Job, or to lessen their self-confidence and prove them guilty of weakness, so that they may become wiser, and others may be instructed.... Good temptation, then, is rather to be desired.... And God promises a happy outcome....⁷

Strength through patience, wisdom through humility and weakness: so God favors his choicest servants. A true servant of God, according to Milton, *welcomes* divine provocation, a "good" temptation, as a means of increasing his or her share of glory. Abraham nearly kills his son at God's command; he becomes the father of the chosen people. Job loses all, wrestles with his "friends" and his God, remains faithful, and receives an even greater bounty than before. Even a weakness brought on or revealed by one of God's good temptations is to be cherished as an opportunity for learning and thus a means to greater wisdom for both the individual and the Christian community. Good temptations come from God, and

⁷ YE 6: 338-9. The story of Job, of course, is Milton's model in *Samson Agonistes*. In the story of God's commanding Abraham to kill his son Isaac, what one might call an extreme form of divine provocation or temptation, John Hollander finds a model of the "kind of dramatic and typological irony that is at work in so many of those highly charged rhetorical moments in *Paradise Lost*," especially in Satanic speech. See Hollander, "Echo Schematic," in *John Milton: Modern Critical Views*, ed. Harold Bloom (New York: Chelsea House, 1986) 224-5.

are indeed one of the principal ways to strength from weakness. Indeed, Kerrigan describes Milton's greatest good temptation this way: "Resolution formed in the dark. Internal and external factors alike suggest that *Paradise Lost* was inaugurated by, not despite, his loss."⁸

For the second point we have, among other testimonies, Adam's consolatory words to Eve after her troubling dream:

Evil into the mind of god or man
May come and go, so unapproved, and leave
No spot or blame behind....

(5.117-21)⁹

Add to this another, harsher passage from the *De Doctrina*:

In the same way, just as when God incites to sin he is nevertheless not the cause of anyone's sinning, so when he hardens the heart of a sinner or blinds him, he is not the cause of sin. For he does not do this by infusing wickedness into the man. The means he uses are just and kindly, and ought rather to soften the hearts of sinners than harden them.¹⁰

⁸ Kerrigan, *The Sacred Complex* 133. For a brilliant psychoanalytic analysis of Milton's positive need for the losses such "good temptations" brought to his own life in order to begin his true life's work, see the chapter entitled "The Way To Strength From Weakness" in *The Sacred Complex* 127-92.

⁹ As we shall see in Chapter 5, Adam's later reneging on this comfort in Book 9.294-301 is at least in part a makeshift argument born of a lover's passionate anxiety.

¹⁰ YE 6: 336.

Temptation as proof, evil present to consciousness but unapproved and therefore blameless, a hard heart hardened even more by justice and gentleness and thereby incited but not caused to sin: these Miltonic ideas originate in his wide theological reading, yet they also exhibit the tendency toward clash, division, paradox, and contrariety we have seen to be peculiarly Miltonic.¹¹ While it is true that Milton speaks of human, not angelic existence in the passages quoted above, and while it is this manifold, dense music of opposition in *Paradise Lost's* human story with which I am most concerned and which I will treat in the next chapter, it is nevertheless also true that Satan's experience in the epic (and, to a lesser degree,

¹¹ Diane McColley, otherwise exquisitely sensitive to the workings and possibilities of God's grace, defines temptation more narrowly than does Milton: while acknowledging that there are "good" and "bad" temptations, she nevertheless states that a "temptation is an attempt to elicit desire for something forbidden by God." She does distinguish between "good" and "bad" temptations, as well as comment approvingly on the "tension" a good temptation may create as long as the temptation is resisted, but she does not cite Milton's distinction in the *De Doctrina* between "good" and "bad" temptations, nor does she grapple with the graciously provocative nature of even those "good" temptations. She goes on to quote James 1:13 ("Let no man say when he is tempted, I am tempted of God: for God cannot be tempted with evil, neither tempteth he any man") without exploring the apparent contradiction between James' statement and Milton's in the *De Doctrina*. See *Milton's Eve* 193-6.

his fellow rebels') sounds this same music. A fuller understanding of key instances in the Satanic rebellion leads to a fuller understanding of Adam's and Eve's experience in and out of Paradise, and thus of Milton's image and poetics of humanity. If we can more completely justify the ways of God to Satan in *Paradise Lost*, we may more completely comprehend the ways of God to Man in the epic, especially as they manifest themselves in the ways of man. In other words, as we continue to scan Milton's poetry of humanity, we may find more than a few important clues to its meter in the oppositional rhythms of our great Adversary's experience.¹²

For if Milton's words in the *De Doctrina* and elsewhere apply to Satan and the rebel angels as well as to

¹² Michael Lieb has recently advanced a fascinating argument for God's setting a provoking (or tempting) object before *himself*, too, in the person of the Son, who engages his Father on the subject of humanity's fate. Such a *dramatic* conception of God relies upon what Lieb calls, using Mikhail Bakhtin's theoretical writings, Milton's "dialogic imagination." As Lieb notes, it is often the critics of Milton's God who are most sensitive to the conflict God sets in motion within and among his creatures--and, apparently, between himself and his own Son. See Lieb, *The Sinews of Ulysses: Form and Convention in Milton's Works* (Pittsburgh: Duquesne University Press, 1989) 76-97, as well as my own discussion in Chapter 4. For Milton's concept of the "provoking object," see below, 8-19.

humanity, as I will argue they do, perhaps the leaven of truth puffing up Satan's bluster is that he and his followers were indeed tempted by God, and continue to be tempted by God. We ought not be surprised that Satan mistakes the means and ends of that temptation; yet his feeling that God was not entirely passive with regard to his fall may, if accorded at least its emotional logic, cast light on God's further dealings with Satan as he progresses through the epic.

I. The Provoking Object

Critics are divided over Satan's status as a free agent in *Paradise Lost*. One school maintains that Satan has no real hope of salvation after his fall, differing only in their assessment of the justice of his doom. Some, like Waldock and Empson, believe Satan to be unfairly manipulated, even degraded and bullied, by Milton and Milton's God. Others, like Charles Williams and C. S. Lewis, argue that the devil is an ass, and Milton's literary treatment of him merely shows the emergence of his true colors. In an effort at mediation, Stanley Fish's famous account turns degradation into didacticism, showing us a Satan whose apparent heroic energy in the

early books diagnoses instead our own persistent fallenness. With Waldock and Empson, we cannot trust Milton or his God; with Lewis and Williams, we cannot trust the multivalence of our response to the most complex and heroic villain in English poetry; with Fish, distrust is our discipline and our corrective.¹³

It is difficult to disagree with any of these readers. Satan's character certainly grows more horrible as the epic progresses; he is at last both a buffoon and a deadly menace. Nevertheless, however transparent Satan's blustering and posturing may eventually be to the perceptive reader (and however skillfully Milton insinuates Satan's ultimate degradation from the very beginning), an undeniable valor remains in Satan's character. The "ruined" of "archangel ruined" does not displace Satan's stature; it is not merely a corrective. Instead, Milton's description offers the reader both angel and ruin, and causes us to feel the force of each. Attending only to Satan-as-angel is delusive; attending only to Satan-as-ruin is premature and overlooks the real drama of his experience. Satan's journey through Chaos, for example,

¹³ Nohrnberg observes that Milton complicates our determination of Satan's true stature at the end of Book 1 (private correspondence).

seems dangerous enough, requiring real determination and courage:

Into this wild abyss the wary fiend
 Stood on the brink of hell and looked a while,
 Pondering his voyage; for no narrow frith
 He had to cross. Nor was his ear less pealed
 With noises loud and ruinous....

...So eagerly the fiend
O'er bog or steep, through straight, rough,
dense, or rare,
With head, hands, wings or feet pursues his way,
And swims or sinks, or wades, or creeps, or
flies.... (2.917-21, 947-50)

The peril is real, the effort heroic. While his followers tear up the landscape or dizzy themselves with philosophy, Satan calls on every limb and every ounce of endurance to bring him through the boiling disarray of Chaos. He stands up to the old anarch himself, whose faltering speech is a portent of Satan's own eventual disintegration, and even within the shadow of Chaos' dreadful glee at the prospect of more destruction gathers himself together for the final push:

He ceased; and Satan stayed not to reply,
But glad that now his ship should find a shore,
With fresh alacrity and force renewed
Springs upward like a pyramid of fire
Into that wild expanse, and through the shock
Of fighting elements, on all sides round
Environed wins his way; harder beset
And more endangered, than when Argo passed
Through Bosporus, betwixt the jostling rocks:
Or when Ulysses on the larboard shunned
Charybdis, and by the other whirlpool steered.
So he with difficulty and labour hard
Moved on, with difficulty and labour he....
(2.1010-22)

Not even Jason or Ulysses will match Satan's feat, a trial worthy of an angel. Moreover, if, as William Kerrigan states, Satan springing upward like a pyramid of fire "is nothing less than his own idea of himself" as a self-originating source of light, we may note that the blasphemy is marvelously audacious, a reach beyond the grasp of any other rebel angel.¹⁴ This is certainly damnable, pride in a refined state that would reduce any mortal to ashes, but it is not low cunning. It is not the work of an ass. And if it is a didactic strategy on Milton's part, it is as breathtakingly risky as Satan's journey. The story of Satan's gathering himself into a pyramid of fire and rising to the gates of heaven may be a cautionary tale, but every caution works against an appeal, and indeed tends to whet its edge, as Milton makes clear. Satan's imagining of himself is too close to the height of Renaissance humanist aspiration--which is to say, a version of our own modern aspirations--to permit

¹⁴ Kerrigan, *The Sacred Complex* 137-9. I cannot therefore accept Stella Revard's assertion that "Only in Hell does Milton permit Satan to seem heroic"--see her *War In Heaven: "Paradise Lost and the Tradition of Satan's Rebellion* (Ithaca, N. Y.: Cornell University Press, 1980) 234.

our easy, rapid judgment. Satan is not the only one playing with fire, if his journey is merely a warning.

Milton is rarely "merely" anything. His love of opposition and conflict keeps his characters, and his poetry, mixed and alive: not chaotic or directionless by any means, but also not simplistic or prematurely unified. The reason for the formula "the Devil is an Ass" is clear. It is largely true. It is certainly *finally* true. It is a way to specify that evil is different from good not only in degree but also in kind. It is an anti-romanticism that stresses the plug-ugliness of evil, its boring witlessness. To say "the devil is an ass" is thereby to remove all *tang* from the taste of evil and reveal its actual insipidity.

The problem with the formula "the Devil is an Ass" (and its corollary, the "banality of evil") is that it can make evil seem uncomplicated, unmixed. Evil itself may be, as Augustine argued, a *privatio boni*, a sort of vacuum pulling existence into its negative self, but its presence in evil ones is less pure as it corrupts in myriad subtle ways our experience and action. Mixture is perhaps the essence of human experience, as Milton well understood. One's beliefs may be clear, one's devotion precise and undoubted, one's aims perfectly in view. Nevertheless,

most reality, interior and exterior, is *mixed*. Since the Fall, this mixture is a source of much of humanity's misery. Before the Fall, however, it is the very fount of blessedness; indeed, the single prohibition in Paradise's law of unfallen grace allowed *mixture* to wield its widest and most benign power. One must sift, either good from good, good from better, better from best, or good from bad. The last discrimination informs much of fallen life, but there are still innocent decisions to be made among the first three polarities. All things are lawful, but all things do not edify--this is the condition of grace, both in Paradise before the Fall and in the Christian life after the Redemption.¹⁵

Milton's devil has a savor, and a strong one, especially in the early books. This tang is, as we have seen, not entirely a product of our own fallen tastes. A few readers have come to the conclusion that this is at least in part because *Paradise Lost* does not show us a Satan who is irredeemably damned. If this is true, not a little of

¹⁵ See 1 Corinthians 10:23, where St. Paul outlines the new rule of grace: "All things are lawful for me, but all things are not expedient: all things are lawful for me, but all things edify not." (Quotations from Scripture are from the King James Version unless otherwise specified.)

Satan's appeal may arise from the real drama of choice he continues to enact throughout the epic. Indeed, as we shall see, the role God plays in this drama is not unlike the role he plays in Adam and Eve's *human* drama of choice in the epic.

For there to be genuine drama, however, the agents must be free.¹⁶ Milton's God in Book 3 energetically outlines the conditions and guarantees of humanity's freedom. His pronouncements regarding Satan are apparently less generous:

¹⁶ This is not quite the same as saying they must have a reasonable motive for their actions. Freedom implies a radical cause-less-ness at the moment will becomes act, whereas motive is by definition a cause. Both motive and freedom are necessary for a drama to be satisfying: see Stella Revard's discussion of Satan's motivation in *War In Heaven* 210ff. Revard's discussion also points out that Milton's Satan is neither a philosophically abstract "motiveless malignancy" (as the patristic commentators would have it) nor the "strutting egotist" often seen upon the medieval stage. See also John Tanner's "'Say First What Cause': Ricoeur and the Etiology of Evil in *Paradise Lost*," *PMLA* 103:1, 45-56. Tanner finds a contrariety (or what he terms a "filiation") in Milton's exploration of evil's causes: "Though Satan cannot say 'the devil made me do it,' he can say, in some sense, 'God made me do it; the Father provoked me': he can and does attribute his envy to causes outside himself.... But envy only seems to provide a plausible cause for Satan's defection.... Having adduced envy or pride or any other similar motive as cause, one is still left with the mystery of choice.... Yet, paradoxically, the more one inspects such absolute freedom, the more it seems like something else, like captivity" (49).

Only begotten Son, seest thou what rage
 Transports our adversary, whom no bounds
 Prescribed, no bars of hell, nor all the chains
 Heaped on him there, nor yet the main abyss
 Wide interrupt can hold; so bent he seems
 On desperate revenge, that shall redound
 Upon his own rebellious head.... (3.80-86)

Empson calls this "the first of God's grisly jokes."¹⁷

Fowler admits that the tone is "sardonic" at least, perhaps even punning.¹⁸ Nevertheless, God delivers his judgment upon humanity in equally harsh tones, climaxing with the grinding "Ingrate" of 3.97. However problematic and disagreeable God's tone may be in this passage, it sounds in both his talk of Satan and his talk of Man, and it alone gives us no warrant for supposing Satan's condition to be hopeless. Far more difficult for Satan's case are God's words of prophecy following the Son's merciful intervention:

The first sort by their own suggestion fell,
 Self-tempted, self-depraved: man falls deceived
 By the other first: man therefore shall find
 grace.
 The other none.... (3.129-32)

This passage seems not only to take away any hope of Satan's redemption, but also to refute any notion of God's

¹⁷ Empson, *Milton's God* 119.

¹⁸ ed. Fowler 147.

"tempting his attempt." Even more seriously, it threatens to make Satan's fall into a false analogy of man's fall.

There are at least two answers to these difficulties. Diane McColley argues that God's words are "prophecy, not decree."¹⁹ That is, God's pronouncement is a report of what he sees *sub specie aeternitatis*, not a punishment he intends to inflict on Satan.²⁰ The peculiar nature of Satan's fall is indeed the cause of his ultimately hopeless situation, but only because its self-initiating character arises from higher angelic capabilities for self-direction, capabilities humanity did not have time to develop fully before the fall.²¹ Obviously this enhanced angelic self-direction makes possible a more relentless

¹⁹ McColley, *Milton's Eve* 189-90.

²⁰ See also Revard, *War In Heaven* 58, for a similar gloss on 5.613-15: God's speech describing the fate of rebels "is not the threat of a vengeful God.... God foretells that Satan will close his eyes to blessed vision, and that eclipsing of light will result in the fall into darkness. Milton's God does not urge Satan into disobedience; like the God of the Nicene fathers he cannot urge evil in a good creature...." For a representative dissenting opinions, see Carey, *Milton* (New York: Arco Press, 1970) 80-1, and Tanner, "Etiology of Evil" 51.

²¹ One might argue that the three major falls in the epic--Satan's, Eve's, and Adam's--while they share a core of disobedience and pride, are nevertheless interestingly distinctive, as if individuality survives at least the first disobedience.

rebellion against grace and any offer of redemption, a rebellion as self-sustaining--and ultimately explosive--as fission in a reactor with the control rods removed. Eventually Satan will run out of fuel, run out of chances, but his unfortunate ability to resist the "hateful siege of contraries" in favor of his resolve never to submit or yield makes it less and less likely, and finally perhaps impossible, for him to respond to grace.²²

For grace is offered to Satan, but in a peculiarly Miltonic form, that of the "provoking object." It is this provoking object that supplies the second answer to the problem of Satan's fate.²³ God does indeed tempt Satan, not to fall, but to be redeemed--that is, to obey. Such a

²² The Greek Father Origen had a word for the possibility of Satan's restoration to grace at the end of time: *apocatastasis*. This heterodox doctrine has persisted to the present; its origins and history are traced by C. A. Patrides in *Premises and Motifs in Renaissance Thought and Literature* (Princeton: Princeton Univ. Press, 1982) 200-217. Patrides notes that "the dramatic context [of *Paradise Lost*] demanded that Satan's redemption should at least be entertained as a possibility" (208). He also includes this suggestive quotation from "Alexander Gill, Milton's one-time schoolmaster: 'Ah, blessed Origen! hath thy too much charity been blamed for so long?'" (212).

²³ James Nohnberg adduces the Genesis story of Cain as an example of one who fell by his own suggestion, but not necessarily because he was "self-provoked" (private correspondence).

temptation not only provides Satan with a means of salvation, but also links his experience again to Adam's and Eve's as a model for our understanding their life in Paradise.

One may find it difficult to imagine a God whose love is provocative, even ironically so, but this is precisely the God Milton delights in imagining. This is the God created (in part) in Milton's image, the God whose divine table-talk can tend toward the satirically witty, sounding its *littera canina* with disturbing relish: "Ingrate!" Yet because Milton's provocative God is a product of his own love for conflict and opposition, we may understand the delight, even the occasional playfulness which such hard r's may conceal, or further:

If every action which is good, or evill in man at ripe years, were to be under pittance, and prescription, and compulsion, what were virtue but a name, what praise could be then due to well-doing, what grammercy to be sober, just or continent? many there be that complain of divin Providence for suffering Adam to transgresse, foolish tongues! when God gave him reason, he gave him freedom to choose, for reason is but choosing; he had bin else a meer artificiall Adam, such an Adam as he is in the motions. We our selves esteem not of that obedience, or love, or gift, which is of force: God therefore left him free, set before him a provoking object, ever almost in his eyes; herein consisted his merit, herein the right of his

reward, the praise of his abstinence.²⁴

This famous passage from *Areopagitica* is often quoted to support Milton's--and Milton's God's--idea of prelapsarian freedom. The threat of an "artificiall Adam" justifies the perils of freedom for Milton, as indeed it does for most of his readers. Yet a curious critical inattention meets the clause after that final colon. What are we to make of the Miltonic doctrine of the "provoking object"? The three major editions of *Areopagitica*--Columbia, Yale, and Hughes--are entirely silent on this point, despite the "herein" that signals its logical importance for Milton's argument.

Perhaps these editors feel the matter to be too obvious to warrant comment: the provoking object is the

²⁴ YE 2: 527. Compare Milton's not-quite-hidden "provoking object" to the childlike object-permanence experiments Nohrnberg describes in *The Analogy of The Faerie Queene*: "The child thus teaches himself that objects persist in some super-sensible way; they do not disappear altogether.... The hidden object, in continuing to exist, parallels the thought of the object in the mind of the person remembering that it is 'there.' Thus develops a kind of reciprocity between the consciousness of interiority and the interiority of consciousness" (327-8). Nohrnberg's discussion of provoking objects in *The Faerie Queene* (326ff.) emphasizes the restraint, the temperance that is the proper response to such enticements and temptations. But of course the Miltonic imagination of restraint seems always to come around to some kind of abundance, even excess.

Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil, and it is necessary to enable obedience, which could not exist without such a prohibition. Milton himself says something like this in the *De Doctrina*:

The providence of God which governs man relates either to man's prelapsarian or to his fallen state.

The providence which relates to his prelapsarian state is that by which God placed man in the garden of Eden and supplied him with every good thing necessary for a happy life. And, so that there might be some way for man to show his obedience, God ordered him to abstain only from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, and threatened him with death if he disobeyed.... Adam was not required to perform any works; he was merely forbidden to do one thing. It was necessary that one thing at least should be either forbidden or commanded, and above all something which was in itself neither good nor evil, so that man's obedience might in this way be made evident.²⁵

It is a long way, however, from a prohibition that enables freedom to a "provoking object" distinguished by its enticingly elusive agency. Milton's calm statement in this passage from the *De Doctrina* must be understood in the light of his more heated remarks elsewhere about the God who incites his creatures into revealing their true natures--what Milton calls a "good temptation" (YE 6: 339-9)--as well as in his characteristically excited equivoca-

²⁵ YE 6: 351-2.

tions in the passage from *Areopagitica*. Not only is the prohibition there made into a provoking object, but that provoking object is made to flicker on the horizon of perception, winking at the periphery. It is as continually, maddeningly present as only the nearly absent can be:

"God therefore left him free, set before him a provoking object, *ever almost* in his eyes..." (my italics). One is left to wonder what is most provoking about this object: what we can see, or what we can barely see.²⁶ Certainly the diction of "ever almost" must reliably indicate the Miltonic oxymoronic ecstasy. Sweet reluctant amorous delay.

Several key episodes in Satan's experience in *Paradise Lost* reveal the various forms a provoking object can take. In all these episodes Milton presents Satan (and the reader) with opposing or conflicting interpretations of particular experiences, experiences enabled either

²⁶ John Tanner ("Etiology of Evil") is the only other critic I know of whose published work pays close attention to this moment in *Areopagitica*; for Tanner, however, the "provoking object ever almost in [Adam's] eyes" is part of "an elaborate drama of temptation ... that imbues Eden with anxiety"--that is, what Kierkegaard calls *Angest* (angst) (50). Tanner insists that "a long, continuous psychological drama of seduction" is present in Eden, but he implies that seduction (or temptation) is only in the direction of evil, of the Fall.

directly or indirectly by the God who also creates its participants. The irony we and Satan may perceive in such a drama and its events is itself, I will argue, part of the object's provoking power and God's provoking intent.²⁷

²⁷ In my emphasis on divine and authorial strategy I am obviously indebted to Stanley Fish's important insights in his *Surprised by Sin: The Reader in Paradise Lost*. I am, however, less interested in the aspect of demonstration in *Paradise Lost* than in its powers of revelation. We are no doubt instructed in either case, but I prefer the Milton of prophecy and epiphany to the Milton of the lesson-plan. Even Milton's most overtly declared educational prospectus, his pamphlet *Of Education*, attests to the *furor poeticus* that periodically intrudes upon the ordered strength of his consciousness: he imagines even the dullards, when properly educated, will cling to "the infinite desire of such a happy nurture" as his curriculum will advance (YE 2: 377). Moreover, and characteristically, Milton's advocacy of music in his educational proposal elicits prose not far from a "o altitudo":

The interim of unsweating themselves regularly, and convenient rest before meat may both with profit and delight be taken up in recreating and composing their travail'd spirits with the solemn and divine harmonies of musick heard, or learnt; either while the skilfull Organist plies his grave and fancied descant, in lofty fugues, or the whole Symphony with artfull and unimaginable touches adorn and grace the well studied cords of some choice composer; some times the Lute, or soft organ stop waiting on elegant voices either to Religious, martiall, or civil ditties; which if wise men & prophets be not extreamly out, have a great power over dispositions and manners, to smooth and make them gentle from rustick harshnesse and distemper'd passions.

(YE 2: 409-11)

This long sentence begins with the Horatian formula of "profit and delight," but before it ends it shows quite clearly how closely the two qualities are related in Milton's mind. For Milton, not only could education

These instances sound Milton's music of opposition in a powerful yet subtle way, not unlike the relationship I have tried to sound between *L'Allegro* and *Il Penseroso*, except that now the stakes are grander and the composition more deeply refined, its harmonic ramifications both more extensive and complicated, tending even less toward resolution, valorizing dissonance by means of one of the most fully imagined harmonies English poetry has articulated. As we catch the strains of this music we may come to understand the role strain itself plays in Satan's story, in Adam's and Eve's experience, and in the Miltonic universe as they are elaborated in Milton's epic.

II. The Gates of Heaven

Satan's provocations, by himself and his creator, begin twice, with his introduction into the *discours* in Book 1 and with his introduction into the *histoire* in Book 5. "Satan" means *adversary*. Provocation is his name and nature; he is himself a provoking object. The anti-

sometimes yield to intoxication, as in Sonnet XXI, but education rightly understood and undertaken is itself intoxicating.

Satanists emphasize this understanding of Satan. Yet generations of readers have noticed that Satan, although permitted by God to raise himself off the burning lake, is never left entirely alone by God, whose provocations of him endure into the sequel, *Paradise Regained*. It is Satan's dual experience as provoker and provoked that leads to our uncertainty over whether he is *Paradise Lost*'s antagonist or one of its protagonists. The first great crux of this issue occurs in a book of cruxes, Book 3. It occurs when Satan alights on *caelia firma* and faces the gates of heaven, one of a sublime poem's most sublime moments.

One is not surprised to find this sublimity following one of Milton's more sarcastic anti-Roman passages, full of keys and wickets, flatulent winds ("o'er the backside of the world"), and vainly fluttering, ragged vestments and paperwork. Only light, that bright essence invoked so movingly at the beginning of this troublesome book, interrupts the wasteland:

All this dark globe the fiend found as he
 passed,
 And long he wandered, till at last a gleam
 Of dawning light turned thitherward in haste
 His travelled steps; far distant he descries,
 Ascending by degrees magnificent
 Up to the wall of heaven a structure high,
 At top whereof, but far more rich appeared
 The work as of a kingly palace gate
 With frontispiece of diamond and gold
 Embellished, thick with sparkling orient gems

The portal shone, inimitable on earth
 By model, or by shading pencil drawn.
 (3.498-509)

Not even Vitruvius can sketch its plan. Milton's own excitation leads him to include an intensifier that will eventually modify the gate, but which appears at first to modify the very notion of "top": "At top whereof, but far more rich appeared" (ll. 504-5). Yet if we cannot understand the intensity of the gates' spangled beauty without starting at the top and then thinking "far more," we can nevertheless and with a contrasting immediacy understand the stairs that lead to the gates:

The stairs were such as whereon Jacob saw
 Angels ascending and descending, bands
 Of guardians bright, when he from Esau fled
 To Padan-Aram in the field of Luz,
 Dreaming by night under the open sky,
 And waking cried, *This is the gate of heaven.*
 (3.510-515)

As Milton goes on to explain, contemplation of the stairs is perhaps a task for mystics. Recognition of the stairs, however--understanding their origin, destination, and purpose--is more sudden, more shocking. The analogy is precise: "The stairs were such as whereon Jacob...." They are already within our ken: all we must do is remember the story of the first man to see them.

That man, Milton tells us, was Jacob. The allusion, which Milton introduces with surprising force, illuminates

the complexity of Satan's position at this point in his odyssey. As Alastair Fowler notes, "Satan like Jacob has fled retribution and is at a parting of the ways where he could still repent."²⁸ The analogy is yet more compelling. Jacob is guilty of supplanting his older brother, Esau. In the Genesis story, Jacob, Esau's younger twin, aspired to dominance from the beginning, struggling with his brother even in the womb. Jacob was born grasping Esau's heel, hence his name, which means "overreacher."²⁹ Sometime after this Jacob's cunning leads Esau into forfeiting his birthright. Finally, abetted by his mother Rebekah (whose favorite he was), Jacob tricks his father Isaac into giving him the blessing Esau deserved as the oldest son.³⁰ It is this final deception, achieved by a disguise and by "subtilty"--the serpent's attribute--that means Jacob must flee from his brother.³¹ It is this flight that brings him to his overwhelming encounters with heaven.

²⁸ ed. Fowler 173.

²⁹ Genesis 25:22-26.

³⁰ Genesis 25:29-34, 27:1-28:7.

³¹ See Genesis 27:35

Satan, too, is an overreacher. His older brother, in a sense, is the Son, whose priority in creation rankles Satan from its first announcement. Like Jacob, Satan is a trickster who will adopt disguises to aid his deceits, and he, reversing Jacob, will end his destiny with heels in view, heels he will bruise. Keith Stavely observes that Satan before the gates of heaven even combines aspects of both Jacob and Esau: he has Jacob's reliance on guile and Esau's reliance on brute force.³² Finally, as we shall see, Satan too is overwhelmingly faced with heaven, brought to a provoking object, several times in his journey through *Paradise Lost*.

One may continue to tease out suggestive parallels between Jacob and Satan by thinking ahead in Genesis to the most portentous encounter with heaven Jacob will have in his flight. Genesis 28:11-22 narrates the episode Milton includes in *Paradise Lost* 3.510-515, Jacob's first confrontation with heaven on his journey. His climactic confrontation comes after decades of work for his uncle Laban, two of whose daughters he married, and whose sons

³² Keith Stavely, "Satan and Arminianism in *Paradise Lost*," in *Milton Studies* 25: 129.

are now jealous of their upstart cousin's success.³³ Once again, Jacob flees. Dreams and visions assure him of his inheritance, of the covenant God renews with him. He makes peace with his father-in-law. He then turns to make peace with his cheated brother Esau. At night, alone, as he tensely awaits the morning of his meeting with Esau, Jacob confronts heaven again, decisively:

And Jacob was left alone; and there wrestled a man with him until the breaking of the day. And when he saw that he prevailed not against him, he touched the hollow of his thigh; and the hollow of Jacob's thigh was out of joint, as he wrestled with him. And he said, Let me go, for the day breaketh. And he said, I will not let thee go, except thou bless me. And he said unto him, What is thy name? And he said, Jacob.

³³ Interestingly, struggle between siblings pervades Jacob's marriage, too. Rachel, the younger of the two sisters he married and the most beautiful, is barren, unlike her older sister, Leah, whose children make up for Leah's lack of favor with her husband. Rachel therefore gives Jacob her handmaid as a concubine, so as to bear him children, if only vicariously. When her handmaid conceives and gives birth to Jacob's son she feels triumphant, vindicated. Indeed, Rachel's combative spirit may account for some of her beauty in Jacob's eyes: when her handmaid bears Jacob a second son, she says, "With great wrestlings have I wrestled with my sister, and I have prevailed" (Genesis 30:8). We may surmise from her sentiments that Jacob found his soul-mate in Rachel, who even goes so far as to trade a night with Jacob to her sister for some mandrake-roots (Genesis 30:14-16) and, in a fit of cunning not unworthy of her husband, hides her father's idols under furniture and special pleading (Genesis 31:35).

And he said, Thy name shall be called no more Jacob, but Israel: for as a prince hast thou power with God and with men, and hast prevailed. And Jacob asked him, and said, Tell me, I pray thee, thy name. And he said, Wherefore is it that thou dost ask after my name? And he blessed him there. And Jacob called the name of the place Peniel: for I have seen God face to face, and my life is preserved.

(Genesis 32:24-30)

Now Satan on the rim of the universe is no peacemaker. Nevertheless, he has wrestled with God after his own fashion, though his motives are base. In contrast, we are not told Jacob's reasons for his struggle; the implication is that he is defending himself, and that God started the fight. It is worth noting, however, that both Satan and Jacob undergo a change of name as a result of their struggle. Lucifer the Morning Star becomes Satan the Adversary. Jacob the overreacher becomes Israel, "God strove," and his new name will be given to God's chosen people.³⁴

As we analyze *Paradise Lost* 3.498-554 more closely, our knowledge of Jacob's history of strife reveals both the intense irony and no less challenging promise Satan faces here. Obviously, striving with God is not itself cause for damnation. It is not Satan's adversarial role

³⁴ Roland Barthes offers a fascinating structural analysis of Jacob's wrestling with God in *Image--Music--Text* 125-141.

per se that dooms him. Nor is it necessarily his cunning or his deceptions that will ensure his perdition. The story of Jacob Milton brings before us just as Satan faces another moment of fateful decision should warn us that Satan's predicament at this point is deeper, more complex, and more dependent upon Satan himself than we might have concluded.

For although Satan may have started the war in heaven, it is clearly God who starts this skirmish, throwing down a mighty and provocative gauntlet:

Each stair mysteriously was meant, nor stood
 There always, but drawn up to heaven sometimes
 Viewless, and underneath a bright sea flowed
 Of jasper, or of liquid pearl, whereon
 Who after came from earth, sailing arrived,
 Wafted by angels, or flew o'er the lake
 Rapt in a chariot drawn by fiery steeds.
 The stairs were then let down, whether to dare
 The fiend by easy ascent, or aggravate
 His sad exclusion from the doors of bliss.
 (3.516-525)

Whether to dare Satan's ascent or aggravate his exclusion, God has lowered, perhaps for the first time, what will one day be Jacob's ladder. It is a special occasion: Milton takes pains to point out that they need not be lowered, nor are they always so deployed. No, the "stairs were then let down" (my emphasis). Is this God's gratuitous nose-thumbing, another ugly degradation of the valiantly malicious rebel angel?

Oddly, neither Waldock nor Empson mention this episode. One would think it a strong defense of their argument that God (and by implication, Milton) simply does not play fair with Satan. Surprisingly few critics have commented on these provocative stairs.³⁵ Those who have, recognize that the incident is remarkable. William Kerrigan, for example, is troubled by it:

Milton himself, who created the righteous nastiness of the lowered stairs, refers to the plight of Satan as a "sad exclusion." Maybe he intended to convey through this cruel derision an aspect of his deity that creatures cannot fully savor; maybe, with regard to this theme, one might concede something to Empson and Waldock, for Milton cannot command our sympathies when he makes the creator of the universe behave like a spoiled child.³⁶

Although his sympathies soon return to his poet, the momentary sad exclusion Kerrigan feels in the face of what he reads as Miltonic spite is genuinely responsive to the tone of the passage. Fowler, on the other hand, tries to save the appearances with a coy note to lines 523-5: "Or

³⁵ John Carey, a vigorous critic of what he perceives as Milton's proto-fascism, does not treat the episode in either his *Milton* or in his more recent "Milton's Satan" in *The Cambridge Companion to Milton*. Kitty Cohen merely notes that Jacob was worthy to wrestle with God and prevail, and that Milton in the *Defensio Secunda* calls Jacob "beloved by God" (see *The Throne And The Chariot* 98).

³⁶ Kerrigan, *The Sacred Complex* 172-3.

perhaps to tempt the reader to fall into the satanic point of view ironically reflected in these conjectures?"³⁷ Milton's tonality is certainly capable of such lightning changes, but one wonders how the fact of God's intermittent lowering of the stairs--which underscores his deliberate lowering of them now--could also be part of a satanic point of view.³⁸ The light from heaven's gate and the ladder that leads to it draws Satan to this affront like a moth to a search-light. Satan no doubt interprets this provocation with some jaundice. Yet God is nonetheless here an *agent provocateur*, a role that is entirely consistent with Milton's theology.

What kind of a provocation do these stairs represent? Why does God choose this moment to confront Satan? What is the purpose of this confrontation? The poem offers two

³⁷ ed. Fowler 174.

³⁸ Michael Lieb, in his comprehensive and illuminating *Poetics of the Holy: A Reading of Paradise Lost* (Chapel Hill, N. C.: University of North Carolina Press, 1981), agrees with Kerrigan that the stairs represent at least in part God's mocking of Satan. Oddly, however, Lieb makes nothing of the episode beyond the static symbolic function he argues for it: "Whatever the precise reason for their immediate presence, the stairs symbolize in part, then, Satan's inability to reascend to God's high-place abode, an inability that accounts for the mountain drama that opens the fourth book of Milton's epic" (154).

explicit possibilities: perhaps God dares Satan to ascend to heaven by making the ascent "easy," or perhaps God means merely to thrust into Satan's face the Heaven Satan has irretrievably lost. As we have seen, many critics believe Satan has no hope of redemption within the epic; they believe the second possibility is the one Milton means us to select. Kerrigan calls this episode one of "tantalization," distinguishing it from temptation, which offers a real choice. Since in Kerrigan's view Satan is forever damned by this point, we witness the relentless logic of his damnation, not the drama of his trial:

It is a reenactment for the purpose of mockery, like a school lesson repeated with no intent to educate, only to humiliate. The God who extends the false invitation of the lowered stairs declares the finality of damnation: 'What you have willed is your fate, but still you desire otherwise.' Fallen man will sometimes feel tantalized as he awaits the delivery of divine promises. But patience is the antidote to fallen man's sense of tantalization, and God does not tantalize unfallen man....³⁹

Certain passages in the *De Doctrina*, however, show how close tantalization, provocation, and temptation lie in Milton's mind, and how difficult they may be to distinguish:

For God, who is supremely good, cannot be the source of wickedness or of the evil of crime:

³⁹ Kerrigan, *The Sacred Complex* 172-3.

on the contrary, he created good out of man's wickedness.... Even in sin ... we see God's providence at work, not only in permitting it or withdrawing his grace, but often in inciting sinners to commit sin, hardening their hearts and blinding them.... [T]o use the common simile, as a rider who spurs on a lame horse in a chosen direction is the cause of the horse's increased speed but not of its lameness, so God, who is the supreme governor of the whole universe, may urge on a criminal although he is in no sense the cause of his crime.... [H]e makes a man see clearly the evil which lies hidden in his own heart, so that he may reform or become thoroughly inexcusable in the eyes of the world; or alternatively, so that both the malefactor and his victim may pay the penalty for some previous offence.... For by offering an opportunity for sin you do not make a sinner, but only reveal one.... In the same way, just as when God incites to sin he is nevertheless not the cause of anyone's sinning, so when he hardens the heart of a sinner or blinds him, he is not the cause of sin. For he does not do this by infusing wickedness into the man. The means he uses are just and kindly, and ought rather to soften the hearts of sinners than harden them. They are, first, his long-suffering ... second, his insistence upon his own good and just commandments in opposition to the stubbornness of the wicked. This hardens them in the same way as an anvil or steel is said to be hardened by hammering.... Third, correction or punishment.... Hardening of the heart, then, is usually the last punishment inflicted on inveterate wickedness and unbelief in this life....⁴⁰

Milton's systematic theology is also surprisingly supple, and will often in the course of a few pages cover such an extraordinary tonal range as this selection demonstrates.

⁴⁰ YE 6: 331-7.

He begins with the repellent image of a rider whipping a lame horse, yet very soon thereafter moves to a God who grants the sinner a searing yet gracious self-knowledge as a means of repentance. Finally Milton pivots toward a God whose mercy will only as a last resort turn into vengeance or punishment. In sum, these paragraphs should prepare us for a more comprehensive understanding of such a "just and kindly" God, one that can include offers of redemption so strong and insistent that they may in fact aggravate the sinner's sad exclusion. Yet God does not will this outcome any more than he wills our fall. Milton's imagination of grace, like his imagination of human freedom, is full of such double-edged swords and requires an unusually capacious and full-blooded Christianity for its complete expression. Note that Milton does not as a rule resolve the opposing alternatives his imagination generates; rather, as we have seen, such opposition is the stuff of hope, of grace, of redemption, of growth.

Another part of Milton's theology bears directly on the gates of heaven episode: his Arminianism.⁴¹ For the

⁴¹ I rely primarily on two discussions of Arminianism and Milton's response to it: Maurice Kelley's in the introduction to *YE* 6: 74-87, and the excellent overview in Dennis Danielson's *Milton's Good God: A Study in Literary Theodicy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1982) 58-82. See also Fowler's note to *Paradise Lost* 3.173-202 in ed. Fowler

Calvinists, who believed God had surely predestined the fates of both the elect and the damned from all eternity, Arminianism was a dangerous consequence of Renaissance humanism and its Pelagian tendencies. To its founder and its adherents, however, Arminianism seemed a powerful *via media* between Pelagian theology, which denied original sin and thus came perilously close to denying God's absolute power or the need for Christ's redeeming sinners, and Augustinian theology, which emphasized nearly to the point of despair the powerlessness of human beings and the omnipotence of their Creator. As Maurice Kelley describes the Arminian middle way, "it substitutes a synergism wherein the human will cooperates with divine grace to attain an earned rather than a bestowed election to eternal life" (YE 6: 80). Kelley goes on to insist that only this Arminian middle way can validate Milton's continual emphasis on *trial*. Kelley argues that Milton could not reasonably praise conflict and trial as he does in *Areopagitica* unless he had at least tacitly begun to accept Arminian tenets. Otherwise,

[his] second argument ... his argument from principle ... would be an empty one, for trial can purify only those who have freedom of

choice. Thus if Milton had not consciously and openly accepted Remonstrant doctrines by the time of *Areopagitica*, he had at least taken a position that would logically develop into the Arminianism advanced in the *Christian Doctrine*.⁴²

In his characteristically combative way, Milton illustrates his case for Arminianism with one of Calvinism's favorite proof texts for predestination: the story of Jacob and Esau, the very story he works so magnificently into his portrayal of Satan before the gates of heaven. Milton's radical insistence on Jacob's and Esau's equal access to grace and salvation, and the way he interprets Scripture to support his claims, help to limn a sphere of redemption available even to Satan:

[N]o one is excluded by a decree of God from the way of penitence and eternal salvation unless he has rejected and despised the offer of grace until it is too late.... I will begin with the example of Jacob and Esau, Rom. ix, since it appears to many that the whole question hinges upon this case.⁴³

From his birth, Jacob was chosen to rule Esau (Genesis 25:33). The story of the brothers' destinies, especially as it appears in St. Paul's commentary in Romans 9, suggested to Calvinists that God did in fact predestinate to

⁴² YE 6: 82.

⁴³ YE 6: 196.

grace (Jacob) and reprobation (Esau), the so-called "double predestination."⁴⁴ In contrast, Milton insists that degrees of grace could and did exist between the extremes of pure blessedness and complete damnation:

If the elder boy or the elder nation shall serve the younger, and in this case certainly the nation is meant rather than the boy, the elder is not necessarily decreed reprobate. If the younger is considered worthy of more grace, the elder is not necessarily considered worthy of none. For this cannot be said of Esau, who was taught the true worship of God in his father's house, nor of his descendants, who were indisputably called to the faith with the rest of the Gentiles.⁴⁵

Milton then adduces Esau's blessing as proof that God dealt him no permanent decree of reprobation: Isaac assures Esau that he will indeed serve Jacob, but also that one day he will break the bonds of that servitude. Milton argues, "If Esau's servitude implies his reprobation, these words clearly imply that it was not to last for ever".⁴⁶ Moreover, although Milton admits that Romans 9:13--"As it is written, Jacob have I loved, but Esau have I hated"--is an extremely awkward text to reconcile with

⁴⁴ Kelley's notes in YE 6: 194-199, as well as the section in his introduction entitled "Arminianism," furnish most of the information I summarize here.

⁴⁵YE 6: 197-8.

⁴⁶ YE 6: 198.

his argument,⁴⁷ he nevertheless insists, stretching his exegesis to his emphasis, that it was Esau's and Jacob's service to God, and their posterities' faithfulness in their service, that resulted in God's hatred or favor, not any "decree of reprobation."⁴⁸

Milton may appear to finesse the difficult task of reconciling prevenient grace (given by God in varying quantities to his creatures) with human free will. On the other hand, one might argue that Milton simply repeats--with his usual vehemence and confidence--the paradox Calvinism (and, in its own way, Arminianism) attempts to resolve, while arriving at a different "answer."⁴⁹ Nevertheless, the most important point for Satan's situation, faced like Jacob with the gates of heaven, is Milton's firm rejection of the notion that God issues "a

⁴⁷ Carey's energetic translation has Milton saying, "But this next quotation floors me." The original is at *hoc iugulat*, whose literal translation, Carey notes, is "But this cuts the throat" (YE 6: 198).

⁴⁸ YE 6: 198-9.

⁴⁹ Patrides, *Milton and the Christian Tradition* 196: "Milton fails to convince us, yet his failure is repeated through the Christian tradition, for no definitive solution is possible; the problem outlasts all who undertake its resolution." Danielson extends Milton's "solution" more philosophical and theological credence: see *Milton's Good God* 61-2, 89-90.

decree of reprobation without lack of faith." Only protracted disobedience leads to that tightening spiral of punishment that eventually removes all hope of heaven. Milton acknowledges that God hardens hearts, but this is not at all like Calvin's idea of reprobation, for it is "a long deferred and quite extreme penalty, used for exceptionally heinous crimes, and only after God has shown a great deal of forbearance...."⁵⁰ He quotes Psalm 95:10-11, which speaks of God's waiting forty years to punish a rebellious people, and says,

Notice here how long it was before God made his decree. Moreover if, as in the case of Esau, we are to deduce spiritual meanings from these examples, notice that God shut out from eternal rest only those who tried his patience and were obstinate....⁵¹

Milton's argument throughout this section of *De Doctrina* is that only repeated, stubborn disobedience merits God's ultimate punishment, a punishment which may be understood not so much as an externally imposed penalty but the inevitable consequence of removing oneself from obedience to God's commands:

... no one is excluded by a decree of God from the way of penitence and eternal salvation unless he has rejected and despised the offer of

⁵⁰ YE 6: 199.

⁵¹ YE 6: 200.

grace until it is too late.... This reprobation lies not so much in God's will as in their own obstinate minds, and is not so much God's decree as theirs, resulting from their refusal to repent while they have an opportunity.⁵²

Keith Stavely maintains, on the basis of Milton's Arminianism, that Satan before the gates of heaven represents just such an opportunity for repentance:

... it is but a short step from assuming that Satan will remain Satan ... to assuming that Satan *must* remain Satan. And this is a step that Milton, ruthlessly consistent in his Arminianism as in all else, refuses to take.⁵³

Stavely is also finely attuned to the ecstatic possibility Milton portrays in this episode:

If the passage depicts an escape from satanic intrigues and rages into the clear air of God's open sky, this is so exhilaratingly accomplished that we feel at least momentarily that all things are possible, and even the archfiend might wake up and cry, '*This is the gate of heaven*' ... God continues to extend the most

⁵² YE 6: 194-5.

⁵³ Stavely 125. I too am impressed by Milton's consistency on this point; like Stavely I depend upon it for my argument. Yet I believe that consistency to be at least as emotional, willful, and faithful as it is logical. Milton's project of integrity can melt with ruth as well as be ruthless: his consistency is large, and can contain multitudes. The "logical Milton" so beloved by some critics (most notably Dennis Burden, as we shall see in the following chapters) too often reduces his breathtakingly inclusive cosmos to a Ramist diagram or an ascetic resolve, leaving little or no room for *L'Allegro*, sex, drink, laughter, dancing, music, or--of course--opposition, trial, conflict, or struggle.

crucial spiritual invitation to Satan despite Satan's previous rejecting and despising.⁵⁴

This feeling that all things are possible coincides at this point in the epic with the feeling that all things are visible; the larger emotion these feelings cause is called wonder, an emotion Satan can still feel:

Satan from hence now on the lower stair
That scaled by steps of gold to heaven gate
Looks down with wonder at the sudden view
Of all this world at once....
Such wonder seized, though after heaven seen,
The spirit malign, but much more envy seized,
At sight of all this world beheld so fair.
(3.540-3, 552-4)

Intriguingly, just as Satan appears to have begun to climb those provoking stairs he is surprised by this new wonder. Just as Milton's readers are "surrounded by sense," in the Richardsons' words, as they read the epic, so here Satan is surrounded by splendor, "seized" by wonder.⁵⁵

⁵⁴ Staveland 131. Unfortunately, Staveland agrees with Fowler that the provocative character of Satan's encounter with the stairs and heaven's gate is merely in Satan's mind. Both critics fear that God's note of challenge here is incompatible with his genuine offer of mercy or salvation. As we have seen, however, such a note of challenge is, if anything, characteristic of the way Milton imagines God's offer of salvation, especially to hardening sinners.

⁵⁵ Tellingly, Eve also uses "seized" to describe her happy capture by Adam's "gentle hand" (4.88-9). Unlike Satan, however, Eve "yielded, and from that time see[s] ... " (4.489). In other words, Eve testifies to the mysterious relationship between surrender and vision that Milton embraces and Satan eludes.

The wonder of this moment in *Paradise Lost* carries an especially compelling power that further testifies to its centrality in Milton's imagined cosmos. One reader notes that Satan's view of the world "is an image that exactly conveys the effect produced by the poem itself, a solid and intricate thing that can be seen as a whole."⁵⁶ Another reader asserts that this spot on the rim of the universe, between earth and heaven, represents "a veritable axis mundi, the cosmic intersection of the divine and the human, where one can pass from one cosmic zone to another."⁵⁷ I would go one step further and argue that our view of Satan's two provocative views--of the stairs leading up to heaven's gate and "all this world beheld so fair"--is an instance of what William Kerrigan calls the "enfolded sublime," a place within a poem that can "arrest the spin of narrative in still points" and "assimilate the work of years to the work of some few visionary days."

⁵⁶ Isabel MacCaffrey, *Paradise Lost as "Myth"* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1967) 50, noted in ed. Fowler 175.

⁵⁷ Lieb, *Poetics of the Holy* 154.

Milton's poem coheres for us, or has the possibility of becoming coherent for us, because he was able to root the entirety with logical and emotional force in certain privileged passages.... The enfolded sublime ... is the arrest of the hermeneutic circle, as if the poem were saying, 'Stop here, I will occupy you....' The enfolded sublime is not absolute closure. Yet by virtue of the enfolded sublime we have the poem, and having it, can proceed to ask our many questions.⁵⁸

Here in this instance of Satan provoked by God's creation and invitation we see not only an epic but a lifetime of concern with aspiration, struggle, vision, and salvation compressed into a brilliant, immortal diamond. Just as Satan in confronting the stairs confronts the essence of creative and redemptive history, so we who witness that confrontation see the operations of love, grace, creation, and damnation in a moment charged with all the wonder and power of the epic itself.⁵⁹

⁵⁸ Kerrigan, *The Sacred Complex* 232, 231.

⁵⁹ Fowler notes that the ladder may be understood as a "hierarchical *scala naturae* or generative sequence," as well as "a symbol for the alchemist's ascesis of purification..." (174). Stavely adds the fact that most Protestant commentators saw Jacob's ladder as a "figure of Christ" (128)--in which case, of course, Satan would be doubly (perhaps triply; see below) provoked by the Son. C. A. Patrides's account of the Christian interpretations of Jacob's ladder is the most comprehensive: the ladder may, in addition to the figures noted above, represent prelapsarian humanity's eventual ascent into heaven, the specifically "dual nature of the Christ," Christ's "reconciliation of heaven and earth," prayer, and human history, as Christians understand it, ascending toward the

The drama is Satan's, God's, Messiah's--and ours. Satan's other encounters with God's provoking objects, although they fall short of this instance of the enfolded sublime, may still teach us how to understand the ways of God to man, and hence the ways of men and women--that subject Milton is supposed by some readers to have found uncongenial. As Raphael will make clear in his warnings to Adam, Satan's lessons should be humanity's lessons, too.

III. Spring and Fall

"The soil of heaven is potentially explosive."

advent of the New Jerusalem, "the Christ's presence not only suffused everywhere in the ladder but, according to Renaissance commentators, the ladder itself." See Patrides, *Milton and the Christian Tradition* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1966) 108, 130, 209 n.1, and 227. See also "Connections Between Heaven and Earth" in Patrides, *Premises and Motifs* 31-63, especially the suggestive quotation from St. Jerome, who saw the "lesson" of Jacob's Ladder as that "the sinner must not despair of salvation..." (43). Echoes of Renaissance humanism's dream of the exaltation of man, particularly as expressed by Pico, are also here: Patrides (*Premises*) notes that the *Oration* "invoked Jacob's experience in order to commend the contemplation of the divine by means of the natural" (45). Of course, "contemplation" may not be all Pico had in mind for Jacob's Ladder; see my discussion in Chapter 1.

--Kester Svendsen, *Milton and Science*

[J]ust as when God incites to sin he is nevertheless not the cause of sinning, so when he hardens the heart of a sinner or blinds him, he is not the cause of sin. for he does not do this by infusing wickedness into the man. The means he uses are just and kindly, and ought rather to soften the hearts of sinners than harden them.

--*De Doctrina Christiana* (YE 6: 336)

As Maurice Kelley and Alastair Fowler observe, Milton's words in the *De Doctrina* recall another moment in which a divine provocation presents an opportunity for weal or woe. It is Christ's appearance near the end of the war in heaven:

Before him power divine his way prepared;
 At his command the uprooted hills retired
 Each to his place, they heard his voice and went
 Obsequious, heaven his wonted face renewed,
 And with fresh flowerets hill and valley smiled
 This saw his hapless foes but stood obdured,
 And to rebellious fight rallied their powers
 Insensate, hope conceiving from despair.
 In heavenly spirits could such perverseness
 dwell?
 But to convince the proud what signs avail,
 Or wonders move the obdurate to relent?
 They hardened more by what might most
 reclaim.... (6.780-791)⁶⁰

⁶⁰ The narrator's wonder will be echoed by Adam in his dialogue with Raphael; see Chapter 4, section II,

Fowler calls this passage "theologically exact," and it is that; yet it is also one of the most compelling of Milton's visions of a cosmos built of opposition. Messiah is come, and with him comes the glorious restoration of heaven. All is not lost; indeed, with Messiah's appearance it seems as if nothing were lost, not even the rebel angels. The radiance of this moment anticipates those preparatory restorations Christ will effect during his earthly ministry, namely his miracles. Who is this man, that even the waves obey his voice? the disciples will ask, as their terror of drowning yields to a terrible awe (Mark 4:41; Luke 8:25). Kitty Cohen describes well the intensity these lines contain:

[W]hen Christ appears, Milton does not describe another battle scene. Instead he describes a spiritual revelation.... [A]s long as the battle between Heaven and Hell was described in terms of war, no poetic distinction was possible [between their forces]. So Milton chose to present the manifestation of God's might not in terms of power but in a scene intense with light and spirit, radiant with glory.⁶¹

"The Great Chain of Dialogue."

⁶¹ Cohen, *The Throne and the Chariot* 124, 127. Another moving description of this moment may be found in Revard's *War In Heaven* 261: "Deliberately, Milton has made the physical environment respond as a living organism, indeed, as a responsive creature, a being who hears and moves, reacts and smiles. Hills and valleys the Son gathers to himself, and they smile and renew, in his glory, their own glory. The rebels, though spectators to all this, refuse to bloom, but before his

Here spiritual revelation is perfectly symbolized by miraculous renovation. Surely Messiah's repair of heaven's disrupted landscape is a sign of God's indefatigable powers of redemption and creation. How can Satan resist the love such a show of creative energy demonstrates, a love that is his only hope of redemption?⁶²

By being faithful: paradoxically, the constancy that Satan lacked in his obedience to God now reappears in a horrible inversion. Just as the announcement of the Son's begetting was one trial of Satan's constancy, a temptation to a more perfect, glorious obedience, so Messiah's restoration of heaven is another, inverted trial of Satan's constancy.⁶³ Ironically, Satan's self-destroying

renewing presence wither; before his living spirit fall spiritless."

⁶² John Carey's description is apt: "The rapport between God and Satan is deepened by the suggestion that it is because Satan finds God so lovable that he has to hate him. Love would threaten his self-sufficiency...." Carey concludes that "[t]his inviting aspect of the quarrel in Heaven is not explored far by Milton, but it is drawn in." I argue Milton does explore, subtly and pervasively, this very inviting--or provoking--aspect. See Carey 94.

⁶³ Milton observes that Satan, like Adam and Eve, "did not stand firm in the truth" (YE 6: 383).

hatred of God and Messiah succeeds only in reversing this lack of constancy in time to fail his second test. Satan changed his mind about obeying God; very well then, God will try to put such changeableness to work as another ladder to heaven. Yet Satan's increasingly suicidal stubbornness here mightily asserts itself for the first time: like a suicide, he apparently wants to decide not to decide anymore. That he can hold onto this nihilistic resolve even when faced with the coming of spring, the season of renewal ("And with fresh flowerets hill and valley smiled"), moves the poet to exclaim, "In heavenly spirits could such perverseness dwell?" (l. 788).⁶⁴ Milton's deeply intuitive imagination of heaven leads him and us to a surprising, awful wonder: heaven, like earth (as the next chapter will show), can contain almost anything besides death. It can include rebellion and active warfare.⁶⁵ It can even include a certain triviality of

⁶⁴ This question is echoed by Adam in his dialogue with Raphael in Book 9, a scene I will discuss in Chapter 4.

⁶⁵ Stella Revard explores the distinction between "war *propter coelum*, 'on account of Heaven,'" which was the way Luther and the patristic writers allegorized Lucifer's rebellion, and "war *in coelo*, 'in Heaven,'" a real war. Revard believes Milton to be indefinite as whether the battle was real or allegorical. See *War In Heaven* 109, 111-12. Raphael's refusal to rule out either possibility in his discourse to Adam (PL 5.570-76) may indicate that Milton believed the war in heaven

mind, as witness Mammon, whose eyes despite the many splendors of heaven were glued to the golden sidewalk:

Mammon, the least erected spirit that fell
From heaven, for even in heaven his looks and
thoughts
Were always downward bent, admiring more
The riches of heaven's pavement, trodden gold,
Than aught divine or holy else enjoyed
In vision beatific.... (1.679-684)⁶⁶

One may marvel at the fine, definite, decisive line Milton imagines between an unfallen angel who can find nothing better to look at in heaven than the streets of gold and a fallen angel who, in C. S. Lewis' famous words:

In the midst of a world of light and love, of song and feast and dance ... could find nothing to think of more interesting than his own prestige. And his own prestige, it must be noted, had and could have no other grounds than those which he refused to admit for the superior prestige of Messiah.... Hence his revolt is entangled in contradictions from the very outset.⁶⁷

to be both allegorical and real.

⁶⁶ This passage is an interesting commentary on the "levity or shallowness of mind" Tillyard believes the cause of man's fall (in *Milton* 222-226). While Milton of all men rejected such shallowness of mind, he apparently did not believe it incompatible with at least a measure of blessedness.

⁶⁷ Lewis, *A Preface to "Paradise Lost"* 96. For a cogent explanation of Satan's rebellion as essentially against the Son, not the Father, see Revard, *The War In Heaven* 60, 67-85.

God tries to use even the rebel's contradictions, perhaps especially the contradictions, but Satan--as he is free to do--eludes even this divine creativity. His heart is hardened, by himself: he stands "obdured," "insensate," and onanistically spills his seed upon his own rocky ground to conceive only a deadly parody of hope, refusing the generative friction of true intercourse.

Milton's portrayal of the perverse dynamics of Satan's rebellion, like his portrayal of the "warfaring Christian" in *Areopagitica*, shows that erring (wandering, *errare*) is not necessarily sinning: there are many errors, but only one Error--to disobey God. The errors that even angels make do not necessarily cause them to forfeit heaven; God uses those very mistakes to educate his creation. In an ironic sense, Satan's Error, his Sin, of disobedience swallows up all other possible errors, or sins, just as Adam and Eve's Sin of eating the forbidden fruit is itself a digest of all sins: "Anyone who examines this sin carefully will admit, and rightly, that it was a most atrocious offence, and that it broke every part of the law."⁶⁸ One may say that, in abandoning his obedience, Satan in a sense comes to abandon the pos-

⁶⁸ YE 6: 383.

sibility of error.⁶⁹ He makes fewer mistakes; from now on, mistakes make up more of *him*.⁷⁰ His story in *Paradise Lost* is about the provocations of life with Father, and his continuing refusal of them.⁷¹ In another awful reversal, Satan mimes the action of repentance, the turning around, but only to turn his back on the struggle of obedience. Obedience must always entail struggle in a free creation; such a struggle is the pledge and condition of its freedom. And a struggle with no possibility of error is not a struggle but a foregone conclusion. The only conclusion in God's universe is the one the reprobate writes for himself in an effort to end the struggle of

⁶⁹ Milton says of Adam and Eve's original sin that it was "COMMITTED WHEN THEY ABANDONED THEIR OBEDIENCE... (YE 6: 382).

⁷⁰ Cf. Revard, *War In Heaven* 59: "In the beginning Satan controls pride's emergence, but thereafter pride controls Satan." To which I would add only an "eventually," for pride's control over him is not complete until he tempts Eve, if then.

⁷¹ Carey notes that Milton took some care to make God's exaltation of his Son "provocative" to Satan, although he insists this provocation is merely to rebellion (*Milton* 81-2). Martin Luther, although speaking of the Son's Incarnation instead of his exaltation, also describes God as having "provoked" Satan's "insolence" against him (Luther, *Works* 22:103, quoted in Revard, *War In Heaven* 73). I argue that the provocation is real but could be to greater blessedness (as it seems to have been to two-thirds of Heaven) as well as damnation.

obedience. Budick analyzes this essential collapse of nerve as:

the inevitable failure of the imagination that has become oblivious to the transcendent structure of creation.... As Milton conceives it, Satan's mind is a coil of self-representations in which the quest for a surpassing first principle, the track of the divine, has been forever abandoned....⁷²

The quest has been abandoned: this is a deeply ironic description of a fallen angel whose apparent quest dominates the epic. Yet it is accurate. Through the course of the epic Satan abandons the quest again and again, each time turning his back on the struggle of obedience and the dynamism of heaven, as he becomes less and less able to imagine his incapacity, and hence less and less able to learn or grow in blessedness. Budick describes Satan's condition as "the monstrousness of endlessly protracted perception" that cannot "admit exclusion" or "internalize loss as an element in vision itself."⁷³ In other words, Satan cannot make a leap of faith, praise a light he cannot see, or fall correctly--to his knees. He refuses the long and joyfully wayfaring/warfaring journey to integrity and righteousness by

⁷² Budick, *The Dividing Muse* 87.

⁷³ Budick, *The Dividing Muse* 90-1.

trading their unfolding possibilities for the death-dealing illusions of infinity, transcendence, and absolute power. As was true for Adam and Eve, he might have had what he wanted, what he *really* wanted, had he waited and worked at it.

It is one of Milton's most remarkable paradoxes that the very decree that 'causes' Satan to revolt might have been, had Satan listened to it carefully and without the blinding fury of his pride, the means to stay his revolt.... God has named the Son to kingship so as to make manifest visually and symbolically the union upon which the vitality of his creation depends.⁷⁴

Satan's inability to wait and work means he will begin to lose the need to need, the ability to desire, to struggle and grow. Satan cannot endure

the self-sacrificial requirements of the continually creative cosmos.... Divine, dynamic fixedness, a truly stable imagining, is for Milton the product of an imagination of loss.... True perception of reality is thus privative perception. It results from achieved recognition of the independence of the image from obsessional subjective continuities. Without recognition of continual loss, perception, in Milton's view, soon collapses into deathly rigor.... *Paradise Lost* ... offers a poetry of

⁷⁴ Revard, *War In Heaven* 57. See also 127, where Revard describes the good angels as they stand ready for the coming of Christ and his chariot: they "achieve their finest moment, as they 'stand still in bright array' and accept with joy the salvation of the Lord. To wait upon the Lord, as Milton affirmed in the sonnet on his blindness, is the highest service possible."

loss that is produced by an imagination of freely accepted, partial exclusion.⁷⁵

Such an exclusion is, seen another way, a provocation, even a temptation. It is the drama of Satan before the gates of heaven, before Messiah's chariot, before the sun, and before humanity--especially in the person of Eve. It is to these final two provocations that I now turn.

IV. The Heavens and the Earth

Satan flings himself into our universe with an energy reminiscent of his falling flight from heaven: "and without longer pause / Down right into the world's first region throws / His flight precipitant..." (3.361-3). He ignores lesser splendors and makes for the sun, apparently because it most resembles the heaven he has twice rejected: "above them all / The golden sun in splendour likest heaven / Allured his eye..." (3.571-3). At least

⁷⁵ Budick, *The Dividing Muse* 91-3. Budick's words are a more abstract version of the Gospel injunction that he who loses his life will find it. Those creatures who are given reason (and thus powers of choice) will see, and must embrace, the necessary contingency and subordination of everything that is not God. Contingency, of course, means limitation; as we have seen, however, Miltonic limitations are the gateway to growth, just as subordination and surrender are the surest paths to glorification.

some of Satan must therefore remain undamned and potentially reclaimable: heavenly splendor still draws him toward itself. Indeed, one might speculate that the "golden sun" is, in a pun common in English religious poetry of the Renaissance, the golden Son, and that Satan will once again find before him the provoking object of Messiah.⁷⁶ Certainly the philosopher's stone lodged in Aaron's breastplate is a symbol of regeneration, transformation, and therefore grace, the chance for forgiveness and a new start. Yet Satan does not yield to this good temptation, God's temptation. In his growing single-mindedness he manages to overlook or ignore the wonderful stone altogether, quite a feat in a land of perfect visibility; the only transformation he effects is his cherubic disguise.⁷⁷

⁷⁶ Fowler's notes (178-182) indicate many of the Orphic, Neoplatonic, and Christian connotations potentially contained within the symbol of the sun.

⁷⁷ ed. Fowler, 181. See also Michael Fixler, "All-Interpreting Love: God's Name in Scripture and in *Paradise Lost*," in *Milton and Scriptural Tradition*, ed. James A. Syms and Leland Ryken (Columbia, Missouri: University of Missouri Press, 1984) 121-2. Nohrnberg observes that Satan's disguise is an attempted "nostalgic self-renewal of innocence" (private correspondence).

God's grace desires to bring good out of evil. Satan's deliberate disguise, temporary and deceptive as it is, could not occur if he were totally bereft of grace. (Contrast with this the metamorphic necessity he experiences in Book 10.) Yet this remaining grace, misapplied, is disastrous, just as God's kindnesses to the recalcitrant sinner serve merely to confirm the sinner's degradation. Hence the most dramatic instance of Satan's continuing degradation occurs just after Satan leaves the sun and lands on Earth, on Mt. Niphates. Here the magnitude of the provocation the sun represents for Satan is revealed in one of the most poignant of Satan's speeches:

O thou that with surpassing glory crowned,
 Look'st from thy sole dominion like the God
 Of this new world; at whose sight all the stars
 Hide their diminished heads; to thee I call,
 But with no friendly voice, and add thy name
 O sun, to tell thee how I hate thy beams
 That bring to my remembrance from what state
 I fell, how glorious once above thy sphere;
 Till pride and worse ambition threw me down
 Warring in heaven against heaven's matchless
 king:

Ah wherefore! He deserved no such return
 From me, whom he created what I was
 In that bright eminence, and with his good
 Upbraided none; nor was his service hard.

(4.32-45)

That the sun reminds Satan not only of his lost Heaven but also of God and the Messiah whose lordship provoked his rebellion is clear. That Satan believes the stars diminished and chastened by the sun's brilliance also

recalls his prideful misinterpretation of the effect Messiah's glory would have on the angels' status. This splendid sun in Satan's eyes is another provoking object, one that sums up Satan's history and sin in one brilliant image.

Nor is that comprehensive image lost on Satan. If God, far from driving Satan "to despair on Niphates' top,"⁷⁸ has placed the sun before Satan's eyes as a new, nearly overwhelming temptation to repentance, the new honesty and introspection Satan displays is, at first, a most promising response to this invasion of grace.⁷⁹ Milton portrays no "Satan in the motions," no divine puppeteering; nor does he show us Satan's final degradation, as Harold Bloom believes:

Here Satan makes his last choice, and ceases to be what he was in the early books of the poem. All that the anti-Satanists say about him is true *after* this point; all or almost all claimed for him by the Satanists is true *before* it....

⁷⁸ Empson, *Milton's God* 95.

⁷⁹ Carey maintains that Satan's "mood can alter his beliefs. When he gets back into sight of Heaven, its brilliance moves him deeply, and he finds himself believing that its God really was his creator...." While "mood" is arguably far too weak a word for Satan's state of mind during these key moments, Carey's assertion does lend credence to the notion that Satan's character is still malleable and hence still possibly salvageable through such provocations as God supplies. See *Milton* 92.

Nothing that can be regenerated remains in
Satan....⁸⁰

As long as God continues to place provoking objects before Satan, I am arguing, God continues to tempt Satan to repentance; such a repentance would be impossible if there were nothing capable of regeneration in Satan, and such provocation would then be merely spiteful. The sun in Satan's eyes on Mt. Niphates is a provoking object of crucial importance, but it is not the last one placed before Satan in the epic--nor, arguably, the most powerfully provocative, as we shall see. Thus it cannot be Satan's final opportunity for regeneration, his "last choice."

Nevertheless, this temptation of Satan is the most detailed in terms of the visible psychological/theological struggle Milton describes, and as such is a particularly valuable example of how proximity to salvation may paradoxically deepen one's commitment to damnation.⁸¹ God chooses to confront Satan with the sun at the very moment the invisible sun within him--without which he would have

⁸⁰ Bloom, in his introduction to *John Milton: Modern Critical Views*, ed. Harold Bloom (New York: Chelsea House, 1986) 5.

⁸¹ Staveland calls this Satan's "(literally) most golden spiritual opportunity of all" ("Satan and Arminianism" 132).

no being at all--is growing stronger. Satan's "dire attempt" (sounding that "tempt" again) "boils in his tumultuous breast, / And like a devilish engine back recoils / Upon himself" (PL 4.16-18). Satan begins to feel, even eerily to become (in a horrible parody of self-creation) the kick from the cannons he helped build. He can't keep his mind on his work: "horror and doubt distract / His troubled thoughts" (4.18-19). Worst of all, as Satan is stirred up the ugly settled sludge of hell within him is stirred up too, and "now conscience wakes despair / That slumbered..." (4.23-24).⁸² Satan is at his

⁸² Louis Martz discusses the apparent "contradiction" of Satan's still possessing a conscience at this point: since conscience is given to fallen man as an "umpire" to guide man toward salvation, Martz argues, its presence in Satan denotes the possibility of grace for him. This Satan "still seems to possess the power of choice.... Milton is boldly raising here another of his ultimate questions: would not a just God prefer to see Satan repent, and give him the chance to repent? Milton seems to leave the question open by showing that Satan's pride would never have accepted the chance, and that therefore God has not offered it...." I find Milton's ultimate question to be just as bold as Martz does, but I think it rather less open: Martz seems to accept Satan's point of view too readily by concluding that God's omniscience keeps him from offering Satan a grace that would only be rejected. The Crucifixion alone is evidence enough that rejection does not constrain God's offers of grace. Martz' argument implies that Satan could still choose in theory only, but that the practical certainty of his actions keeps God from giving him a real opportunity for choice, an argument against free will that I cannot accept. See *Poet of Exile* 106-8. I am indebted to Diane McColley's *Milton's Eve* for the Martz citation.

most vulnerable to God's temptations at this moment; moreover, just as he did on the rim of the universe, he finds those provocations all around:

Sometimes towards Eden which now in his view
Lay pleasant, his grieved look he fixes sad,
Sometimes towards heaven and the full-blazing
sun,
Which now sat high in his meridian tower:
Then much revolving, thus in sighs began.
(4.27-31)

The accumulated internal and external pressures Satan feels on Mt. Niphates are a more than sufficient motivation for what is at first a surprisingly honest and genuinely moving speech. God has provoked Satan into re-enacting the very conditions of his fallenness. With the sun on one side and Eden on the other, Satan is conspicuously alone and thus turns inward, where a fitful but enduring inner light clarifies, painfully, his murky vision.⁸³

⁸³ There are interesting similarities between Satan's speech on Mt. Niphates and Despaire's speech to Redcrosse Knight in *The Faerie Queene*, Book 1, Canto 9. R. A. Shoaf analyzes Spenser's portrayal of Despaire and concludes that true faith must re-enact the condition of despair: "faith repairs despair precisely because faith repeats (resembles) despair.... Faith, like Despaire, burdens present memory with the weight of old crimes.... To forget, of course, would be to forfeit the hope of repair: one must remember to repair, although memory must not be permitted to consume the present in reiteration of the past. If one remembers in faith, this will not happen, but still, remembering in faith will always bring one near to despair, for faith repeats despair so as to repair

In a word, Satan blinks. He might be undone, remade. In the face of this possibility, he soliloquizes.⁸⁴ This soliloquy, although like all soliloquies self-regarding, need not remain so. Indeed, for an instant it appears that Satan's growing habit of self-negation may, despite itself, lead him to the positive self-knowledge that might bring contrition and true repentance. A flurry of rhetorical questions arises, to which Satan shakes his mighty head, a head that for an instant almost clears: "Ah wherefore!" "How due!" "what burden then?" When he rehearses a characteristic complaint--God could have made me lower, and thus less ambitious, and thus less prone to fall--he sees through it at once: "Yet why not? Some

despair--as the surgeon wounds to heal a wound" (Shoaf, *Milton, Poet of Duality* 22). In Satan's case on Mt. Niphates, then, God's scalpel is at work and cutting deeper than ever before. Here is when he ought indeed to find himself "hope conceiving from despair" (PL 6.787).

⁸⁴ Although "soliloquy" may be technically inaccurate, as it is the sun and not himself Satan addresses at the speech's beginning, by line 66 Satan explicitly talks to himself. One might speculate that Satan moves so easily (and unknowingly) from sun to self because he has succeeded in eclipsing the sun in himself, or because the invisible sun (Son) yet within him (however buried or reviled) allows for genuine introspection a while longer. Perhaps both are true.

other power / As great might have aspired, and me though
 mean / Drawn to his part..." (4.61-3). Then, shockingly,
 Satan in turn sees through *this* complaint, and comes as
 close to indicting himself for his sin as he ever will in
 the epic. Within Satan's "tumultuous breast" stirs not
 only hell but heaven too. Milton's theodicial tone-poem
 of provocative grace reaches one of its twin peaks with a
 great crescendo in the music of opposition:

Hadst thou the same free will and power to
 stand?
 Thou hadst: whom hast thou then or what to
 accuse,
 But heaven's free love dealt equally to all?
 Be then his love accursed, since love or hate,
 To me alike, it deals eternal woe.
 Nay cursed be thou; since against his thy will
 Chose freely what it now so justly rues.
 Me miserable! Which way shall I fly
 Infinite wrath, and infinite despair?
 Which way I fly is hell, my self am hell;
 And in the lowest deep a lower deep
 Still threatening to devour me opens wide,
 To which the hell I suffer seems a heaven.
 O then at last relent: is there no place
 Left for repentance, none for pardon left?
 (4.66-80)

Some readers may hear no break between Satan's ques-
 tion in line 80 and his answer in line 81; for these
 readers, the question is dramatically rhetorical, another
 empty Satanic flourish. I, on the other hand, hear a
 grand pause, rounded into a period by the mirrored words
 at either end of line 80, a pause that underscores the
 intensity and pathos of Satan's cry, a cry that nearly

escapes the pull of his dark gravity. *Relent*: one meaning of this verb, now obsolete but current in Milton's time, is "to melt under the influence of heat."⁸⁵ Between the boiling in Satan's breast and the "full-blazing sun, / Which now sat high in his meridian tower," Satan might well melt. His stony heart might soften despite itself; the wonders around him and the new wondering within him might yet cause this obdurate devil to change his mind (6.789-90). This angel might, even now, look homeward and melt with ruth:

[Satan's soliloquy] is a more expressive response to God's offer of grace than Satan had [yet] achieved ... emotion recollected in turbulence rather than tranquility, not an acceptance of the offer certainly, but something more than a simple rejecting and despising of it nevertheless. Like any other creature who is fallen but still struggling to make a free choice, Satan is poised between an attentive focus upon God-given reality and his own past and possible future place in it ... and a self-absorbed pride which blurs such a focus even as it is achieved....

The psychic struggle on which Satan now embarks ... feels as authentic as Adam's similar struggle in Book 9: two steps forward, one back; one forward, two back. It has all the ingredients of the Arminian moment of choice and truth, including conviction of sin ... and

⁸⁵ See the *Oxford English Dictionary*, compact edition (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1971) 2479, definition 1.

direct confrontation with the possibility of repentance....⁸⁶

And it is only the possibility of repentance that makes Satan's struggle authentic. For even saints' cries are not unlike this fallen angel's: "O wretched man that I am! who shall deliver me from the body of this death?" (Romans 7:24).

St. Paul's answer is that Christ will deliver him. Satan too knows his deliverer's name, but the submission his deliverance requires leads him, unfortunately, to shake his head again:

None left but by submission; and that word
Disdain forbids me, and my dread of shame
Among the spirits beneath, whom I seduced
With other promises and other vaunts
Than to submit, boasting I could subdue
The omnipotent. (4.81-86)

The pitch of Satan's self-accusation may produce the ironic "subdue the omnipotent,"⁸⁷ but it also blinds him

⁸⁶ Stavely, "Satan and Arminianism" 135. See also Martz, *Poet of Exile* 107: "Something very important is accomplished by this humanization of Satan, this treatment of his psychology as resembling that of fallen man. The effect is to place him on the same plane ... with man." Martsz' observation underscores the relevance of Satan's experience for our understanding of Adam and Eve's.

⁸⁷ I owe this clarification to Professor James Nohrnberg.

to the true understanding of submission's glories that he had at last worked out just moments before:

I sdeigned subjection, and thought one step
higher
Would set me highest, and in a moment quit
The debt immense of endless gratitude,
So burdensome still paying, still to owe;
Forgetful what from him I still received,
And understood not that a grateful mind
By owing owes not, but still pays, at once
Indebted and discharged; what burden then?
(4.50-57)

Such truths slip Satan's mind more easily as it hardens into near-impenetrability. The conclusions Satan draws as he forgets everything his tumult taught him are then summed up in his famous malediction, "all good to me is lost; / Evil be thou my good..." (4.109-110). Satan is indeed beset by a "hateful siege / Of contraries" (9.121-2), never more so than when a provoking object is set before him. By turning good into evil, Satan tries to elude all such gracious provocation: "For only in destroying I find ease / To my relentless thoughts..." (9.129-130). Alas, part of the good that Satan finds himself destroying is that good left in him. This good, ironically, is enabled by a grace that will not yet leave him alone. Hence Satan's malediction is not only angry and suicidal, but for now sheer wishful thinking: God has another surprise for him, one more provoking object to place in his path.

As Satan turns his attention from the heavens to Earth, Paradise, and its human lords, he is confronted by a new kind of creature, a new kind of beauty, one that calls forth an uncertain response. When faced with Adam and Eve and their love for each other, Satan does not try to deny that the human pair experience true happiness; perhaps he is not yet so damned that he could manage such a lie when the evidence is so plain before him:

... aside the devil turned
For envy, yet with jealous leer malign
Eyed them askance, and to himself thus plained.
Sight hateful, sight tormenting! Thus these
two
Imparadised in one another's arms
The happier Eden, shall enjoy their fill
Of bliss on bliss, while I to hell am thrust,
Where neither joy more love, but fierce desire,
Among our other torments not the least,
Still unfulfilled with pain of longing pines....
(4.502-511)

Satan's envy quickly turns back into the malice he has almost got by heart, so often does he rehearse it.⁸⁸ Yet

⁸⁸ In an interesting analysis, John Hollander argues that Satan is mistaken about the "happier Eden" Adam and Eve feel in each other's arms: "Satan is wrong because they are 'imparadis't' indeed in Paradise; the notion that an erotic embrace is a bower of bliss is a desperate, lovely fiction of fallen humanity." While Satan's perspective is certainly limited and skewed in this instance, "bliss on bliss" is in truth an accurate description of love in Paradise. Perhaps Hollander means only that Satan confuses the happy surplus of delight Paradise yields to its inhabitants--and its inhabitants yield to each other--with a fallen strategy of pleasure-seeking. See Hollander, "Echo Schematic," in Bloom, ed., *John Milton*:

the moment approaches when such provocation will not be so easily abandoned.

The last, greatest provoking object set before Satan must somehow circumvent his now almost wholly corrupted inner voice.⁸⁹ We do hear Satan grieving and debating again, as he agonizes over what beast he will occupy for his deadliest work yet, the temptation of man. Unlike his struggle on Mt. Niphates, however, Satan's latest soliloquy shows connoisseurship, but not much genuine horror and doubt:

O earth, how like to heaven, if not preferred
More justly, seat worthier of gods, as built
With second thoughts, reforming what was old!
For what god after better worse would build?
(9.99-102)

From this confused praise--which implies that heaven, God's initial creation, was somehow defective--Satan soon enough moves to his by now tedious self-justification and rehearsal of purpose, a sing-song varied by two horrible changes. First, we hear that Satan no longer wants to relieve his misery, but only to find company in it (9.126-

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⁸⁹ See Revard, *War In Heaven* 61: "[Satan's] wish to soar in happiness through his own powers is a perverting chemical that has mutated his nature, destroying the fabric of sound intellect."

8). For the possibly purgative suffering he experienced on Mt. Niphates, Satan substitutes spite. Second, Satan has adopted a new disdain for earthy matter. Gone is his earlier note, however wavering, of genuine admiration for this latest creation and its highest example, humanity. When he first saw Adam and Eve, Satan was moved to praise them and, by clear implication, their creator:

... earth-born perhaps,
 Not spirits, yet to heavenly spirits bright
 Little inferior; whom my thoughts pursue
 With wonder, and could love, so lively shines
 In them divine resemblance, and such grace
 The hand that formed them on their shape hath
 poured....
 To you whom I could pity thus forlorn
 Though I unpitied: league with you I seek,
 And mutual amity so strait, so close,
 That I with you must dwell, or you with me
 Henceforth.... (4.360-5, 374-7)

This oddly moving interruption is brief: by the time he gets to "so strait, so close" Satan is hissing again, and his final plea of necessity merely adds the darkest of beauty spots to his mask. Yet there is, or appears to be, a moment of genuine love here, or at least a receptivity to wonder that gives signs that all is not lost. That this moment is moving and disquieting makes us feel, even if faintly, that somewhere in Satan the siege is not quite over:

[I]ndeed ... there is an unnerving strain here between the two ways of reading the passage; you can either shudder at Satan's villainy or take the offer as sincere, and feel the agony of his

ruined greatness. But both are within him....⁹⁰
Precisely so, and it is the agony that testifies to the remaining greatness.

By Book 9, however, Satan appears to have lost his appetite for wonder, or to have traded it for more wounded vanity. He now finds man's exalted station "from so base original" repugnant; his arch-refined sensibilities also suffer from the indignity of his having to mix with the serpent's "bestial slime." Frank envy, the appalling dandyism of a hack actor ("O foul descent! That I who erst contended / With gods to sit the highest, am now constrained / Into a beast" [9.163-5]), the questions now wholly rhetorical and preening ("But what will not ambition and revenge / Descend to?" [9.168-9]), the ruins of courage eroded into a dusty wind of folly ("Let it; I reckon not" [9.173])--this soliloquy reveals a Satan repeatedly and thoroughly condemned out of his own mouth.

Thus the last provoking object God sets before Satan to tempt him to a possible good is uniquely and beautifully invasive: one that he has seen before, but never in

⁹⁰ Empson, *Milton's God* 69. By agreeing with Empson I take issue with Revard's contention that Satan refuses "to regard Adam and Eve as anything other than means to his revenge..." (*War In Heaven* 80). But also see Carey, *Milton* 92.

this way or in this context. It is Eve, mother of mankind, indeed mother of Messiah, who all unknowingly confronts Satan with heaven once again.

Beyond his hope, Eve separate he spies,
 Veiled in a cloud of fragrance, where she stood,
 Half spied, so thick the roses bushing round
 About her glowed, oft stooping to support
 Each flower of slender stalk....
 Much he the place admired, the person more.
 As one who long in populous city pent,
 Where houses thick and sewers annoy the air,
 Forth issuing on a summer's morn to breathe
 Among the pleasant villages and farms
 Adjoined, from each thing met conceives delight.
 The smell of grain, or tedded grass, or kine,
 Of dairy, each rural sight, each rural sound;
 If chance with nymph-like step fair virgin pass,
 What pleasing seemed, for her now pleases more,
 She most, and in her look sums all delight.
 (9.424-8, 444-54)

This is the rural England Milton portrayed so lovingly in *L'Allegro*. Amid the machinations of Satan's plot, the pastoral scene is not merely a respite but a positive opposing force, more arresting even than the "sober certainty of waking bliss" that comes upon the tempter Comus in *A Mask*. In the earlier work Milton has the antagonist rapt by the Lady's overheard song. Now one greater antagonist, bent on an even more ruinous initiation than Comus intended, has Eve in full view.⁹¹

⁹¹ Eve may in fact be singing, too; see Chapter 2, 57-8. Note also that conception occurs here, just as it does in Satan's heart in heaven, except that the offspring here is, or could be, "delight" (ll. 449, 454), like the offspring of Venus and Bacchus, or

At this moment, Satan is faced with a provoking object combining the power of aesthetic rapture, sexual conquest, and irresistible grace in an angelic form and "human face divine." The effect is devastating:

Such pleasure took the serpent to behold
This flowery plat, the sweet recess of Eve
Thus early, thus alone; her heavenly form
Angelic, but more soft, and feminine,
Her graceful innocence, her every air
Of gesture or least action overawed
His fierceness of the fierce intent it brought;
That space the evil one abstracted stood
From his own evil, and for the time remained
Stupidly good, of enmity disarmed,
Of guile, of hate, of envy, of revenge....
(9.455-466)

For the first time since he plotted his rebellion, Satan is clean, indeed nearly a *tabula rasa*. Space and time stand still while the tempter is tempted by an overpowering prey. Diane McColley observes that Eve might have used this surprising position of power to help effect Satan's salvation, or at least to try. Eve may have been

a conduit to others confronted by Satan--perhaps even to Satan himself. That might have become the mission on which, in responding to her calling in that prime season, Eve went forth....

McColley goes on to suggest that Satan is not ultimately doomed until he causes Eve to fall:

Zephyr and Aurora.

... Satan's soul-searching at the beginning of Book 4 and his momentary rapture now suggest that he has consciously to reject every shred of lingering goodness in himself and commit the malicious act of corrupting innocent beings before he completes the work of damning himself utterly.... If Eve had prevented [Satan's] putting his plan into action, he might have tried again and again, against beings better and better prepared to resist through grace and virtue following the precedents of their parents; that is, he might have continued to choose damnation. But his success with Eve ensures it. It cuts off his opportunity *not* to sin by corrupting innocence. When one gives in to temptation one sins against the tempter--as Adam, too, is about to do.⁹²

To McColley's intriguing insights we might add Fowler's note, which informs us that

Satan is *abstracted* not only in the sense 'absent in mind' but also 'separated, removed from matter'--turned momentarily, in fact, to 'the soul's essence' (*Comus* 462).... For a moment Satan's evil becomes a separate thing, rather than a quality of himself.⁹³

This moment, therefore, is not merely one more Satanic false step, a momentary stumbling on his steady course. On the contrary, as we have seen, that course,

⁹² McColley, *Milton's Eve* 189-191. Of course Eve does not know she has this power over the serpent/Satan, but the power is nevertheless present--and surprising, if only to the reader, who might not have expected humanity's greatest show of strength against its adversary just before its greatest defeat by that adversary.

⁹³ ed. Fowler 466.

though deliberate, is anything but steady: God continues up to the very morning of man's fall to tempt Satan to repentance and redemption. And this temptation is the most extreme, the most provoking, the most overwhelming of all. Here at this extreme point in Satan's fall, he is confronted by what is arguably the best chance he has for redemption, the greatest, most gracious gift he could receive: the cessation of his constant inner monologue, the shutting-down of that spiraling-inward consciousness that leaves him no peace in which repentance might take root and grow. *Stupidly* good is precisely what Satan must become here, for his intelligence, his powers of reasoning, are nearly rotted through. Transfixed by Eve, Satan returns to heaven. In the afterglow of Eve's rapine sweet, Satan might have remembered the joys of submission, and found a way to remain in the company of the blessed. As a doctor breaks a crooked bone that it might mend straight, so God's provoking Eve breaks the endless loop of Satan's corrupt reasoning--indeed, comes near to breaking his will--that it might resume a healthy course.

But Satan recovers with desperate speed. The "hot hell that always within him burns" reasserts its demands, and Satan "recollects" his "fierce hate" (9.467, 471). Interestingly, however, when Satan has urged himself back

into his spiteful concentration and regains his powers of speech, he finds himself more than single-minded:

"Thoughts, whither have ye led me, with what sweet / Compulsion thus transported to forget / What hither brought us, hate, not love..." (9.473-5). Satan implies that his evil integrity of purpose has wavered, even that parts of himself are rebelling against the rebel.⁹⁴ Once more, Satan is shaken, and might choose a different side.

Nevertheless, after he has gotten over the awkwardness of chiding himself, he rededicates himself to his mission, and carries on. He is blinded by his own reflection; the voices inside his head deafen him to the music of opposition.

He will not face such a temptation to good again in the epic. The next provoking object before him will be a tree in Hell whose ashy fruit is an anti-sacrament, emptied of grace. The only struggle left to Satan and his angels will be a struggle toward illusion and repetition,

⁹⁴ Satan's self-address also eerily prefigures Eve's "Serpent, we might have spared our coming hither," spoken when she realizes the goal toward which he has led her. Indeed, leaders and followers exchange their roles several times in this book, as will be discussed more fully in the following chapters.

not life and growth. The contraries Satan then experiences lead only to dead ends.

...a while he stood, expecting
 Their universal shout and high applause
 To fill his ear, when contrary he hears
 On all sides, from innumerable tongues
 A dismal universal hiss, the sound
 Of public scorn; he wondered, but not long
 Had leisure, wondering at himself now more....
 (9.504-510)

Wonder now wears a desperate face. Temptation turns to tantalization, and the provoking object bears bitter fruit.⁹⁵

... There stood
 A grove hard by, sprung up with this their
 change,
 His will who reigns above, to aggravate
 Their penance, laden with fair fruit, like that
 Which grew in Paradise, the bait of Eve
 Used by the tempter....
 ... they fondly thinking to allay
 Their appetite with gust, instead of fruit
 Chewed bitter ashes, which the offended taste
 With spattering noise rejected....
 ... so oft they fell
 Into the same illusion, not as man
 Whom they triumphed once lapsed....
 (10.547-552; 564-7; 570-2)

⁹⁵ For a keenly insightful discussion of the difference between temptation and tantalization in *Paradise Lost*, see Kerrigan, *The Sacred Complex* 172-3. I agree that God does not tantalize unfallen man, but I differ with Kerrigan over the issue of when God stops tempting Satan and begins to tantalize him. See above, 28-9.

Not as man: this early hint of humanity's repentance and the ensuing promise of salvation prepares us for our return to Paradise, where we find a couple who, having yielded to the serpent's temptation, nevertheless choose to yield to another temptation, namely God's temptation of grace. Their return to their obedience restores the music of opposition, the gracious contraries of creation, to their genuinely fruitful possibilities. Those possibilities, their loss, and their restoration--and what these teach us about Milton's poetics of humanity--await us in the story of our grand parents and their relationship, before and after the Fall.

Chapter 4

The Provocations of Paradise

Our understanding of Milton's Paradise has developed greatly since E. M. W. Tillyard's famous remark that Adam and Eve, "reduced to the ridiculous task of working in a garden which produces of its own accord more than they will ever need, ... are in the hopeless position of Old Age Pensioners enjoying perpetual youth."¹ Many writers, including Barbara Lewalski, Thomas Blackburn, Joan Bennett, Dennis Danielson, and others, have argued strenuously for a dynamic, even taxing Paradise, one which calls for Adam and Eve to use every nascent ability to its fullest, thereby developing that ability, that strength, that capacity.² Diane McColley's evocation of Milton's

¹ E. M. W. Tillyard, *Milton* rev. ed. (New York: Barnes and Noble, 1967) 239. Some reductive readings of Eden persist, however. In 1989 one critic was still calling Milton's Paradise "pristine." (See John Leonard, "Language and knowledge in *Paradise Lost*," in *The Cambridge Companion to Milton*, ed. Dennis Danielson [Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989] 97-111.)

² See Barbara Lewalski, "Innocence and Experience in Milton's Eden," Thomas Kranidas, ed., *New Essays on Paradise Lost* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1969) 86-117; Diane McColley, *Milton's Eve* (Urbana: Univ. of Illinois Press, 1983); Thomas Blackburn, "'Uncloister'd Virtue': Adam and Eve in Milton's Paradise," *Milton Studies* 3: 119-137); Joan Bennett, *Reviving Liberty* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1989) 109-118); Dennis Danielson, *Milton's Good God* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1982) 164-227. For a dissenting voice, see Mary

Paradise is most eloquent:

If human love and accomplishment depended on disobedience to God's word, or God's grace depended on disobedience to God's word, or Paradise did not offer unlimited possibility for every sort of achievement and delight, god would not be God and Eden would be, as Eve avows, 'no Eden' (9.341). Milton's response was to invite a renewal of the imagination by recreating a paradisaical life so filled by God's creating hand with interest, opportunity, choice, and bliss that every human faculty and capacity could enjoy, free from the hindrances of sin, misery, and death, its fullest exercise, and to engage the reader in a mimetic experience of unfallen virtue that exercises, even in 'all our woe,' those faculties and capacities for fullest use in the process of regeneration.³

Yet even these champions of a vital Paradise and its maturing human inhabitants often neglect or understate or explain away the inescapable element of conflict in this

Nyquist, "Reading the Fall: Discourse in Drama in *Paradise Lost*," *ELR* 1984 Spring: 14 (2) 199-229. Nyquist distinguishes between the "different kinds of presentations" the epic affords, specifically the "epic recitals" of prelapsarian life versus the "dramatic" dialogue beginning with the separation scene. While the distinction is valuable, Nyquist's thesis leads her to ignore important variation in dialogic context and content in Books 4 through 8, as well as to ascribe a "tragic" or "dramatic" character not only to Books 9 and 10, but also to the historical pageant of Books 11 and 12, simply because tragedy depends on linear progression: "the poem's ... 'lofty' epic retrospections and temporal discontinuities are succeeded in Books 9 through 12 by the straightforward linear progressions we normally associate with tragedy" (202).

³ McColley, *Milton's Eve* 2.

vitality and maturation. Milton's provoking Paradise, like his heaven, his Godhead, and his own aesthetic/prophetic vocation, is built on opposition. He names one "provoking object" within Paradise, as we have seen. This chapter will explore the wider range of Paradise's provocations; it will also seek to understand why Milton's readers have been so reluctant to grant conflict and provocation their rightful roles in Milton's image of Paradise--and, most importantly, in his image of humanity.

This reluctance finds its most strident expression in Douglas Burden's *The Logical Epic*, which argues that Milton's "provoking object" cannot really be what Milton said it was: a Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil planted in the Garden as a provocation to Adam, who had it "ever almost in his eyes" (*De Doctrina*, YE 2: 527). Burden insists that Milton could not have attributed such tantalizing, provocative behavior to Adam's creator:

[I]t was necessary [for Milton] to insist that God had not made the forbidden Fruit provocative, thus almost inciting Man to sin. That Milton had himself in *Areopagitica* described it as provocative must not be allowed to influence the way in which *Paradise Lost* needs to be read since Milton's argument in *Areopagitica* is not as innocent as it appears.... The Tree is not in reality compelling, but, when judgment is in abeyance, it can be shown to seem and to be

thought so.⁴

This peculiar argument must ignore Milton's explicit comment that, as Eve stands with the serpent before the tree, the mere sight of the fruit itself is almost all the temptation she needs: "Fixed on the fruit she gazed, which to behold / Might tempt alone..." (735-6). Alastair Fowler, using Burden's analysis, must also explain away the "provoking object" of *Areopagitica*:

The forbidden fruit is now for the first time described as specially attractive and tempting to man. It would have been improvident or provoking of God to have allowed it to seem so before; but now Eve's heart is corrupted.... Burden ... has it that the fact that Eve would always be hungry at noon contributes to the crisis. The increased appetitive urge is not, of course, evil in itself--even Raphael got hungry at this time...; but [Milton] means to run excitingly close to a tragedy of necessity.⁵

⁴ Douglas Burden, *The Logical Epic* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1967) 125, 132-3. In what sense the Miltonic argument of *Areopagitica* could appear "innocent" (i. e., free of ideological motive) Burden leaves unclear. Indeed, Burden's argument consistently flattens Milton's poem into a frieze of rationality, e.g.: a "frustrated desire would be a satanic thing"; "[m]arriage is rational," etc. (84-5).

⁵ *Paradise Lost*, ed. Fowler 482-3. Re-reading Milton's description of the "provoking object" God places in the Garden, "ever almost in Adam's eyes," one cannot but be struck by the fact that the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil *must* be provocative regardless of its beauty or aroma or the time of day in which it is beheld, etc. It is the only such tree in all of Paradise; its singularity coincides with very few other singularities in this Garden--indeed, the only one that springs readily to mind is Adam and Eve's "wedded love,

One may note the irony of an admittedly provocative Milton whose provocative God is nevertheless displaced into Eve's own prelapsarian "corruption"--as if such a thing as prelapsarian corruption were possible. Yet Fowler's distress, and Burden's before his, is typical. Something about the true warfaring Paradise, the *frisson* of conflict and opposition, the very "increased appetitive urge" Fowler names so dryly, present themselves as provoking objects many of Milton's most sympathetic readers seem unable to recognize, admit, or name.⁶

mysterious source ... sole propriety / In Paradise of all things common else." It is provokingly near the Tree of Life. Finally, the command not to eat of the forbidden fruit is uppermost in Adam's and Eve's minds, as we see nearly from our first glimpse of them (4.412ff.), as we hear iterated by Adam in response to Raphael's warnings (5.520-2), as Raphael repeats at the end of his creation narrative (7.542-7), as Adam relates in his autobiography (8.323-335--Adam says the "rigid interdiction ... resounds / Yet dreadful in mine ear"), as Raphael reiterates in his valediction (8.633-9), and as Eve makes clear both in her quarrel with Adam (9.273-81) and in her encounter with the serpent (9.659-63). Certainly such a prohibition, with its many repetitions throughout Adam's and Eve's prelapsarian experience, is itself a kind of provocation, especially since its punishment--death--is something Adam is ignorant of, yet curious about (4.425-6).

⁶ Perhaps an over-reliance on Augustine's model of Paradise is to blame. The Bishop of Hippo writes: "It is true that even in the garden, before man sinned, he could not do everything, but he could still do all he desired to do, since he had no desire to do what he could not do."

My argument is that Paradise includes within its bliss even the delight of restlessness, of desire to do

This "increased appetitive urge" is the engine that drives Milton's Paradise, the means of grace and the hope of glory, as the Book of Common Prayer has it. From our first glimpses of it, we see a Paradise whose bounds are being pushed, a creation always spilling over the lips that try to imbibe its heady liquors.⁷ The ecstasies at the ends of "L'Allegro" and "Il Penseroso" find their fulfillment here, in Paradise--a fulfillment, ironically, which includes hunger within its satisfactions. "His garden is a garden of love, but it is also a garden of dreams, of longing without which nothing worthwhile can be

what one cannot (yet) do. Adam and Eve have indeed every happiness in Paradise, including the happiness of genuine longing, blissful discontent. See Augustine, *City of God*, ed. and abridged by Vernon Rourke from the translation by Gerald G. Walsh, S. J., et al. (New York: Image Books, 1958) Book 4, Chapter 15, 313.

⁷ Stevie Davies' commentary on Book 7 is marvelously evocative: she calls it Milton's "Ad Matrem." "Birth is presented as a release into an astonished variety of intuitive life: the animals know what they are to be, how to behave, and long to do it." See *The Idea of Woman in Renaissance Literature: The Feminine Reclaimed* (Sussex: The Harvester Press, 1986) 222-228. Unfortunately, Davies' emphasis on the natural and maternal in *Paradise Lost* depends heavily on a postlapsarian sense of the cycle of birth-decay-death-new birth, which leads her to see fallenness as the epic's primary subject.

created."⁸ Above all, we must remember that prelapsarian life, no less than postlapsarian life, demands a theodicy. Why are things as they are? Why is there a tempter in the Garden? Why was there a war in Heaven? Why is there a prohibition? Why is an angel coming to talk with us? Why don't I have a mate when all the other animals (whose profit will be much less) seem to? Why must I consort with a coarser being, this man Adam, when my own image is so beautiful? Why does Eve run away from me? How should we live with our warnings? Why did I dream of evil? Why the *copia* of creation?

I. The Wilderness of Sweets

We have seen that Milton habitually resorts to oxymorons when reaching toward the articulation of ecstasy. Just as Eve's "coy submission, modest pride, / And sweet reluctant amorous delay" yokes heterogeneous qualities together to evoke the complexity of delight she embodies, so Milton's Paradise revels in the paradoxes of control, abandon, virginity, and endless fertility. Auda-

⁸ Kitty Cohen, *The Throne And The Chariot: Studies in Milton's Hebraism*. (Paris: Mouton Press, 1975) 82.

ciously, Milton uses Raphael's heavenly fragrance and conspicuous splendor merely as a foil, a prelude to the Garden God has created:

Like Maia's son he stood,
And shook his plumes, that heavenly fragrance
filled
The circuit wide. Straight knew him all the
bands
Of angels under watch; and to his state,
And to his message high in honour rise;
For on some message high they guessed him
bound. (5.285-290)

The angelic encampment boasts "glittering" tents (5.291), and this messenger Raphael is a mighty angel on mighty business, but Paradise's untamed, lovely intoxications soon overwhelm the narrator's attention.

and now is come
Into the blissful field, through groves of
myrrh,
And flowering odours, cassia, nard, and balm;
A wilderness of sweets; for nature here
Wantoned as in her prime, and played at will
Her virgin fancies, pouring forth more sweet,
Wild above rule or art; enormous bliss.
(5.291-297)

This Garden's nature could look rather like anarchy, even chaos; there is about its wanton play something almost dauntingly willful and reckless, at least to our timid postlapsarian sensibilities. That Milton intends such an element of the *alien* to mix with all this sweetness is evident, if nowhere else, in his strange phrase "enormous bliss." *Enormous*, as Fowler notes, carries with

it the etymological suggestion of abnormality, or lawlessness.⁹ Indeed, the 1919 edition of the *Oxford English Dictionary* cites this very passage in *Paradise Lost* as an example of its first, obsolete definition of "enormous":

1. Deviating from an ordinary rule or type; abnormal, unusual, extraordinary, unfettered by rules; hence, mostly in bad sense, strikingly irregular, monstrous, shocking.

Milton's *Paradise* should shock us; Milton's idea of perfection is not only one of moral and spiritual trial, but of what we might call ontological provocation.¹⁰ Nature's

⁹ Fowler, as usual, is too quick to decide the matter in favor of a less threateningly inclusive Milton: he adds hastily that *enormous* here is "probably influenced also by the modern meaning 'immense.'" *Paradise Lost*, ed. Fowler 275. I am grateful to my colleague Dr. Louis Schwartz for alerting me to this crux.

¹⁰ "In none of the other literary interpretations of paradise is Nature so strongly personified, so dynamic, and so lavish as in *Paradise Lost*. Nowhere else does Nature so tend to wildness and need continued pruning. Yet most of the other poets described a paradise that was more strictly and consistently natural than Milton's." Joseph E. Duncan, *Milton's Earthly Paradise* (Minneapolis, University of Minnesota Press, 1972) 241. "Natural," of course, is a relative term here: the prelapsarian state Milton imagines is so thoroughly and blissfully natural that it will seem preternatural, if not supernatural, to us at our fallen remove. To ask, as Duncan and many other commentators do, whether the forbidden fruit *actually* has magical powers avoids grappling with the larger issue that in *Paradise* to eat and be eaten, so to speak (Adam and Eve will, after all, experience a quasi-alimentary exaltation as they are "improv'd through tract of time"--see Kerrigan, *The Sacred Complex* 207-262), is to expand one's being and ascend to heaven.

wanton play within the Paradise God planted is too much, much too much--and thus just enough. Confronted by it we are cowed; Adam and Eve are continually challenged by it. (Indeed, the sheer, almost numbing fecundity of this wilderness of sweets is at least the material cause of their quarrel in Book 9.) As Barbara Lewalski has noted, Milton's Paradise

has a surprising tendency to excess and disorder, to overprofuseness and languid softness--the 'mazy error' of the brooks, the 'wanton fertility' of the vegetation, the 'luxuriant' vines, the 'pendant shades' (4.239, 259-260).¹¹

Lewalski correctly notes the surprise, but the "languid softness" she describes, while certainly part of this Garden, is only part of it; challenge, even aggressive challenge is its more salient activity regarding its human inhabitants.¹² When she notes that Adam and Eve have real, necessary gardening to do, else the Garden will "tend to wild," she omits the fact that one of the effects

¹¹ Barbara K. Lewalski, "Innocence and Experience in Milton's Eden" 89-90.

¹² William Blake's "Proverbs of Hell" assert that "Damn braces, bless relaxes." In *Paradise Lost*, by contrast, it is bliss that braces, and sin that relaxes.

of this wildness is precisely the "enormous bliss" Adam and Eve live within.

[E]verything has a tendency to regress to the chaotic state unless continually acted upon by a creative force.... The highly cultivated Garden which yet tends to 'wild' manifests this tension and so defines the responsibility of Adam and Eve as gardeners. Their labor is 'pleasant' and unarduous, but even in the idyll of Book IV Adam observes that they can only barely cope on a day to day basis with the immense task of maintaining the Garden in a condition of ordered beauty, and indeed that it is at times marred by overgrown paths and 'unsightly' blossoms strewn about.¹³

Certainly Adam and Eve are called to cultivate the Garden, yet part of Milton's heart cannot forsake the ecstasy of pure nature, nature virgin and wanton, direct from her Maker's hand.¹⁴ Milton's dialogic imagination, his dialogic image of humanity and of all creation, must have surrender as well as mastery to make it whole.

The provocative intercourse this Paradise has with its human tenders does indeed entail submission as well as

¹³ Lewalski, "Innocence and Experience" 91-2.

¹⁴ Mary Nyquist also overlooks Milton's love of a certain sacred wantonness, going so far as to observe, incorrectly, that "Nature's excessive fertility has always simply been associated with the promised fertility of the first pair, implying that in time the disproportion will cease to be." See "Reading the Fall" 210.

mastery. Adam's first description to Eve of their surroundings makes the Garden sound almost mischievous:

To morrow ere fresh morning streak the east
With first approach of light, we must be risen,
And at our pleasant labour, to reform
Yon flowery arbours, yonder alleys green,
Our walk at noon, with branches overgrown,
That mock our scant manuring, and require
More hands than ours to lop their wanton growth:
Those blossoms also, and those dropping gums,
That lie bestrewn unsightly and unsmooth,
Ask riddance, if we mean to tread with ease;
Mean while, as nature wills, night bids us rest.
(4.624-633)

The confusion of emotion in Adam's speech here perfectly re-enacts the tension inherent in Milton's "wilderness of sweets": the human pair's labor is "pleasant," but necessitated by trees and vines that with "wanton growth" "mock" their efforts at reformation.¹⁵ The same blossoms that shower Adam and Eve with flowers and fragrance in their nuptial bower (4.772-3) also clutter up their paths, and complicate their steps. Yet it is no accident that complication and obstacles are part of the condition of bliss and increase in Milton's Paradise; like Garden, like

¹⁵ One cannot but wonder if "to reform / Yon flowery arbours" contains another Miltonic pun: cf. *Areopagitica*'s declaration that "God is decreeing to being some new and great period in his Church, ev'n to the reforming of Reformation it self" (YE 2: 553). The "reforming of Reformation" is, after all, the Edenic condition--and joyously, perilously so.

gardeners.¹⁶ Nor is it an accident that Adam and Eve unanimously remind their God and themselves in their evening prayer of Paradise's "enormous bliss":

Thou also madest the night,
Maker omnipotent, and thou the day,
Which we in our appointed work employed
Have finished happy in our mutual help
And mutual love, the crown of all our bliss
Ordained by thee, and this delicious place
For us too large, where thy abundance wants
Partakers, and uncropt falls to the ground.
But thou has promised from us two a race
To fill the earth, who shall with us extol
Thy goodness infinite....

(4.724-734)

The earth, already over-full, will be filled again, this time by more human beings, more gardeners, whose work will be an act of praise at the same time that it, ironically, will be the condition of yet more natural abundance.

For pruning and cutting and plucking are "restrictive actions that at the same time stimulate greater fertility," as is clear from Book 5, lines 316-20.¹⁷ As Adam and Eve prepare to welcome Raphael to their noontime

¹⁶ See Lewalski, "Innocence and Experience" 92-4, for an evocative description of the Garden-human analogy. My differences with Lewalski's energetic and insightful essay are largely ones of emphasis, although significantly so. Lewalski, like most Christian commentators on Milton, is not prepared to grant Milton's bellicose ecstatic imagination its full heft or bite.

¹⁷ Lewalski, "Innocence and Experience in Milton's Eden" 92.

meal, Adam notes that moderation itself is a problematic concept when using a resource stimulates not only its replenishment, but a new abundance:

well may we afford
Our givers their own gifts, and large bestow
From large bestowed, where nature multiplies
Her fertile growth, and by disburdening grows
More fruitful, which instructs us not to spare.

This "spare" is unlike the teasing "spare" of Sonnet 20; here Milton intends an unambiguous inference for Adam. Adam sees that he not only cannot use up Paradise or its fruits, but that his use of it actually accelerates Paradise's already relentless growth.¹⁸ In such an environment, no principle of frugality is simple or unisemous, and the idea of temperance, the postlapsarian version of which is one of Milton's most-repeated subjects, must be drastically modified.¹⁹ There is "no fear lest dinner cool"; there is also no fear lest dinner someday disappear. God himself promised Adam that he should "Of

¹⁸ In *A Preface to Paradise Lost*, C. S. Lewis writes: "For this is perhaps the central paradox of his vision. Discipline, while the world is yet unfallen, exists for the sake of what seems its very opposite--for freedom, almost for extravagance" (81). I would substitute "indeed" for "almost."

¹⁹ Fowler notes that the only frugality Adam and Eve use is that of storing "food that improves in firmness or dryness by keeping" (*Paradise Lost*, ed. Fowler 276).

every tree that in the garden grows / Eat freely with glad heart; fear here no dearth" (8.321-2). Milton takes great pains to emphasize the immoderate quantity of food Adam and Eve prepare for themselves and their guest: Eve gathers "fruit of all kinds" (save one, Milton leaves unsaid) in "tribute large, and on the board / *Heaps with unsparing hand...*" (5.341-344, emphasis mine). And again, amidst this dizzying array of aromas, liquids, rinds, and fruits, Eve hears the even more vertiginous promise that her own womb will be even more fruitful than Mother Earth's prodigious capacities. Raphael tells her that her "fruitful womb / Shall fill the world more numerous with thy sons / Than with these various fruits the trees of God / Have heaped this table" (5.398-391).²⁰

The truth of Milton's Paradise is the truth of God's goodness, as Adam ("our author") articulates it to Raphael just before they begin their meal:

Heavenly stranger, please to taste
These bounties which our nourisher, from whom
All perfect good *unmeasured* out, descends,
To us for food and for delight hath caused
The earth to yield; unsavoury food perhaps
To spiritual nature; only this I know,
That one celestial Father gives to all.

²⁰ Eve, like Milton, will not only repeat her predecessor (Mother Earth), but out-do her as well.

(5.397-403, emphasis mine)²¹

All you know, Adam, and all you need to know--and yet, paradoxically, a confession and a grace that elicit a fuller revelation from Raphael, the great revelation that "whatever was created, needs / To be sustained and fed..." (5.414-5). Food and delight are one, power and need are perfectly, symbiotically interdependent. Hunger and increase feed on and nourish each other in the perfect ontology of Paradise.

This perfect ontology in which needs are never and always satisfied, in which diminution and augmentation, like spring and autumn, "danced hand in hand," is very like Cusanus' perfect food, one which satisfies hunger and quickens appetite simultaneously:

In *De docta ignorantia*, Nicolas asserts that our identification with Christ will deepen infinitely in the life to come. We must have something to do, a propulsion, in the hereafter,

²¹ Fowler (281) adduces James 1:17 as a Biblical parallel: "Every good and every perfect gift is from above, and cometh down from the Father of lights." Also to the point are the promises in Malachi 3:10 of a blessing greater than one's room to receive it (a blessing given to good husbandry that yields its tithe to God), and in Luke 6:38 of reciprocal giving and its rewards: "Give, and it shall be given unto you; good measure, pressed down, and shaken together, and running over...." In this way Adam and Eve give and receive more and more life to and from their Garden.

and, to evoke this ... beatitude, Nicolas adopts the metaphor of unappeased appetite....²²

Something like this beatitude exists in the terrestrial here-and-now of Milton's Garden. Cusanus' description of a perfect food perfectly eaten illustrates the unappeasable human intellect; in Milton's monist Paradise the intellect is merely one part of a totality of being. Thus Cusanus' words admirably prepare us to understand the hunger Adam and Eve enjoy in Paradise:

If you will reflect upon these indeed deep [matters], you will be overwhelmed with an admirable sweetness of spirit. For with an inner relishing you will scent, as in the case of a very fragrant incense, God's inexpressible goodness. God, passing over to you, will supply you with this goodness; you will be filled with Him when His glory shall appear. You will be filled, that is, without surfeit, for this immortal good is life itself.... Now, our intellectual desire is [the desire] to live intellectually--i.e., to enter further and further into life and joy. And since that life is infinite, the blessed, still desirous, are brought further and further into it. And so, they are filled--being, so to speak, thirsty ones drinking from the Fount of life. And because this drinking does not pass away into a past (since it is within eternity), the blessed are ever drinking and ever filled; and yet, they have never drunk and have never been filled....

The enjoyment does not pass away into a past, because the appetite does not fade away during the enjoyment. [The situation is] as if--to use an illustration from the body--someone hungry

²² William Kerrigan and Gordon Braden. *The Idea of the Renaissance* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1989) 93.

were seated at the table of a great king, where he was supplied with the food he desired, so that he did not seek any other food. The nature of this food would be [such] that in filling him up it would also whet his appetite. If this food were never depleted, it is obvious that the perpetual consumer would always be filled, would always desire this same food, and would always willingly be brought to the food. And so, he would always be able to eat; and, after having eaten, he would still be able to be led to the food with whetted appetite.²³

Or, as Ernst Cassirer explains Cusanus' idea of perfection:

The ideal towards which our knowledge must strive, then, does not lie in denying and rejecting particularity, but in allowing it to unfold in all its richness. For only the totality of faces gives us the One view of the Divine. The world becomes the symbol of God, not in that we pick out one part of it and provide it with some singular mark of value, but rather in that we pass through it in all of its forms, freely submitting ourselves to its multiplicity, to its antitheses.²⁴

As Adam and Eve both tend, reform, pursue, and submit to the wanton sweet multiplicity of their Garden home, they

²³ *Nicholas of Cusa On Learned Ignorance*, 2nd ed., trans. Jasper Hopkins (Minneapolis: Banning Press, 1985), 155-6. I quote from Hopkins' translation; the Kerrigan/Braden *Idea of the Renaissance* reprints this material and led me to it. The brackets are in Hopkins' translation of the original.

²⁴ Ernst Cassirer, *The Individual and the Cosmos in Renaissance Philosophy*, translated with an introduction by Mario Domandi (New York: Barnes & Noble, Inc., 1963) 37.

will find their labors beget more strength, more labor, more food, and more not unappeased hunger. Nothing will get used up, nothing will languish unused; even the much-too-muchness has its operation to perform. This Paradise produces itself as a perfect food. For Milton, God wills for original humanity just such nourishment as Cusanus, thinking about the blessedly restless intellect, imagines for the Christian redeemed. No analysis of Milton's Paradise or its inhabitants can overlook this *coincidentia oppositorum* of appetite and satisfaction, or the thrusting, spiralling energy it releases into this primal narrative. Despite all of Raphael's warnings, as we shall see, what Fowler calls the "increased appetitive urge" defines Paradise: you can eat all you want, secure in knowing that you'll always be full, and always want more. Raphael knows this, of course, full well. After all, he is the one who tells Adam and Eve about angelic feasting:

On flowers reposed, and with fresh flowerets
crowned,
They eat, they drink, and in communion sweet
Quaff immortality and joy, secure
Of surfeit where full measure only bounds
Excess, before the all bounteous king, who
showered
With copious hand, rejoicing in their joy.
(5.636-641, emphasis mine)

The 1667 edition reads simply "They eat, they drink, and with refection sweet / Are filled, before the all

bounteous king, who showered"; Fowler asserts that "the additions ... draw closer the link with Raphael's meal with Adam and Eve ... [and] endow the eating with a spiritual value."²⁵ The most conspicuous additions, however, the lines I have emphasized, go even farther than Fowler suggests. They hint that perfect food does not permit immoderation, since it knows nothing of moderation: one cannot eat too much since one cannot eat more than one can eat, and one's full capacity is the only boundary between enough and too much. John Milton, breathing the aspirations of the Renaissance, here imagines that surfeit is impossible when the perfect tension between capacity, hunger (and the new capacity it implies and effects), and obedience is unbroken.

II. The Great Chain of Dialogue

The perfect Cusan food that Paradise provides is not only the fruit the earth yields, but the company it continually attracts. The dialogic relationship between Paradise and its inhabitants includes the relationship between the human beings and their divine, angelic, and

²⁵ *Paradise Lost*, ed. Fowler 298.

demonic visitors. That a dialogue of contest and trial and struggle exists between Satan and Eve is universally acknowledged. That a similar dialogue exists between a yet sinless Adam and Eve is beginning to be admitted, as we shall shortly see. Yet the dialogue between prelapsarian humanity and their superiors on the Great Chain of Being is also rich in both friction and fruition, and portrays much of Milton's love for and insistence on opposition as a means of relationship and truth-gathering.

Adam's colloquies with Raphael and with God are fascinating examples of complicated rhetorical intercourse, often nearly as complex and emotionally charged as the separation scene dialogue between Adam and Eve. Milton's monist continuum of matter and spirit should lead us to pay particular attention to metaphors of eating and drinking, one of which is a simile recalling Cusanus' perfect food:

as one whose drouth
Yet scarce allayed still eyes the current
stream,
Whose liquid murmur heard new thirst excites,
Proceeded thus to ask his heavenly guest.
(7.66-69)

Adam is Tantalus unbound here, for his thirst will be provoked, slaked, and challenged by his "affable" guest Raphael, whose fluent conversation will not flee from him

as Eve's watery image fled from her.²⁶ Simply to say, as John Peter Rumrich says, that "... Adam and Eve, like the devils, can be described through the Tantalus myth, but through an inversion of it, in which moderate desires are perfectly satisfied..." is to blunt the edge and scope of those desires and overlook the immoderation Milton builds into his garden paradise, an immoderation that may lead to Heaven itself, if it is rightly used, obediently pruned.²⁷

Adam's pressing Raphael for more and more information has been judged variously by the critics. Some find in

²⁶ Contrast Adam's thirst and satisfaction and thirsting again with the tantalization the devils endure in 10.550-577. The devils keep falling, into "the same illusion" (571), whereas prelapsarian Adam wants only truth. But see also John Carey, *Milton* (New York: Arco Press, 1970) 85-6: "Raphael's warning to Adam is teasingly inadequate.... When he boasts to Adam that he is going to unfold secrets 'perhaps / Not lawful to reveal' (5.569-70), he is hardly assisting the human pair to take divine prohibitions about knowledge very seriously. He heavily underlines the inferiority of their understanding of the universe to his own, and tantalizes them with alternative theories (8.122-6), only to condemn the curiosity he has been arousing." (Actually, only Adam is so "tantalized," since Eve has already excused herself from the table.) This is a perversely exaggerated account, of course, but like Empson's exaggerations it tells a truth. Milton does modulate paradisiacal conversations in a provocative way; dialogue in Paradise is both context and contest, as we shall see.

²⁷ John Peter Rumrich, *Matter Of Glory: A New Preface To Paradise Lost* (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 1987) 100.

his curiosity an indication of his power to aspire too high, and thus his tendency to fall.²⁸ Some find Adam's curiosity laudable, so long as he heeds Raphael's cautions.²⁹ But what of the tone of their intercourse, and the language with which Milton portrays their dialogue? These two negotiate with each other, skillfully parrying

²⁸ Douglas Bush uncritically accepts Raphael as Milton's and God's spokesman (see "Characters and Drama," *Milton: A Collection of Critical Essays* 119). Tillyard credits Adam with "near impudence ... great charm and mental dexterity," but attributes this to Adam's being "virtually fallen" already (see "The Crisis in *Paradise Lost*," *Milton: A Collection of Critical Essays* 157-8). Dennis Burden asserts that Milton is in agreement with Raphael, as Adam's eventual "acceptance" of Raphael's advice makes clear (see *The Logical Epic* 154-5). Fowler, following Burden, says that Adam's first inquiry--do angels eat?--"verges already on forbidden knowledge: questions about the diet of angels are in one way not far from questions about how to become a god by eating" (see *Paradise Lost*, ed. Fowler 282). More recently, Sanford Budick has argued that Raphael's criticisms of Adam point to real liabilities in Adam's nature (in *The Dividing Muse* 84-7). And William Kerrigan seems to take the conflict between Raphael and Adam as an unacknowledged conflict within Milton himself, not, as I argue, a conflict Milton employs deliberately, a conflict that both Adam and Raphael may profit from (see *The Idea of the Renaissance* 196-217).

²⁹ Irene Samuel (in *Plato and Milton* [Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1947] 111-114) observes that "Raphael cannot be a mere licenser, setting bounds to a scientific curiosity on the part of Adam." She believes Raphael to be saying that ethical concerns should precede scientific concerns. True enough, but the conversation between Raphael and Adam is not so simply homiletic or didactic as Samuel implies.

and thrusting in a genuinely provocative dialogue that is the essence of Milton's image of humanity:

For Raphael's visit and Adam's talk with God represent not one-time things but the order of social contract that was intended to be a regular feature of man's unfallen existence.... Milton himself, in beginning book 9, implies that the particular social relations we have seen going on between heaven and earth are only indicative of the larger pattern of prelapsarian life....³⁰

And a piquant set of social relations it is.

Although Raphael is "higher" than Adam on the Great Chain of Being, the approach of superior to inferior is, as always in Milton, a complicated ritual of assertion and submission:

Mean while our primitive great sire, to meet
His godlike guest, walks forth, without more
train
Accompanied than with his own complete
Perfections, in himself was all his state....
Nearer his presence Adam though not awed,
Yet with submiss approach and reverence meek,
As to a superior nature, bowing low....
(5.350-353, 358-360)

Raphael's reply to Adam's welcoming address repeats these rhythms:

Adam, I therefore came, nor art thou such
Created, or such place hast here to dwell,
As may not oft invite, though spirits of heaven
To visit thee.... (5.372-5)

³⁰ Dennis Danielson, *Milton's Good God* 184-5.

Adam's own "modest pride" yields and does not yield to Raphael's rank; the tension between those two poles, governed by obedience to God's sole command, informs their entire conversation.³¹

Raphael's role as Adam's provoking object begins before dinner is served, and continues immediately after they look up from their "viands."³² Having tasted the heady nectar of revelation before the paradisiacal meal, Adam has barely swallowed his last morsel before "sudden mind arose ... not to let the occasion pass / Given him by this great conference to know / Of things above his world..." (5.452-455). Adam provokes his own provoker; "his wary speech / Thus to the empyreal minister he framed" (5.459-60). Those readers who find an ominous

³¹ In John Leonard's apt words, "Like the 'ambient air' which 'yields or fills/All space', Adam fills a space in his knowledge by yielding to it" ("Language and knowledge in *Paradise Lost*" 105.) See also, in the same volume, Dennis Danielson's essay on "The Fall of Man and Milton's theodicy," in which Danielson notes (speaking of the dialogue between Adam and Michael) "the balancing act between *chutzpah* and humility ... " we find in Milton, and that " ... these two apparently opposed attitudes end up nurturing each other" (127).

³² No doubt Milton, who, his biographers tell us, loved food and conversation about equally, was no stranger to the discourse that would not wait till after dinner; his infamous joke "no fear lest dinner cool" is probably a wry fantasy born of his own experience of immoderate conversation at table.

novelty in Adam and Eve's self-conscious rhetorical strategies in Book 9 overlook the deliberate, transparent care with which Adam draws Raphael into further narration, further revelation.³³ And Adam's strategies are successful: a mere "yet what compare?" elicits from Raphael a surprising, comprehensive lecture on ontology, digestion, hierarchy, destiny, and obedience. Typically, Raphael's discourse closes with a warning: "Mean while enjoy / Your fill what happiness this happy state / Can comprehend, incapable of more" (5.503-5). And just as typically, Adam hears the "mean while" (and why should he not?), and opens his lips for another draught of knowledge:

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....
(5.506-512)

One might argue that the lesson Adam tells Raphael he has received is not exactly the lesson Raphael has in fact given him: "body up to spirit work" and "improved by tract of time" are not the same as Adam's "contemplation of created things," after all. Yet Adam has heard the words

³³ This contra Nyquist, "Reading the Fall."

"reason" and "aspire" in Raphael's speech, and these are his cue.

Raphael's reply brings the provoking object--God's sole command--before Adam's eyes once again: "... for how / Can hearts, not free, be tried whether they serve / Willing or no..?" (5.531-533). Again Milton hints at something more than a purely passive role for the Tree of Knowledge and its metonymic twin, the Prohibition. So long as Adam and Eve remain in the Garden with the Tree and the Prohibition, they are being tried; match this trial with God's trial of Adam and Adam's trial of God, Adam's and Raphael's mutual trials, and the supreme trial Adam and Eve's marriage provokes, and one would have to imagine trial and conflict to be the very fabric of paradisaal happiness, a wanton dance of endless judgment, endless growth.

Interestingly, twin motions within Adam's heart respond to Raphael's mention of trial: "... some doubt within me move, / But more desire to hear..." (5.554-555). Here, and again in 7.59-61, doubt and more desire in an Adam who continues to obey his maker elicit from Raphael the "high matter" Adam wants to hear. Adam may, indeed, be cultivating (pruning, manuring) a certain "skeptical inwardness" that Harold Bloom traces from Elijah to

Malachi as the "true mode of preparing to receive the God-word.... It is not meaning but will that gets started when Yahweh speaks."³⁴ Significantly, Raphael pauses; his own abilities are also put to the test in this "sad task and hard" (5.564). He himself seems not to know, or not to know definitely, how to tell the tale, whether to tell the tale, and finally whether the accommodation he must employ to fit heavenly truths to human understanding may not itself be a kind of truthful non-metaphor, comparing like with like.³⁵ Raphael is equipped for this kind of testing in a way Adam and Eve cannot yet be, however: Raphael has experienced and learned more about the strangeness and unpredictability of *unity* than Adam or Eve have. Raphael knows that the orbits of the planets are in "mazes intricate, / Eccentric, intervolved, yet regular /

³⁴ Bloom, *Ruin the Sacred Truths*, (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1989) 162. Curiously, Thomas Greene denies this kind of skeptical energy to Adam (and Eve) in prelapsarian Paradise: "Adam's life is circumscribed by the walls of his garden, and his strength is not of that mobile or questing temper which would lead him beyond" ("The Descent from Heaven," from *The Descent from Heaven: A Study in Epic Continuity* [Yale, 1963], rpt. in Bloom, esp. 90-97). But of course it is precisely Adam's "questing temper" that drives the narrative forward during the middle third of the epic, Books 4-8.

³⁵ See also, as Fowler notes, Empson's *Milton's God* 149.

Then most, when most irregular they seem." Adam and Eve hear from Raphael "things to their thought / So unimaginable as hate in heaven, / And war so near the peace of God in bliss / With such confusion...." Raphael has already learned how these apparent contradictions can be coincident. Satan's and his angels' first attack on God's mount demonstrate to Raphael's experience what his angelic reason wondered at:

strange it seemed
At first, that angel should with angel war,
And in fierce hosting meet, who wont to meet
So oft in festivals of joy and love
Unanimous as sons of one great sire
Hymning the eternal Father: but the shout
Of battle now began, and rushing sound
Of onset ended soon each milder thought.
(6.91-98)

Much will continue to seem strange to Adam and Eve; not even the overwhelming narrative Raphael gives them can fully prepare them for the experience that is to come for them in Book 9.

Meanwhile Raphael continues his story, prodding and being prodded by Adam. Appetite and satisfaction continue their twin courses through the human pair as Adam, once again moving from "doubts" to "desire" (7.60-61), asks Raphael to narrate the creation of the universe, "what nearer might concern him." Interestingly, Adam's latest request follows not only the story of Satan's rebellion

and punishment, but also Raphael's iteration of the Prohibition:

The affable archangel, had forewarned
Adam by dire example to beware
Apostasy, by what befell in heaven
To those apostates, lest the like befall
In Paradise to Adam or his race,
Charged not to touch the interdicted tree,
If they transgress.... (7.41-47)

The strained syntax that for a moment makes it seem as if the forbidden tree might not remain forbidden if Adam and Eve remain obedient (as we read, "if they transgress" won't immediately leap above "Charged not to touch" to modify "lest the like befall ... to Adam") is only the first surprise in this passage. The second and more potent surprise is Milton's description of Adam and Eve's appetites:

and slight that sole command,
So easily obeyed amid the choice
Of all tastes else to please their appetite,
Though wandering. (7.47-50)

"Wandering," we remember, is what the more intellectual demons do in Hell as they await Satan's return: "And found no end, in wandering mazes lost" (2.561). Perhaps wandering and wayfaring and warfaring are all permitted in Paradise, are indeed the stuff of Paradise, if the end--God--is acknowledged and obeyed.³⁶ In Paradise, even the

³⁶ John Carey, discussing the great demonic debate in Book 2, says of *Paradise Lost* that "[w]ander' is

appetite may wander, so long as its owner does not disobey God's command.³⁷ In this light, Adam's persistence in questioning Raphael, not entirely reckless but certainly "immoderate" by postlapsarian standards, is no sin; it is, instead, a virtue. Adam is "wandering" after more knowledge, just as Eve "wanders" after the serpent in Book 9. In both cases, however, Milton is careful to note that the human beings are "yet sinless." Here it is Adam: "Whence Adam soon repealed / The doubts that in his heart arose: and now / Led on, yet sinless, with desire to know..."

one of its key verbs, and it belongs to the lost, the fallen..." (*Milton* 95). Either "to please their appetite, / Though wandering" is an exception to this rule, or (as I would rather argue) the "wandering" in the epic, like "tempt/attempt" and many other of the poem's important, conspicuous iterations, repeatedly, joyously demonstrates its potential contrariety of signification. Certainly Milton's words in *Areopagitica* should make us suspect that "wandering," like "temptation," can be good or bad: "This justifies the high providence of God, who though he command us temperance, justice, continence, yet powrs out before us ev'n to a profusenes all desirable things, and gives us minds that can wander beyond all limit and satiety" (*YE* 2: 527-8).

³⁷ Raphael does tell Adam "govern well thy appetite" (7.546), as well as "knowledge is as food, and needs no less / Her temperance over appetite" (7.126-7). Yet this warning effects a curious circle: Adam mustn't try to find out what God hasn't revealed, but by the same token he cannot find out what he should not ask about unless he asks and is rebuffed.

(7.59-62). Adam, leading and being led, asks for more than he can now have, perhaps, but commits thereby no sin.

Thus we must judge Adam's colloquy with God, as he narrates it to Raphael, as well as his framing exchange with the affable angel, as divinely sanctioned (even encouraged) contests whose genuine *struggle* is part of Milton's dialogic image of humanity. Adam's conversation with Raphael is as much a story of persistence as of courtesy, a drama of hesitation and pursuit on the part of man and angel. Indeed, it Raphael's hesitation that seems to keep Adam asking; no sooner does Raphael give one answer than the angel solicits another question:

And thy request think now fulfilled, that asked
How first this world and face of things began,
And what before thy memory was done
From the beginning, that posterity
Informed by thee might know; if else thou
seek'st
Aught, not surpassing human measure, say.
(7.635-640)

The celestial door swings wide; once again, as they were for Satan, the stairs to the gates of heaven are lowered. Adam is stunned enough by Raphael's speech to miss the moment the angel actually stops speaking, but once again thirst, wonder, delight, and doubt interact to provoke more questions:

divine
Historian, who thus largely hast allayed
The thirst I had of knowledge, and vouchsafed
This friendly condescension to relate

Things else by me unsearchable, now heard
With wonder, but delight, and, as is due,
With glory attributed to the high
Creator; something yet of doubt remains....
(8.6-13)

What Adam wants to know is the key to the cosmic order as devised by God; apparently he is dissatisfied with his own earlier answer. As Fowler notes, "Adam proposes to Raphael essentially the same problem proposed to him by Eve at 4.657ff.; though he carries it to a higher level of abstraction."³⁸ This may be why Eve excuses herself and leaves the table: she knows this question well, having first asked it herself, and just now she is more interested in conversation than disputation.³⁹ Adam's thirst for knowledge at this point is not necessarily connected with a desire for intimacy; Eve's is. Eve wants to preserve a connection between the "propriety" of marriage and her intellectual pleasure. Adam wants merely to take occasion, in the form of Raphael's continued presence, by the forelock. As we shall see, these roles will reverse and collide in the separation scene in Book 9, but the

³⁸ *Paradise Lost*, ed. Fowler 396.

³⁹ Sanford Budick asserts that Eve leaves "with the intoxicating realization that her thoughts are to crown--or unsettle--the entire divine colloquy" (*The Dividing Muse* 101-2).

effect will be the same: Eve departs. And then, just as now, "from about her shot darts of desire / Into all eyes to wish her still in sight" (8.62-3).

As Eve leaves, Raphael grants Adam an absolution: "To ask or search I blame thee not, for heaven / Is as the book of God before thee set..." (8.66-7). Yet this time, unlike before, Raphael's answers are primarily questions. "Perhaps," "may," "not that I so affirm, though so it seem," "what if?" "whether ... or whether not...." These are certainly the words of a poet who lived at a time of cosmological uncertainty, who wanted to hedge his bets and commit to no one system.⁴⁰ Yet bets might be hedged much more easily: Milton might have had Raphael shut down this phase of the conversation much sooner than he does. Once again the teasing quality of this encounter of man with angel becomes apparent, nowhere more so than when Raphael punningly demands of Adam: "But this I urge, / Admitting motion in the heavens, to show / Invalid that which thee to doubt it moved..." (8.114-116). Although Raphael side-

⁴⁰ Fowler observes: "The elusiveness of Raphael's position reflects the difficulty [Milton] must have felt in making a final decision in favour of any one of the many alternative planetary systems available" (402). My point is that Milton's elusive Raphael reflects not only the poet's difficulty, but also his pedagogical/ontological strategy--and his pleasure.

steps immediately after this ("Not that I so affirm"), the joke still registers. "Raphael is detached, provocative, agile, intellectually stimulating."⁴¹ Precisely so, and never more stimulating than when he is trying to advise Adam on intellectual temperance.

What Raphael does assert unequivocally to Adam concerns scale and sexuality, two important concerns both for Adam's birth narrative and for his later encounter with Eve in Book 9. "Consider first," Raphael says, "that great / Or bright infers not excellence," which could be taken to mean that Eve's beauty doesn't make her more excellent than Adam, or that his superiority doesn't make him more excellent than Eve. (That Raphael's comparison is between the "barren sun" and the "fruitful earth" doesn't leave the issue less ambiguous, since Adam seems to be more like the sun and Eve more like the earth, and the earth ends up containing "more plenty" of "solid good.") The angel goes on to say that God has made the universe so big in order to keep heaven's secrets out of the reach of humanity's presumption (8.119-122), though not, we may presume, out of the reach of that "long obedience" that will raise Adam and Eve up to heaven. His

⁴¹ *Paradise Lost*, ed. Fowler 402.

final unqualified statement is that male and female are "two great sexes" that "animate the world" (150), an admission that prepares Adam, and us, for the debate on sexuality that follows Adam's birth-narrative. Raphael's final revelation to Adam, then, is a very curious non-revelation that raises as many questions as it answers, yet nevertheless both enriches and complicates Adam's understanding of himself, his mate, sexuality, astronomy, hierarchy, and being itself; a kind of unequivocal equivocation has marked this entire exchange.

Apparently Raphael's intricate answer satisfies Adam, who claims he has been "freed from intricacies" by it. We may, however, suspect Adam of the last infirmity of every eager student, that is, of saying "oh yes, I see" before he really does. Or perhaps Adam has seen that the dialogue is now as much between Raphael and Raphael as between Adam and angel, and sees an opportunity to "descend / A lower flight, and speak of things at hand," things he knows that Raphael may not, things that may provoke Raphael's renewed response:

now hear me relate
My story, which perhaps thou hast not heard;
And day is yet not spent; till then thou seest
How subtly to detain thee I devise,
Inviting thee to hear while I relate,
Fond, were it not in hope of thy reply....
(8.204-9)

And what does Raphael's reply mean to Adam? Pleasure and fruitful aspiration: the heaven that Raphael says "is for thee too high" comes within Adam's reach as the angel speaks:

For while I sit with thee, I seem in heaven,
And sweeter thy discourse is to my ear
Than fruits of palm-tree pleasantest to thirst
And hunger both, from labour, at the hour
Of sweet repast; they satiate, and soon fill,
Though pleasant, but thy words with grace divine
Imbued, bring to their sweetness no satiety.
(8.210-216)

Once again the perfect food appears that brings forth appetite and satisfaction but no satiety; once again appetite and nourishment dance hand in hand. (Adam and Eve may eat their fill, temporarily, of Paradise's vegetables and fruits, but they cannot eat their fill of Paradise itself.) Raphael returns the compliment: "But thy relation now; for I attend, / Pleased with thy words no less than thou with mine" (8.247-8). Such mutuality must linger in Adam's mind the next day as he talks with an Eve who wants to garden alone till noon, making it even more difficult for him to accept her going. And with this mutuality comes another story of origins, this time Adam's.

Adam's story is one of perfect language as the fount of knowledge, of dreams that come true, but most importantly of a dialogic contest that brings him to his

heart's desire, or, more precisely (if not Socratically), brings his heart's desire out of him, then to him. Interestingly, his uncanny, immediate power of naming--"to speak I tried, and forthwith spake, / My tongue obeyed and readily could name / Whate'er I saw"--precedes his powers of self-understanding. For that, Adam needs another--Eve.⁴² One of Adam's first experiences is thus the experience of a verbal frustration that testifies to his need for dialogue. He can name what he sees, but what he sees cannot respond:

Thou sun, said I, fair light,
And thou enlightened earth, so fresh and gay,
Ye hills and dales, ye rivers, woods, and
plains,

⁴² Bakhtin observes that "our real exterior can be seen and understood only by other people, because they are located outside us in space and because they are *others*.... In the realm of culture, outsideness is a most powerful factor in understanding.... A meaning only reveals its depths once it has encountered and come into contact with another, foreign meaning: they engage in a kind of dialogue, which surmounts the closedness and one-sidedness of these particular meanings, these cultures." See *Speech Genres and Other Late Essays*, trans. Vern W. McGee, ed. Caryl Emerson and Michael Holquist (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1986) 7. Cf. also Kerrigan and Braden, *The Idea of the Renaissance* (writing of Eve's and Adam's dialogue after the Fall): "Eve also discovers one of the perennial secrets for inspiring self-knowledge in a person suffering from benighted introspection: reflect for him an external image, in art or conversation, of his own spiritual state on the assumption that what he cannot grasp directly within himself, he may catch on the rebound from another's enactment of it" (216).

And ye that live and move, fair creatures, tell
Tell, if ye saw, how came I thus, how here?
(8.273-277)

To name is to know, but not to converse; Adam seems to name creation only in order to ask it the way to God. Creation offers him no reply, a disappointment total enough to leave Adam strangely passive even in the face of the possibility of his own disintegration:

when answer none returned,
Pensive I sat me down; there gentle sleep
First found me, and with soft oppression seized
My drowsed sense, untroubled, though I thought
I then was passing to my former state
Insensible, and forthwith to dissolve.
(8.285-291)

At this point God appears to Adam, a God whom Adam has not named and does not know, but a God whom Adam has nevertheless called. God takes Adam on what looks like a flight into Paradise ("by the hand he took me raised, / And over fields and waters, as in air / Smooth sliding without step"). Interestingly, the flight ends with "fairest fruit that hung to the eye / Tempting," fruit that "stirred in [Adam] sudden appetite to pluck and eat"--interestingly, because the circumstances bear an marked resemblance to Eve's dream in Book 5. Eve dreams of "quickened appetite" that all but compels her to eat the fruit, after which she flies up to the clouds with her guide, "One shaped and winged like one of those from heaven / By us oft seen"

(5.85-90, 55). The parallel is even more striking when we realize that Adam, to his great joy, awoke "and found / Before [his] eyes all real" and his "guide" appearing from "among the trees" (8.309-313)--the trees, that is, from which hang the tempting fruit; Eve's dream ends with the disappearance of her "guide" (5.91), and she wakes to the great joy of finding her dream "but a dream!" (5.93). So near do death and life grow together in this Garden: one command apart.⁴³ Adam is tempted with a good temptation the moment he enters Paradise. He wakes to find his dream of temptation real--and that God has brought him this dream. "Pluck and eat": Fowler insists that "temptation" here is "innocent," and so it is, technically--but the deliberate verbal parallels not only foreshadow the Fall, but make it clear that in prelapsarian Paradise there is real temptation, provocative confrontation, which asks proper handling.

Having met God, Adam meets his first respondent, and with him the first possibility of dialogue. The work of naming and the specific understanding it brings is not

⁴³ Rumrich notes that Adam's dream of Paradise and his dream of Eve are two steps that take him both farther into Paradise and higher toward the heavens and union with God. See *Matter of Glory* 110-112.

enough, as God knew it would not be. Once again appetite is quickened, and with it a certain audacity. A contest is begun with the onset of dialogue, and Milton creates the creation of his image of humanity. Mikhail Bakhtin describes the condition of dialogue for everyone who follows Adam--even for Adam himself once naming is done:

The speaker is not the biblical Adam, dealing only with virgin and still unnamed objects, giving them names for the first time. Simplistic ideas about communication as a logical-psychological basis for the sentence recall this mythical Adam.... The speaker is not Adam, and therefore the subject of his speech itself inevitably becomes the arena where his opinions meet those of his partners....⁴⁴

Mere naming is not dialogue, and the understanding it confers, however complete, reaches only to the world of objects. Dialogue is an arena requiring a self and an other; the two subjects can know each other and themselves only by entering this arena. Ironically, appropriately, Adam's first dialogic contest is with an other--God--about his need for an other--Eve. Adam knows he is wrestling, Jacob-like, with God; he admits twice in eleven lines (356, then 367) that he is being presumptuous in asking God for a creature to "partake" of creation with him.

⁴⁴ Mikhail Bakhtin, "The Problem of Speech Genres," in *Speech Genres* 93-94.

God smiles and deliberately, provocatively misunderstands Adam; he tells him that the animals will "come and play before [him]," and there will be language and reason in their "pastime" together. Adam anxiously clarifies his request: "of fellowship I speak / Such as I seek, fit to participate / All rational delight..." (8.389-91). His plea mixes "can sort" (384) with "consort" (392) and "converse" (396), as if searching through his newly-won language for the magic word. God, enjoying the game ("not displeased"), teases Adam with more delay:

A nice and subtle happiness I see
Thou to thy self proposest, in the choice
Of thy associates, Adam, and wilt taste
No pleasure, though in pleasure, solitary.
(8.399-402)

Compare these words with Adam's words to Eve after he eats the forbidden fruit she proffers:

Eve, now I see thou art exact of taste,
And elegant, of sapience no small part,
Since to each meaning savour we apply,
And palate call judicious; I the praise
Yield thee, so well this day thou hast purveyed.
(9.1017-1021)

Knowledge, discrimination, desire, tasting: Milton insists, over and over, on their interrelation in virtue and growth as well as, wrongly used, in vice and decay. Adam, like Eve, is "exact of taste," and here God is

encouraging, through indirection and challenge, through dialogic contest, that taste's steady refinement.⁴⁵

Adam, to meet God's challenge, finds himself straining to the height of his powers--a rather strenuous test for his first day of life--and arguing with God about the One and the Many, pointing out that God is not really alone but "already infinite; / And through all numbers absolute, though one..." (8.420-421).⁴⁶ Then, in his final, richly paradoxical argumentative thrust, Adam uses his new language to confess its inadequacy, and thereby gives a powerful, if implicit summary of the effect of God's language upon him as their dialogue has progressed:

Thou in thy secrecy although alone,
Best with thy self accompanied, seek'st not
Social communication, yet so pleased,
Canst raise thy creature to what highth thou

⁴⁵ Fowler (*Paradise Lost*, ed. Fowler 417) notes the complex overtones of the word "nice" in this context.

⁴⁶ See W. B. C. Watkins, "Creation," *Milton: A Collection of Critical Essays* 136: Adam's "first oral manifestation, typically, is not eating but speech.... Further, Adam boldly ventures even to dispute with God on the questions of equality and Unity in Trinity. Having lost the seventeenth century passion for disputation, we find God's pleasure in Adam's sudden suspiciously-Arian argumentative skill faintly humorous, like a father with a precocious child. But Milton departs from Genesis deliberately to stress an essential point of his creed: God creates man with independent God-like reason which awakens as naturally as his senses and at the same time." (emphasis mine).

wilt
Of union or communion, deified;
I by conversing cannot these erect
From prone, nor in their ways complacence find.

Indeed, what Adam cannot do to the beasts with his language, God has been doing all along to Adam with his:

Thus far to try thee, Adam, I was pleased,
And find thee knowing not of beasts alone,
Which thou hast rightly named, but of thy self,
Expressing well the spirit within thee free,
My image, not imparted to the brute....

I, ere thou spakest,
Knew it not good for man to be alone,
And no such company as then thou saw'st
Intended thee, for trial only brought,
To see how thou couldst judge of fit and
meet.... (8.437-441, 444-448)

God's behavior here toward Adam must not be neatened into a tepid exercise in divine foreknowledge; to do so is to overlook or ignore the contrarieties Milton brings into play whenever a genuinely dialogic encounter occurs.⁴⁷

And if what I am arguing is correct, Milton's understand-

⁴⁷ Mary Nyquist reads this exchange between God and Adam, not as a tepid exercise, but as a contractual conversation in which Adam states his need, God supplies it, and the deal is struck. Nyquist wants to argue that anything Eve gives Adam is something Adam has already demanded and Milton has authoritatively supplied, thus rendering even Eve's love a product of Adam's, or God's, or Milton's (that is, a man's) desire and, thus, control. See "The genesis of gendered subjectivity in the divorce tracts and in *Paradise Lost*," in *Re-membering Milton: Essays on the texts and traditions*, ed. Mary Nyquist and Margaret W. Ferguson (New York: Methuen Press, 1988) 113-114, 122-123.

ing of humanity and human experience is genuinely dialogic in just this way: willful, unpredictable, thorny, ironic, provocative. Michael Lieb, also using a Bakhtinian approach, has stated it well:

[God] is a being who may disturb us, who may even repel us; but He is a being nonetheless. His proper environment is that of drama; His proper discourse that of dialogue, not monologue. As such, Milton's conception of God is in harmony with what Mikhail Bakhtin implies is 'the dialogic imagination,' according to which the word as uttered 'encounters an alien word ... in a living, tension-filled interaction....' If Milton's rendering of God causes us discomfort, so be it. The answer to this discomfort is not to consign the Deity to the realm of abstraction. The appropriate response, paradoxically, is that of God's critics, who are inclined to argue with Him, to impugn his motives, to be offended by what He says and how He says it, to engage Him in debate, to struggle with Him, to see Him struggling with Himself. It is the critics of Milton's God who provide the greatest insight into how the Deity of *Paradise Lost* is to be understood. For knowingly or not, these critics at the very least credit Milton with the courage, if not the audacity, to have conceived God dramatically.⁴⁸

And of course the dialogue is not only between God and Adam here: "The arguments with which Milton supplies God are dramatically invigorating precisely because they spark

⁴⁸ Michael Lieb, *The Sinews of Ulysses* (Pittsburgh: Duquesne University Press, 1989) 79. Lieb quotes Bakhtin from *The Dialogic Imagination*, ed. Michael Holquist and trans. Caryl Emerson and Michael Holquist (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1981) 279.

off so many objections," John Carey observes.⁴⁹ While Carey seems unable to get beyond the philosophical problem of God's foreknowledge, he does understand well the implications of God's discourse with Adam.

God's banter with Adam about why he should want a woman (8.368-451) is less amiable if you recall that the one he intends to supply will, he knows, be the death of Adam. Besides, for God to mislead Adam, in this scene, about his real purposes marriage-wise merely 'for trial' (8.447) appears irresponsible. Might not Adam think the tree-prohibition merely for trial too, as Satan suggests it is (9.692-7)?⁵⁰

The tree-prohibition is for trial, although not *merely* for trial. Satan's lies are rarely pure fiction. Nevertheless, Carey's unease at God's testing/tempting/trying of Adam is far more sensitive to the tone and text of their encounter than a reading like the following, one more anxious to preserve a spurious (and most un-Miltonic) decorum in this exchange between maker and man:

... what may at first have looked like the creature's 'arguing with God' is revealed to be an expression of what has been God's purpose from the start--an expression, indeed, of God's own image in man.... What may at first appear a needless game that God decided to play with Adam before giving him a wife can in retrospect be seen as something necessary for the function and realization, in more than one sense, of that which is God's image in man--his free spirit....

⁴⁹ Carey, *Milton* 78.

⁵⁰ Carey 77.

[God] must not bombard man with knowledge of the truth, but allow him to discover and judge things for himself.⁵¹

In one sense this is certainly true, but it fails utterly to take account of the tone, and thus the dramatic effect, of the passage. What do we make of such an exchange, such a God? Why should the process of discovery require such an ironic dialectic? And if Adam isn't really "arguing with God," doesn't this compromise his "free spirit," and rob the divine image within him of the power of significant innovation? Adam may in fact need to play this game with God to demonstrate his readiness for Eve, but the decision to play, and his dialogic insistence as he plays it, are his, must be his, else he is an "Adam of the motions." The process of discovery and judgment Adam undergoes leads him, in good Old Testament fashion, to dispute with the Almighty. That the Almighty wants so to be disputed with is cause for greater wonder at the richness, the uncanniness, the fierceness of his image in Adam and Eve, not for disavowing the reality of the disputa-

⁵¹ Danielson, *Milton's Good God* 122-3. Danielson's emphasis on the soul-making properties of Eden is well-placed, but, like Lewalski, he is too ready to smooth over the more radical implications of Milton's drama.

tion.⁵² It is entirely right that, after Adam has named the animals, he should next use his new tool of language, provoked by the creator who gave him this tool, to understand and articulate his feeling that he should not be alone.⁵³

The Adam who has so soon after his own creation disputed with his Almighty creator does not hesitate to argue with the creator's emissary angels, either. Adam ends his birth-narrative by telling Raphael of Eve's creation, and of the difference she has made and is making in his experience of the world. The "nice and subtle happiness" Adam proposes, presumptuously, to God calls forth not only the creation of his "likeness ... fit help ... other self"

⁵² After such an unmistakable episode of arm-wrestling with an ironic God, one may wonder why Harold Bloom continues to insist that the Yahwist ("J") Jehovah of the Old Testament is radically absent from *Paradise Lost*. Of the Yahwist Bloom writes, "Surprise ... is one of the dominant elements of J's Yahweh.... The God of the Priestly writer is already almost the God of *Paradise Lost*, but J's Yahweh is no schoolmaster of souls." See *Ruin the Sacred Truths* 5-11.

⁵³ Adam's understanding and articulation please God, not only because Adam is learning, but because their dialogic exchange makes them more intimate: "We know the meaning of what we have tried and of what has tried us: what we have dualized and (yes, of course) dueled, we know and understand--it has a meaning for us." See R. A. Shoaf, *Milton, Poet of Duality* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1985) 2.

(8.450), but also (and thereby) a re-creation of himself,
as he watches God's last, best creation:

Under his forming hands a creature grew,
Manlike, but different sex, so lovely fair,
That what seemed fair in all the world,
 seemed now
Mean, or in her summed up, in her contained
And in her looks, which from that time infused
Sweetness into my heart, *unfelt before*,
And into all things from her air inspired
The spirit of love and amorous delight.
She disappeared, and left me dark, I waked
To find her, or for ever deplore
Her loss, and other pleasures all abjure....
 (8.470-480, emphasis mine)

It is often said that Eve writes Paradise's first love poem; Adam's narration of Eve's birth and the difference she then makes to and in him, told to Raphael in her temporary absence, is no less moving or intense. (One may also note that Adam's first response to the possibility of losing Eve is nearly identical to his response to the fallen Eve when she returns from eating the forbidden fruit.) The most important element of this passage, however, is that Eve introduces something radically new into Adam's experience: "sweetness."⁵⁴ It is the erotic,

⁵⁴ "'Sweet' and 'sweetness' are words that this poet reserves, almost always, for music, for paradise, and for the originally perfect affection between Adam and Eve. As he had indicated as early as 'At a Solemn Music,' to be unparadised is to lose music and love...." Edward S. LeComte, *Yet Once More: Verbal and Psychological Pattern in Milton* (New York: AMS Press, 1953, rpt. 1969) 16. Adam's praise of Eve's inspiring "air" reinforces this union of music and

generative sweetness of Paradise, but also more than that. Adam's final exchange with Raphael is in fact his attempt to articulate the "more than that": the new, untamed, transformative abundance Eve represents for him. And as before, articulation and the growth it represents come as a result of a dialogic contest: Adam struggles first with God, then with Raphael, over the nature of his partner.

God would not fulfill Adam's desire for a companion until Adam had worked out what he wanted and why he wanted it. Now that Adam has Eve, he continues, as any husband does, to work out what he has and how that affects his life. The creation of Eve required an ironic colloquy with the Creator. The ongoing marriage requires a dialogue, not only with Raphael, but (as, of course, it also did the first time) with himself as well. In Raphael's presence, Adam thinks aloud about his wife, and the fact that she represents something truly new under the sun:

Thus I have told thee all my state, and brought
My story to the sum of earthly bliss
Which I enjoy, and must confess to find
In all things else delight indeed, but such
As used or not, works in the mind *no change*,
Nor vehement desire....

... here

love.

... transported I behold,
Transported touch; here passion first I felt,
Commotion strange, in all enjoyments else
Superior and unmoved, here only weak
Against the charm of beauty's powerful glance.
(8.521-526, 528-533, emphasis mine)

Adam's confession of weakness is certainly also an indication of risk, of danger. Many, if not most readers assume that Milton means the rest of Adam's speech, and especially Raphael's reply, to be the last, best warning given in Paradise about the possibility of sin and the necessity of obedience. After Raphael gives his lecture, Adam has no excuse, or so the reasoning goes.⁵⁵ Yet a careful analysis of the passage will not support such a thesis. Raphael warns Adam, yes; warning the human couple is Raphael's mission. Adam's immoderating love for Eve is risky; beauty and the love it attracts may always degenerate into idolatry. Indeed, strengthening Adam

⁵⁵ In *Milton: A Collection of Critical Essays*, see for example Bush 119; Watkins 137; Tillyard 158. See also Budick, *The Dividing Muse* 84-7; Burden, *The Logical Epic* 154-7; Lewalski, "Innocence and Experience in Milton's Eden" 114-116 (it should be noted that Lewalski, although considering Adam to be too confident, also considers his reply to Raphael to be legitimate); Shoaf, *Milton: Poet of Duality* 150. Stella Revard asserts that Raphael "unties the knots of domestic quandaries," which is certainly what he intends to do, but almost precisely what he does not actually do (see *The War In Heaven: Paradise Lost and the Tradition of Satan's Rebellion* [Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1980] 52).

against such a degeneration may be part of God's purpose in trying Adam's desire for a companion. Nevertheless, what Adam feels for Eve must be immoderate and dangerous for it to be even *greater* than the "wilderness of sweets" nature has already shown him in Paradise. If the garden before Eve arrives is already "wild above rule or art, enormous bliss," how nearly devastating must be the delight she brings into Adam's world, a delight unique in its ability to "work ... change" in Adam's mind.⁵⁶ If, as Raphael has hinted and God has observed, humanity can work its way up to heaven through long trial, certainly the ability to change--and the agent or motive of those changes--will be of prime importance. And Adam's testimony reveals that Eve is the only earthly creature that has brought to him something he didn't already have or enjoy. John Peter Rumrich observes that Adam and Eve "enjoy the fluidity of being able to become other than they are, an otherness that does not involve the loss of their created identities."⁵⁷ Adam and Eve activate each

⁵⁶ "Adam learns that his image or other half is not *just* his image, has much to give, can enlarge and change *him*...." See Diane McColley, "Eve and the Arts of Eden," in *Milton and the Idea of Woman*, ed. Julia Walker (Chicago: Univ. of Ill. Press, 1988) 106.

⁵⁷ Rumrich 100.

other's ontological fluidity; the potential for dissolution this fluidity implies is simply another one of the risks of freedom.

Adam is working through the contrarities of delight, metamorphosis, obedience, and identity as he speaks of Eve to Raphael.⁵⁸ He wonders aloud what Eve's beauty means, what it reveals about her and about him. And as he wanders through his wonder, Adam's re-enters the dialogic mode, a key-change we should recognize even if Raphael doesn't. Adam first moves from wondering if nature is to blame to a recitation of what he has memorized ("For well I understand in the prime end / Of nature her the inferior"), and then in a massive modulation, to the Miltonic qualification:

... yet when I approach
Her loveliness, so absolute she seems
And in her self complete, so well to know
Her own, that what she wills to do or say
Seems wisest, virtuousest, discreetest, best;
All higher knowledge in her presence falls
Degraded, wisdom in discourse with her

⁵⁸ Turner's analysis of this dialogic encounter between Adam and Raphael, like my own, emphasizes the friction and surprising ambiguity of the conversation. Turner's primary goal is to parse the nature of Paradisal eroticism and marriage, but he too recognizes the ontological uncertainties and possibilities raised by the Adam-Raphael dialogue concerning Eve. See James Grantham Turner, *One Flesh: Paradisal Marriage and Sexual Relations in the Age of Milton* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1987) 266-87.

Looses discountenanced, and like folly shows;
 Authority and reason on her wait,
 As one intended first, not after made
 Occasionally; and to consummate all,
 Greatness of mind and nobleness their seat
 Build in her loveliest, and create an awe
 About her, as a guard angelic placed.
 (8.546-559)

To this enormously moving speech Raphael can find no more considered reply than "For what admir'st thou, what transports thee so, / An outside?"⁵⁹ Far from accepting Raphael's "contracted brow" and stern words as Milton's exacting response to Adam's outpouring, we should instead check the text again to make sure Raphael has heard the same speech we have. Can it be possible that a supernatural messenger from God could fail the challenge of the dialogue so utterly? Or is Raphael's thickheadedness (and thickheartedness) another provoking object, another divine call for clarification? Did the God who "bantered" with a creature in need to try his desire send an angel not only to provoke wonder but also defense?

⁵⁹ McColley (*Milton's Eve* 71) notes that Raphael shows a certain "impercipience" about the "human condition" when he rebukes Adam, a weaker reading of the passage than I am arguing for, but in the same direction. Unfortunately, McColley goes on to call Raphael's description of angelic sex "tactless," and Adam's cross-examination of Raphael "courteous." While I do not claim Adam's response to Raphael is rude, to call it "courteous" is to miss its provocative intent and effect.

For defend himself--and his consort--Adam does, at once, and in the defending he grows, "improv'd through tract of" dialogue (as he was with God, earlier). Raphael's anxiety is not without foundation, as Adam's own anxiety testifies; nevertheless, here Adam is the one who moves beyond anxiety into a fuller articulation of doubt and desire, a motion provoked by Raphael, whose understanding is so rigid and limited as to be *misunderstanding*. The angel's extreme simple-mindedness (almost brutality) in equating Adam's delight in Eve with "carnal pleasure" alone is met by an Adam whose reply is only "half-abashed."⁶⁰ Adam's answer manages to clarify, enlarge, reassure, and rebuke all at once:

Neither her outside formed so fair, nor aught
In procreation common to all kinds
(Though higher of the genial bed by far,
And with mysterious reverence I deem)
So much delights me as those graceful acts,
Those thousand decencies that daily flow
From all her words and actions mixed with love
And sweet compliance, which declare unfeigned
Union of mind, or in us both one soul;
Harmony to behold in wedded pair

⁶⁰ Before he introduces an allegorical reading of this dialogue as a debate between Heavenly Love and Human Love, Fowler observes that "Adam is only *half abashed*, for he goes on to give a spirited defence of his love. One is presumably to conclude that it is still rational and unfallen; so that Raphael's unsympathetic sharpness has been occasioned by an anxiety without present foundation" (*Paradise Lost*, ed. Fowler 428).

More grateful than harmonious sound to the ear.
Yet these subject not; I to thee disclose
What inward thence I feel, not therefore foiled,
Who meet with various objects, from the sense
Variously representing; yet still free
Approve the best, and follow what I approve.
(8.596-611)

Adam insists on the integrity of his love for Eve: he loves her body, mind, and soul, her words and deeds. Such a love also argues powerfully for the integrity of the beloved: Eve is a true poem in Adam's description.

The highest integrity asserted here, however, is the integrity of the marriage itself. In a locution that suggests he is not so innocent as Raphael has assumed, Adam introduces the possibility of deception only to deny it. Adam's and Eve's separate integrity of being, with the integrity of their relationship, "declare unfeigned / Union of mind, or in us both one soul." The word "unfeigned" strikes an odd note. We are surprised at first to think that Adam can imagine what a feigned union might be like. Then we realize that Adam is arguing that he enjoys complete intimacy, complete integrity, in his marriage to Eve; he argues this precisely because that intimacy and integrity has just been challenged, and he remembers why he asked God for Eve in the first place. Raphael's reply to Adam's paeon of love for Eve is "the beasts do it too." Adam's plea to God was that "the

beasts alone won't do"--"I by conversing cannot these erect / From prone, nor in their ways complacence find" (5.440-441). Adam's reply to Raphael allows him to remember just what Eve is for him, what Eve alone can be for him. Adam uses "unfeigned" because he suddenly realizes that human beings must judge each other's insides from each other's outsides, thus making trust even more an act of faith and love. The "union of mind, or in us both one soul" Adam avows is, ironically, not unlike the sexual union Raphael tells Adam the angels enjoy:

Easier than air with air, if spirits embrace,
Total they mix, union of pure with pure
Desiring; nor restrained conveyance need
As flesh to mix with flesh, or soul with soul.
(8.626-629)

Does angelic sexual intercourse therefore excel human sexual intercourse? Is Raphael really blushing when he begins his answer to Adam's question "Love not the heavenly spirits, and how their love / Express they...?" If, as I have been arguing, Raphael is not always sensitive or correct in his dialogue with Adam, the answers to these questions may not be easy to determine. Let us begin with the latter question. Barbara Lewalski, in an otherwise perceptive essay on prelapsarian life in *Paradise Lost*, insists Raphael has not been caught out by

Adam, and is not betraying any modesty or misgivings or embarrassment over angelic sexuality:

Raphael's answer has been as badly misunderstood as Adam's question. He does not blush like a Victorian schoolgirl because sex has been mentioned and hurry away after a mumbled answer....

Raphael's "rosy red" smile is not a blush, Lewalski continues, but a sign of his seraphic, flamelike nature, since seraphs were the "angels who most fully embody the quality of love...."⁶¹ And Adam's question is not a challenge: he merely asks for "confirmation of his intuition about the scale of love." The angel also smiles because he likes Adam and is pleased at Adam's "right understanding of the scale of Nature and the scale of love ...

[inferring] points omitted in the angelic account. We ought to recall here that at the outset of Adam's career in the Garden God was similarly delighted when Adam argued him down on the question of a mate."⁶² Fowler's commentary agrees substantially with Lewalski's:

Raphael may be blushing at a successful riposte of Adam's ... but it seems more likely that the riposte is unsuccessful, and that the angels'

⁶¹ Lewalski's evidence is not persuasive: she adduces a passage from Dante and a passage from St. Teresa attesting to the Seraphim's flamelike visages, neither of which mentions Love or its "proper hue."

⁶² Lewalski, "Innocence and Experience in Milton's Eden" 115-116.

smile glows red because that is the colour of angelic ardour.... Certainly [Milton] and Raphael go on to insist proudly on the closeness and totality of angelic coitus, much as angelic digestion was flaunted at 5.433ff.⁶³

Of course Adam is about more here than a "confirmation of his intuition"; his spirited dialogue with Raphael has just led him to say that "To love thou blamest me not, for love thou say'st / Leads up to heaven, is both the way and guide." "Blamest" makes it clear that Adam has felt himself challenged by Raphael, and he in turn challenges Raphael by using Raphael's own words, a time-honored debater's trick. Raphael's rosy red smile may or may not show that Adam has scored a point, but it is certainly a response, either to the dialogue or to the subject the dialogue has led them to. After all, not much more than a hundred lines earlier Adam led Eve, "blushing like the morn," to their "nuptial bower." To read Adam's question and Raphael's reply as other than challenge and response is to read it dialectically, not dialogically, and to ignore its dramatic context.⁶⁴

⁶³ *Paradise Lost*, ed. Fowler 430.

⁶⁴ Nyquist's hard-and-fast distinction between "ceremonial" prelapsarian speech and the newly dramatic speech of the separation scene must, for her thesis' sake, overlook moments such as these. For instance, she argues that Adam's changing the "direction of his response" as he talks with Eve "makes his response to Eve radically unlike the ceremonially complete

John Carey's reading raises tougher questions, but is much more responsive to the text:

Adam tells Raphael he felt 'passion' when he went to bed with Eve (8.530), and Raphael says that passion is wrong (8.588).... Angels, it turns out, can assume not only 'either sex' but 'both' (1.424), with the implication that their gaseous sex-act, expounded by Raphael, can be solitary.... [Milton's] dramatic instinct is surer when he leaves it to Adam to defend human sexuality. It is one of the few times in the poem that we want to applaud. Raphael has been carrying on about how men and women are really just like animals, and Adam, as if in passing, reproves the angel's coarseness--'Though higher of the genial Bed by far, / And with mysterious reverence I deem' (8.598-9). Well may Raphael blush.⁶⁵

Carey's reading reminds us that angels are not infallible agents in Milton's cosmos, although it is tempting to regard Raphael this way, for of course much of what he says is true, and most of his cautions are wise and neces-

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responses unfallen superiors have always given their hierarchical inferiors in *Paradise Lost* ("Reading the Fall," esp. 199-211). My reading of the dialogue between Adam and Raphael (holding in abeyance for the moment the question of which being is in fact superior), by contrast, emphasizes those moments of provocation (doubt, desire, wonder, incomprehension) that work specifically to undermine ceremony, or perhaps to broaden the idea of ceremony; in James Nohrnberg's words, "to make the conversation more than ceremonial," more than simply a "correct change of protocol" (private correspondence).

⁶⁵ Carey, *Milton* 106-7.

sary. Yet the angel does not leave this exchange with Adam wholly, homiletically triumphant. We want to applaud Adam, as Carey points out, because we believe Adam has struck a blow for the integrity and goodness of his love for Eve, and thus, more largely, of their human condition as hybrids of dust and spirit. Our applause, and Milton's eliciting it, indicates that Pico's *Oration* still lingers in the air we breathe: we still hope that our place on the Great Chain of Being is peculiar and peculiarly fluid, a little lower than the angels perhaps, but nevertheless we are their judges.⁶⁶

Now we may return to our first question. If Adam has indeed judged an angel here, or at least if their dialogic encounter has produced no clear winner, can we safely assume, as Lewalski and Fowler do, that the superiority of angelic sex to human sex Raphael asserts is beyond question? In one sense, the sexual union Raphael describes must be superior: they find no obstacles to union, and their union is "total." Angelic sex knows no bounds.

⁶⁶ Satan complains that God not only made Adam and Eve lords of this lovely Garden but, "O indignity! / Subjected to his service angel wings..." (9.154-155). Even if we allow for Satan's histrionic exaggeration, we still see a universe in which humanity's place is somehow (and provocatively, in Satan's case) privileged.

Human sex, of course, is in many ways about boundaries; "membrane, joint, or limb" are not only in the way of union, they are the only means of union. Penetrated or penetrating, we're outside. And of course sexual differentiation, marked by this "outside," can mean trouble, and usually has. Overt, intractable differentiation is a necessary (though not sufficient) condition for strife: witness Lucifer's differentiation from the Son, the Forbidden Fruit's differentiation from all other fruit, and the no unambiguous formula "not equal, as their sex not equal seemed" we get at our first glimpse of Adam and Eve. More than one critic has judged the angelic experience of sex and sexual differentiation to be a paradise humanity has, to its sorrow, been denied. Here is Catherine Belsey:

At the end of their discussion Raphael tells Adam with a disarming blush that there is love in heaven, and there the angels simply mix freely in perfect union, without all these difficulties (8.618-29). In the heaven he speaks of, however, there are, of course, no women (10.889-90).

This arrangement might not do for us. But *Paradise Lost* also offers the basis of a more utopian vision. Though the angels are identified by masculine pronouns throughout, and are thus presented as essentially male, the text none the less draws attention to the fluidity of heavenly gender: 'For spirits when they please / Can either sex assume, or both...' (1.423-4). Either ... or both: not simply a sexual duality, a bisexual ability to move between antithetical poles, nor a uniform androgyny, but

an internalization of difference itself, of sexual otherness within the self-same.

Milton's plural angels are by no means unique. Italian Renaissance painting, too, often shows God's emissaries as sexually ambiguous. Annunciating angels, for example, are commonly placed in a relationship of spatial and pictorial symmetry with the Virgin, their physical characteristics resembling hers to a surprising degree. How strange that a culture which so polarized male and female stereotypes should represent a higher form of life as thus transgressive, apparently endorsing sexual undecidability.

The effect in the paintings is the divorce of sexual difference from its alliance with power. Neither Gabriel nor the Virgin lays claim to mastery. And in Milton's heaven there are no gender stereotypes, no antithetical voices, masculine and feminine, no opposition affirmed as privilege. There can be, in consequence, no sexual rule and no submission, no authority grounded in anatomy.

The text goes no further than this. But in separating gender from anatomy, and in glimpsing the possibility of a difference within sexual identity, *Paradise Lost* allows its reader a momentary vision of a world beyond essences. The result is imaginable as sexual plurality for each individual, and the consequent release of sexual being from power.

God ought to have thought of that. It would have made all the difference in the world.⁶⁷

⁶⁷ Catherine Belsey, *John Milton: Language, Gender, Power* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell Ltd., 1988) 66-7. By "[a] momentary vision of a world beyond essences" Belsey means that Milton was prescient enough to glimpse, if not elaborate, that currently popular theory of existence Catherine Belsey believes to be true.

Ironically, Belsey finds herself agreeing with Fowler, among others, in this matter: angelic sex is superior to human sex. But as we have seen, Raphael's testimony can be mistaken. Has Milton inscribed in this dialogue a defense of human sexuality that argues it no less "pure" or "total" than that of the angels? James Grantham Turner believes the answer to this question can be "yes":

Angels enjoy a distillate of human eroticism, but without its density and rootedness: their texture is 'liquid' rather than palpable and multifarious (6.348-52). They can 'limb themselves,' but in love-making they evidently choose not to experience the constraint of limbs, which means they also forego the touch of breasts meeting through a veil of hair. They do not suffer 'exclusive barrs,' but neither do they enjoy the exclusivity or 'sole propriety' that enriches the private love-making of Adam and Eve.... Angels ... are as it were Platonists by nature, but mature humans need a more complicated model.⁶⁸

The union of insides by means of outsides, the burdens and possibilities of conflict and trust those outsides engender, the endless dialogic challenge of faithfully and lovingly combining one subject with another in a world of externals and objects: there is much Adam may grasp that

⁶⁸ Turner, *One Flesh* 279-280. See also Kerrigan and Braden, *The Idea of the Renaissance* 205: "Milton understood the erotic importance of the barrier."

will be foreign to the angels, fallen or unfallen.⁶⁹ As

Stevie Davies observes:

Adam seems to imply, very delicately, that perhaps Raphael does not know what he is talking about, because he has never experienced it.... [T]here is a secret sense--taught us by Book IV and the Orphic Book VII ... in which it is right to say of Eve that 'All higher knowledge in her presence falls'. It is the intuitive or sexual *gnosis* which cannot be imparted by ratiocination, however strenuous and earnest. But Adam cannot explain this to Raphael because it has its own silent language which does not translate into any other. As in the *Secret Discourse of Hermes to Tao*, an element of sublime humour enters with the teacher's inability to articulate what the uninitiated cannot in any case comprehend.⁷⁰

⁶⁹ In theory, the direct, intuitive apprehension the angels enjoy is also "higher" than man's discursive reasoning (5.486-90); but, as we have seen, angelic fallibility in *Paradise Lost* eliminates any simple reliance on Raphael's ontological pronouncements. At the very least, Raphael's qualifying statements in Book 5 indicate that angels must reason discursively at times, and likewise human beings may reason intuitively at times. And in any case, the refreshments of otherness seem more available to God and to human beings than to angels.

⁷⁰ Davies, *Idea of Woman* 228-229. (See also the discussion following 230-231.) Cassirer summarizes Cusanus' ideas regarding "opposition" and "resistance" between the sensible and the intellectual as a necessary means of fulfillment and "full actuality," an actuality Milton's human beings may (potentially) enjoy more of than the angels do (Cassirer, *Individual* 127-30). (Note too that, although Satan does experience change and a kind of "commotion strange" as he stands atop Mt. Niphates (4.114-121), the "gestures fierce ... and mad demeanour" are not the result of another creature's presence, but indeed of his solitary self-consumption as his heart hardens to God's gracious provocations.)

Turner also makes the crucial point that the angels "have Eros, but they do not have marriage."⁷¹ To which we must add, "they do not have children, either." Humanity, of course, does and will; just as Adam and Eve may grow up as they are "by long obedience tried," so they may grow out as their children help garden Paradise and populate the world. Angelic embraces, like the "fruit-trees over woody" that "reached too far their pampered boughs," are "fruitless" (5.213-215). In this dimension, then, human sexuality clearly excels the angels'. Like God, who has a Son (and sons, in the angels), Adam and Eve will know what it is to be parents, to love their image in each other, and then love the images *that* love produces.⁷² Humanity shares the procreative image of God. For Adam and Eve, however, procreation, like their love, comes out of the tension between sexual differentiation and the "union of minds, or in us both one soul" Adam so rightly feels their

⁷¹ Turner 280.

⁷² See Kerrigan and Braden, *The Idea of the Renaissance* 201: "The embrace, the dialectic of the flesh, will disseminate her image in 'Multitudes like thyself.' In dilating the concept of the image [in the scene with Eve at the lake], God has moved from mirror to mother, arriving thereby at the concept of Eve...."

marriage to represent. One doubts whether the angelic utopia Belsey argues for would provide so rich a field of strife and possibility.⁷³

Thus it is not at all clear that "angelhood" of the variety represented by Raphael, for example, is what Milton imagines as the highest object of humanity's aspiration. That humanity will be improved, or raised, to a state that includes more than terrestrial existence is clear, both from Raphael's testimony (5.493-503) and God's (155-161). But Raphael characteristically qualifies his prophecy: "perhaps / Your bodies may at last turn all to spirit ... or may at choice here or in heavenly paradises dwell," and God's prophecy, while more definite than Raphael's, is one of unity and reciprocity, not one of leaving the human condition altogether behind for another one:

out of one man a race

⁷³ Thinking about the idea of a "true democracy," Owen Barfield speaks of "... principles of mutual penetrability, of a dependence with is at the same time independence, and a separableness that is inseparable-- tensions or polarities which are head-splitting paradoxes to judgmental thought, but child's play to the imagination"--not a bad way of thinking about Adam's and Eve's marriage, too. See *The Rediscovery of Meaning, and Other Essays* (Middletown, Connecticut: Wesleyan University Press, 1977) 227. Perhaps Satan's failure is partially a failure of imagination after all, as Budick and Nohrnberg point out.

Of men innumerable, there to dwell,
Not here, till by degrees of merit raised
They open to themselves at length the way
Up hither, under long obedience tried,
And earth be changed to heaven, and heaven to
earth,
One kingdom, joy and union without end.
(7.155-161)⁷⁴

Nevertheless, after arguing that the dialogic complexity of Adam and Eve's sexual differentiation is essential to the new pleasures God has created in human sexuality, and to the procreative power in which Adam and Eve image God, I want to re-complicate the dialogue between Adam and Eve even further, in part by complicating Belsey's wish for the angelic internalization of sexual differentiation.

74 These words might be enough to make an angel
aspire to humanity; indeed, Raphael has already
admitted that earth is not at all outclassed by heaven.
Far from it:

though in heaven the trees
Of life ambrosial fruitage bear, and vines
Yield nectar, though from off the boughs each
 morn
We brush mellifluous dewes, and find the
 ground
Covered with pearly grain: yet God hath here
Varied his bounty so with new delights,
As may compare with heaven; and to taste
Think not I shall be nice. (5.426-433)

Raphael's praise of earth after such a description of heaven should make the heart of Pico himself swell with pride. There is something new: it's under the sun.

Chapter 5

Differentiation and Dialogue: The Separation Scene

The separation scene in Book 9 strains Milton's conception of prelapsarian life to its utmost, so much so that some critics simply give up and assign the scene to postlapsarian life, arguing that Adam's and Eve's quarrel demonstrate that the Fall has already happened, or at least begun.¹ Interestingly, even an eloquent defender of Milton's portrait of prelapsarian life like Barbara Lewalski concedes that the separation scene is the beginning of the end, and somehow separate from what has come before: "Adam and Eve's life in Eden, *until the fateful marital dispute*, describes a pattern, not of declining innocence but of steady growth toward perfection..." (my emphasis).² Other readers grant Milton his thesis that Eve is "yet sinless" even up to the moment she allows the serpent to assume a "new part" and make his

¹ Tillyard's is perhaps the most well-known of these readings: he maintains that Milton "anticipates the Fall by attributing to Eve and Adam feelings which though nominally felt in the state of innocence are actually not compatible with it . . .," and that therefore "both are virtually fallen before the official temptation has begun." See "The Crisis in *Paradise Lost*, in *Milton: A Collection of Critical Essays* 157-158.

² "Innocence and Experience in Milton's Eden" 100.

grand speech of "love / To man...." (9.659-667)--perhaps even to the moment of fateful decision itself, in which she iterates the serpent's speech, appropriating and thereby approving evil, and finally plucking and eating the forbidden fruit (9.745-784). For these readers, the separation scene, if the Fall had not occurred, would have been merely the latest and greatest trial for Adam and Eve as they grow toward God.³ Joan Bennett calls this scene "a concentrated exploration of the antinomian experience" in which

[t]hey do not fall ... they do not sin, but they lose their balance in particularly antinomian ways and render themselves more vulnerable than usual to a push from the enemy. Both, as they have before in Paradise, here experience unsettling passions. Eve feels an urge toward independent action and a greater personal efficiency than is possible, or necessary, or desirable in the prelapsarian balance. Adam, though, finds himself desiring a greater sense of interdependence, a more complete security in his relationship with his beloved, than is possible to rationally free creatures. Both seek to reason their way toward an answer to the pro-

³ Turner argues that the separation scene is "the first scene of the new tragedy," referring to Milton's announced "change of literary mode" in 9.5-6, but accepts that "the characters are still explicitly 'sinless' and still inspired by the ideal of erotic love, dignity, and freedom built up in the earlier books." See *One Flesh* 289.

posed separation and toward settling the passions underlying the debate.⁴

What such a careful description omits, however, is an explanation as to why these changes in Adam and Eve should have come about. Why should Adam be wanting a more secure relationship with Eve just now? Why should Eve want more independence at just this moment? And are these desires wrong, or misplaced, or lesser goods? Reading the separation scene as certainly the most dramatic and perhaps the most profound example of Milton's image of humanity as dialogic, contrarious, and trial- and conflict-ridden, we may find, instead of a merely logical or theological problem, a subtle, rich exploration of human experience and relationship in which reason and emotion and will (for reason is but choosing) intertwine and struggle together. Perhaps growing, like dancing, is a matter of losing one's balance, and finding another, to be lost in its turn.

The separation dialogue, as Diana Benet comments, has as "one of [its] most important functions" the job of examining "the nature of the spiritual trial that awaits the human couple."⁵ Benet goes on to say, however, that

⁴ Bennett, *Reviving Liberty* 111.

⁵ Diana Benet, "Abdiel and the Son in the Separation Scene," in *Milton Studies* 18: 129.

"Adam and Eve's disagreement does not arise from hidden tensions in their relationship. It is the result of opposing concepts of the anticipated trial...."⁶ This is one of several attempts to rescue the separation dialogue from any taint of incipient fallenness.⁷ Unfortunately, these rescues often give away as much as they gain, usually by reducing dialogue (with its distinguishable but inseparable strains of emotion and reason) to a more or less sophisticated dialectic. Since human emotion is at a higher, more complex level of engagement in this scene than in any preceding it in *Paradise Lost*, any exegesis of the separation dialogue which does not give the heart at least equal billing with the head is simply not reading the scene Milton gives us.

I want to argue that there are indeed hidden (and quite obvious) tensions in this marriage and this separation dialogue, and that those tensions, as with all tensions in Milton, offer the means of grace and the hope of glory, as well as the means of sin and the prospect of

⁶ Benet 129.

⁷ Joan Bennett's, Dennis Danielson's (in *Milton's Good God*), and Diane McColley's (in *Milton's Eve*) readings of this scene are three recent examples.

damnation.⁸ The very real and important theological, ethical, and philosophical issues raised by this scene have been analyzed exhaustively, but rather less attention has been paid to the way in which the separation dialogue (or argument, or quarrel, but not "debate," as Bennett once incautiously calls it)⁹ portrays one radical result of Milton's image of humanity, a music of opposition that sounds both within and between its players, our grand parents, Adam and Eve.

That the Garden's fecundity outstrips Adam's and Eve's labors is not in dispute, either by Milton or by Adam and Eve. The human pair awakens, worships God, enjoys the morning ("partake / The season, prime for sweetest scents and airs"),

Then commune how that day they best may ply
 Their growing work: for much their work outgrew
 The hands' dispatch of two, gardening so wide.
 (9.201-203)

⁸ The idea of relationship itself, if the relationship is, as Adam's and Eve's is, genuinely dialogic, means that there are "hidden tensions." No relationship existing in time can be entirely explicit, not if the partners are indeed "other" to each other. In this sense one may speculate that marriage is Milton's master trope for what Thomas Kranidas calls his "fierce equation."

⁹ Bennett 111. It is Satan who indulges himself in a long (and to some extent mock) "debate" (9.87).

As we have seen, Adam has already commented on the odd fact that Paradise's work grows faster as they garden it. Here the author explicitly confirms Adam's estimate, thus making Eve's desire to work apart (and thereby more efficiently) plausible, and not necessarily a smoke-screen for other, illegitimate desires.

But is Eve's desire to separate from Adam mixed with other, legitimate desires? The plausibility of Eve's wish to work separately on this fateful morning grows from more than just the authorial confirmation of Paradise's exponential growth. Eve's very language recalls Adam's original observations in Book 4. There Adam tells Eve, just before they go to bed, that the next morning must see them hard at work at their "pleasant labour" (4.625); in Book 9, Eve refers to their "pleasant task" (9.207). Adam speaks of the "flow'ry Arbors" and "Alleys green" that are with "branches overgrown, / That mock our scant manuring, and require / More hands than ours to lop their wanton growth" (4.626-629). Eve's words are eerily parallel:

but till more hands
Aid us, the work under our labour grows,
Luxurious by restraint; what we by day
Lop overgrown, or prune, or prop, or bind,
One night or two with wanton growth derides
Tending to wild. (9.207-212)

The urgency of "mock" and "derides" puts an edge on the sweetness of Paradise's fertility, just as the urgency of

this new dialogue between Adam and Eve puts an edge on the domestic sweetness of their relationship. And the urgency derives, at least in part, from the changes each partner is working in the other. It is the very relationship itself that brings the relationship to this crucial moment. As we can see from Eve's using and modifying a vocabulary she has learned from Adam, this couple's dialogic relationship has progressed to a new, more rewarding, more perilous stage, in which each partner has learned enough from the other to internalize and complicate a differentiation that before existed only between them. In other words, Eve is growing in Adamic ability, and Adam is, in turn, growing an Eve-image in himself.

This man and this woman have different gifts, so that Eve has particular pleasure in helping and learning from a husband she admires, and Adam has particular pleasure in attending to the peace and liberty of a wife he cherishes. But each also increasingly participates in the other's particular virtues....¹⁰

The incorporation of difference into identity has begun; the dialogue of the separation scene is its greatest prelapsarian example, but it is in fact a process that began with Adam's argument with God, and even more strikingly with Eve's awakening to Adam, an awakening

¹⁰ McColley, *Milton's Eve* 35-36.

whose warmth is perhaps more than the couple "needs," but no less than the dialogue requires:

Part of my Soul I seek thee, and thee claim
My other half: with that thy gentle hand
Seiz'd mine, I yielded....
(4.487-489)

The love hunt that precedes this reaching, grasping, and yielding in many ways defines the erotic mutuality of Adam's and Eve's marriage.¹¹ Yet the conflicts and trials of venery are not unique; similar struggles and frictions define the growth and ascent of Adam and Eve toward their lofty potential. It is true that their love, their marriage, begins to turn them into angels--but angels and then some. Like the angels, they can (to a lesser extent, perhaps) internalize sexual differentiation. Unlike the angels, the frictions and stimulations of barriers, of outsides, cannot be entirely overcome--and should not be, if humanity is something new under the sun, not merely embryonic angels. This perfect marriage, among other things, is an *agon* for Adam and Eve, yet an *agon* that potentially "heals the wound, without undermining the

¹¹ Kerrigan and Braden's analysis is sensitive and exact; see "Lust Captured: *Paradise Lost* and Renaissance Love Poetry" in *The Idea of the Renaissance* 191-218.

privilege, of individuality."¹² In this separation dialogue, we hear words (and wounds) of asserted privilege. We also hear "healing words" (9.290). Both the balms and the privileges have their source in each partner's experience of, and transformation by, the other.

Eve's first assertion of privilege evokes a "mild answer" from Adam, who interestingly enough justifies their continued togetherness with an argument strongly reminiscent of Eve's pedagogical preferences:

Yet not so strictly hath our Lord imposed
Labour, as to debar us when we need
Refreshment, whether food, or talk between,
Food of the mind, or this sweet intercourse
Of looks and smiles, for smiles from reason
flow,
To brute denied, and are of love the food,
Love not the lowest end of human life,
For not to irksome toil, but to delight
He made us, and delight to reason join.
(9.235-243)

Compare Adam's emotional reasoning with the narrator's account of Eve's as she leaves his side in Book 8 when the

¹² C. S. Lewis, *An Experiment in Criticism* (Cambridge, Cambridge Univ. Press) 140. (Lewis is speaking here of literature's potential power.) Stevie Davies, by contrast, sees "the containment of self in the solitary confinement of individual identity" as "a painful consequence of the Fall." Not surprisingly, Davies thinks Milton regards angelic sex as ideal: "[t]here are no surfaces in heaven to define one happiness against another...." See *The Idea of Woman in Renaissance Literature* 196.

talk turns to "studious thoughts abstruse":

Yet went she not, as not with such discourse
 Delighted, or not capable her ear
 Of what was high: such pleasure she reserv'd,
 Adam relating, she sole Auditress;
 Her husband the relater she preferred
 Before the angel, and of him to ask
 Chose rather; he, she knew, would intermix
 Grateful digressions, and solve high dispute
 With conjugal caresses, from his lip
 Not words alone pleased her....

(8.49-57)

Once Adam was the source of "grateful digressions," by Eve best required; now Adam, changed by Eve, is shown to require such digressions too, while Eve now contemplates, inspired by an earlier Adam, the idea of work without looks or smiles or casual discourse.

Perhaps Eve has been contemplating this notion since her return the day before, just as Raphael was leaving. We learn from her that she is well aware of the dangers Raphael warned Adam about, for she has learned of them not only from Adam, but also from overhearing the angel "as in a shady nook I stood behind" (9.277). She thus brings independently derived knowledge to this dialogue. Yet her growing independence (which could lead, of course, to a fuller interdependence and a fuller love) results only in a surprising "misthought" she hears from Adam's lips. She is surprised, and perhaps a little shaken, to be reminded on the morning of her fullest initiative of their

essential--and her particular?--vulnerability; we should not be surprised that she takes it personally.¹³

Nor should we be surprised that Adam, who, having begun to dig himself into a deep hole, is thinking as much with his heart as with his head just now, rapidly back-pedals into emotionally compelling but logically specious replies. He argues, most un-Miltonically, that temptation is dishonorable; he claims that he is strengthened (if only by the potential for shameful failure) in Eve's presence, and she should feel the same way about him.¹⁴ This is not to say, of course, that Eve's arguments are uninflected by her own emotions (they, too, are fraught with emotion), but rather that during their separation dialogue Eve is using what strikes us as a new power of reasoning (including, however imperfectly expressed or understood, many of Milton's own arguments regarding freedom and the necessity of trial), and that Adam is using

¹³ Fowler notes that in the separation scene "Eve speaks first, something she has not previously done" (*Paradise Lost*, ed. Fowler 450). See also Nyquist, "Reading the Fall" 209-210.

¹⁴ To say, as Bennett does, that Adam is reasoning from "axioms" here while Eve is laboring with the lower reasoning of syllogisms is to strip the profuse emotional markers from the text, and thus to falsify it. See Bennett 111-117.

what strikes us as a new urgency and depth of emotion (awakened perhaps by his very narration to Raphael in Book 8 of his attachment to Eve and her effect upon him).¹⁵

Indeed, at the midpoint of the dialogue Milton very nearly turns Adam into Eve:

So spake domestic Adam in his care
And matrimonial love; but Eve, who thought
Less attributed to her faith sincere,
Thus her reply with accent sweet renewed.
(9.318-321)

"Domestic" is a very strange word for Milton to apply to Adam. Milton uses the word only five times in his English poetry; three of those times are in *Paradise Lost*, two in *Samson Agonistes*. Nowhere besides the separation dialogue does he use "domestic" specifically to describe a man.¹⁶

¹⁵ Nyquist ("Reading the Fall" 209) asserts that "[w]hat *Paradise Lost* presents us with in Book 9 is a conversation that simply goes out of control." While she wants, mistakenly in my view, to distinguish between what she terms "ceremonial" speech in the earlier books and "newly dramatic" speech in this scene, her words here do capture the uneasy rapidity of growth, the enormous bliss of development, that this scene portrays. *Contra* Augustine, Milton prizes the notion that Paradise may include the (temporarily, giddily) out-of-control, the wild--the radically free.

¹⁶ *A Concordance to Milton's English Poetry* 133. Oddly, Mary Nyquist, who demonstrates a sensitivity to unusual gender constructions in *Paradise Lost* in her essay "Textual Overlapping and Dalilah's Harlot-Lap" (in *Literary Theory/Renaissance Texts*, ed. Patricia Parker and David Quint [Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1986] 341-372), utterly elides this electric moment in her reading of the separation scene by speaking, inexplicably, of "the domestic Adam and

Elsewhere "domestic" either refers to the home or marriage generally--"perpetual fountain of domestic sweets"--or specifically to the woman's identity. To speak of "domestic Adam" is to suggest a radical internalization of sexual differentiation: Adam partially metamorphoses into Eve, just as Eve, by reasoning (not simply rationalizing, however mixed the motives) her turning away from Adam, begins partially to turn into him. Our sense of Adam's transformation is reinforced, too, by the "matrimonial love" he shows Eve: within this adjective there is a mother, a *mater*, a kind of nurture whose exercise Adam is unused to. Alas, Adam is no better at his growing capacity for nurture than Eve is at her growing capacity to reason--yet such risky progress is an essential part of their marriage's growth, a good and perilous thing that, rightly used, will bring more intimacy and greater love.¹⁷

Eve" ("Reading the Fall" 214). (At the close of the essay (229), Nyquist says that "Milton let the unfinished *Adam Unparadized* become *Paradise Lost*, a text unparadizing in language the domestic Adam with Eve," which hints at a fuller reading without actually moving in that direction.)

¹⁷ One might even argue that gender hierarchy is itself a provocation, another way of ensuring friction and motion for humanity. What do we make of woman's fluid "subjection" when she ascends far above the level her husband once occupied, even though (if she looks over) he is still a step ahead?

Wrongly used, the growth and the friction which produces such increase, the lopping and propping that relationship entails even in Paradise, lead to the first disobedience.¹⁸

For Eve's separation from Adam, like Adam's resounding "Go," is in no way disobedience or failure. Joan Bennett argues that Adam fails Eve:

Most critics believe that it [Eve's decision] is freely made and that Adam is right to tell her, after all his reasoning to the contrary, 'Go, for thy stay, not free, absents thee more.' I believe, however, that Adam fails as Eve's governor when he 'lets' her go, because by giving his permission when he does, he substitutes his own authority for her truly free decision.... Because [Adam] wants so fervently to be wanted by her, he lets her rest in her mistaken beliefs and act on the basis of his (permissive) authority.¹⁹

¹⁸ Diane McColley puts it well: "In the separation colloquy it is Eve's adherence to principles very like Milton's own that moves her to decline to let Satan's threat interfere with their liberties and the pursuit of their callings; it is Adam's respect for open dialogue and his sense of true relation, needing freedom, that move him to accede to her wish. But at the Fall these qualities run to excess in Eve's ambition and Adam's 'effeminacy' or uxoriousness, when he puts the immediate concerns of personal relations above the long-term claims of truth." See "Milton and the sexes," in *The Cambridge Companion to Milton* 157.

¹⁹ Bennett 112, 113.

Adam's "permission," however, is not so clear-cut as Bennett (and, for that matter, Eve, the one who calls it "permission" in line 378) believes:

But if thou think, trial unsought may find
Us both securer than thus warned thou seem'st,
Go; for thy stay, not free, absents thee more;
Go in thy native innocence, rely
On what thou hast of virtue, summon all,
For God towards thee hath done his part, do
thine. (9.370-375, my emphasis)

Adam is using a version of Raphael's words to him at the close of Book 8: "Accuse not Nature, she hath done her part; / Do thou but thine, and be not diffident / Of Wisdom..." (8.561-563). Unlike Raphael, however, Adam does not say these words with an authoritatively "contracted brow." Neither does he relax his grip on governance with the beginnings of a fatal uxoriousness. Rather, Adam leaves Eve to herself: "if thou think ... go." It is not quite the license Eve takes it to be, but a conditional permission that, after the fits and starts of this most taxing of conversations, returns to the freedom that is Paradise's *sine qua non*. Adam correctly realizes that any more constraint than such a conditional permission implies will be an intolerable abridgement of freedom that will neither prevent a possible temptation nor satisfy him emotionally.

Dennis Danielson advances the peculiar argument that Adam could have required Eve to stay, thus fulfilling his obligation as her governor, without abridging Eve's freedom to disobey him. But would Eve's disobeying a direct command from Adam be tolerable in Paradise? For that matter, would such a direct command, in the face of Eve's clear and reiterated contrary desire, even be *possible* in Paradise?

At the moment, however, what one ought to notice is that God's expressly having forbidden something (9.356) by no means infringes on man's freedom with respect to that thing, because a command does not compel obedience.... [A]ll Adam apparently need do in order to prevent Eve's wandering off by herself is to forbid it. And because it is constraint, not command, that negates freedom, he can forbid it. He would not thereby violate Eve's freedom to go if she so chose, any more than God's commanding them not to eat the forbidden fruit prevents their freely doing so.²⁰

But this clearly won't do. Eve is not "wandering off by herself"; she is going to work, purposefully, independently. And the equation of God's command, "sole daughter of his voice," with Adam's governance of Eve is nonsense. The Prohibition is *God's* only command; the Prohibition is *God's only* command. It is a peculiarly provoking object that enables freedom, even stimulates it. It is difficult

²⁰ Danielson, *Milton's Good God* 127.

to see how Adam's "commanding" Eve to stay would do either.²¹ Eve's subjection to Adam, we recall, is required with "gentle sway" (a condition which, tellingly, rhymes with "sweet reluctant amorous delay"); even if she is Adam's inferior, her service cannot be enforced as Danielson suggests it might.²² There is also the logical difficulty of the effect of a "command" that does not constrain; in this case, if Eve did exercise her freedom to disobey Adam, what would be gained by Adam's command, beyond simply clearing Adam of any taint of failure or uxoriousness? Slim gains for such a radical use of authority.

A similar difficulty besets Joan Bennett's insistence that

[Adam] must use the rhetorician's patience as well as the logician's rigor to bring [Eve] to the point where, not the authority of his testimony or his permission, but his right reasons enable her right reason to understand

²¹ Nohrnberg observes that Adam is "not ever told that he should not have let Eve go.... Adam can speak the one thing God forbids, but he cannot become a for-bidder himself and still treat Eve as his consort" (private correspondence).

²² One may note that Eve's notorious last word also creates a distant rhyme with the "coy submission, modest pride, / And sweet reluctant amorous delay" of Book 4: "but Eve / Persisted, yet submiss, though last, replied" (9.376-377). A similar verbal balancing act informs both instances.

the whole picture that her balancing choice will perfect. He needs to find a way out of the command/permission dichotomy that has entered the conversation with his reduction of ratio to logical method....

Bennett then makes the compelling but flawed argument that Adam's responsibility to Eve is to

keep the dialogue open and moving toward the truth.... He must not *close the encounter* before both participants have been freed of the passions clouding their reason.... In one sense Milton provides his Adam with a model in Raphael. Surely, Adam's human questionings must be as tedious and exasperating for the benevolent angel to bend his intuitive reason to as Eve's imperfect understanding and discursive reasoning are for Adam's quicker, axiomatic mind. But Adam, who experiences a complex human relationship with the 'other,' which the angel does not share, is not able to follow through with a rationally 'contracted brow' like Raphael's....²³

So much the better for Adam. Raphael's contracted brow means misunderstanding and premature, inaccurate judgment; Adam's conditional permission means that, for all his rhetorical and logical missteps, he has returned to an understanding of Paradise and his relationship to Eve. Like Danielson, Bennett imagines that if Adam had made Eve stay "until she genuinely understood his reasons," she would have had to "break an actual, positive law of

²³ Bennett 114. If anything, Eve's mind seems to be working faster, not slower, than Adam's in the separation dialogue.

Paradise--her cooperation with Adam's governance." How such an event would be much preferable to eating the apple is more than I can imagine. Bennett seems to imply that Adam's reasons, properly understood by an Eve cleansed of passion, would be incontrovertible. Such an interpretation of the separation dialogue makes *both* participants into failures, and turns dialogue into a mere "dialectic of the motions." Instead, I believe the drama we witness in this scene is real: a free choice must be made, and is made, in the absence of compulsion and in the absence of certainty:

[Eve] must choose because Adam simply does not know which is the best alternative. Each has something to recommend it, but he can endorse neither as foolproof. The first alternative [forbidding Eve's departure], while it satisfies his unaltered and loving wish to protect his wife, has been seriously discredited by Raphael's advice and his own experience; the second, while it seems more perilous, urges the self-reliance that Raphael recommends in his narrative and in his parting injunction.²⁴

The "commotion strange" Adam first experienced in Eve's presence was not simply lust; it was the creation of a new Adam within by the new Eve without. Likewise, Eve's ambition to work more efficiently (and do it alone) reflects her earliest change in the presence of Adam, that

²⁴ Benet, "Abdiel" 140.

ingenuous yet Adam-like query that strangely follows her beautiful love-poem to Adam, the poem that begins "With thee conversing I forget all time":

Nor grateful evening mild, nor silent night
With this her solemn bird, nor walk by moon,
Or glittering star-light without thee is sweet.
But wherefore all night long shine these, for
whom
This glorious sight, when sleep hath shut all
eyes? (4.654-658)

Eve is learning, not only to obey Adam, but to internalize his example, and thus be raised by conversing with him, changing in conversation in a way the beasts, as we will see Adam has already lamented, can never change. The swerve at the end of Eve's love poem is an awakening, childlike curiosity, one whose abrupt turn may lack sophistication, but not intensity or value. In his edition of *Paradise Lost*, Fowler asks us to note "at what a disadvantage [Milton] puts the question in the present context":

Eve's preceding song of love is magnificent and sophisticated, but coming after it her intellectual query sounds perfunctory, casually abrupt in rhythm, shallow.

Such a reading makes Eve sound flighty and half-fallen already, even though Fowler does concede earlier that Eve's question is

A good question, in a way; for, although Adam gives partial answers in the speech that follows, his doubts have been aroused, and he him-

self addresses a very similar enquiry to Raphael at 8.15ff.²⁵

If Adam's astronomical curiosity can lead to a frank, spirited, poignant description of his love for Eve and her effect upon him, why cannot Eve's jewel-like love-poem lead to astronomical curiosity? We know her mind is fit for such high thoughts; Milton takes great care to show us this as she leaves Raphael and Adam in 8.39-63. In the separation dialogue we see one repercussion of a process begun much earlier in Adam and Eve. Just as they do in Adam's continued questioning of the affable angel, doubt and desire mingle in Eve and within the marriage of Adam and Eve, pruning and spurring both partners and their relationship into new, risky growth. James Nohrnberg's words are apt:

Men in all ages have known that the mote in the other fellow's eye may reflect the beam that is in one's own. But in the Renaissance the commerce between two subjects is often found, as if the theme of subjectivity had received a kind of enhanced valuation. Each subject's perception modifies the other's: the process of mutual observation objectifies a given subjectivity, and subjectivizes a given objectivity.²⁶

²⁵ *Paradise Lost*, ed. Fowler 233.

²⁶ Nohrnberg, *The Analogy of The Faerie Queene* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1976) 788.

To "mutual observation" we might add "parting and return," had things worked out differently for our grand parents.

II. The Dialogue of Deception

We see Eve continue to grow during her greatest trial. It is very telling that Eve's first reaction to the serpent is one of surprise at his powers of speech (9.553-566). As we have seen, a Piconian (and Biblical, and Christian) ontological ambition is at work in *Paradise Lost*: Raphael's speculations and God's pronouncements make it clear that humanity's place on the Great Chain of Being is not immutable. Now, whether by design or lucky accident, the serpent's speaking calls the hierarchy of creation into even greater doubt ("The first at least of these I thought denied / To beasts, whom God on their creation-day / Created mute to all articulate sound...").²⁷ As John Leonard points out,

²⁷ The serpent's express disruption of the hierarchy of creation is not only the first thing to get Eve's attention (see Nyquist, "Reading the Fall," 219), but also the first event in this encounter to move her to doubt. (Nyquist calls this doubt "exceedingly rational wonder," but, as we have seen, wonder, doubt, and desire are closely intertwined in Adam's and Eve's experience. Doubt, of course, can lead to greater wonders--"lead on"--as well as to disaster, while wonder *per se* seems less ominous.) The serpent's deception of Eve, then, might not be only a matter of

The serpent's most persuasive argument is his ability to argue. His seeming participation in language not only argues a miraculous change; in a world where names correspond to natures, language is knowledge.²⁸

Eve's heightened ontological uncertainty, coming after a particularly tricky and contentious piece of intellectual/emotional struggling with her lover and closest friend, might, of course, be a moment of triumphant achievement, *had she matched her uncertainty with the unwavering, unambiguous certainty of God's sole command*--which of course she does at first ("Serpent, we might have spared our coming hither, / Fruitless to me,

denying the unequivocal truth of God's command, but also (and importantly) a strategy of using a lie (I ate the fruit; look what happened to me)--we have to assume the serpent is lying when he says he ate the fruit--to conflate, disastrously, prohibition, penalty, and promise. Prohibition and penalty are unequivocal; promise is radically unpredictable, though nevertheless meaningful: Adam and Eve have more than intimations that a faithful life will one day allow them to cleave the sky as well as enjoy it, but they don't know what events will come to them in that life. The serpent uses the freedom of promise to confuse Eve about the nature of prohibition and penalty. She should have held fast to what she knew, but the serpent's bald lie was a severe test indeed. This is more evidence that Milton reserves his highest standards for humanity: the angel Uriel was baffled by the space between assertion and truth, but Eve, however arduously, *might not* have been.

²⁸ Leonard, "Language and knowledge in *Paradise Lost* 108.

though fruit be here to excess...").²⁹ When her endurance fails, when she can or will no longer hear God's voice within, Eve eats "without restraint ... satiate at length."³⁰ Worst of all, "nor was godhead from her thought." No restraint means no stimulus to growth; satiety where sin is concerned means you do not know what you are eating ("and knew not eating death") nor when you are truly full. As William Kerrigan points out, Eve wants exactly the right thing, but she has gone about it in precisely the wrong way:

The irony of the temptation is that Satan offers a reward that God has already offered and, it would seem, already bestowed.... It was not wrong to aspire. It was wrong to prefer the

²⁹ See Nyquist, "Reading the Fall" 219-220: "What from one perspective looks like progressive enactment of a demonic plot is from another a sustained revelation of Eve's rational freedom." Nyquist goes on to suggest that "Eve's second speech reveals her actually *recovering* the untroubled perspective on Nature's disproportions that she had earlier seemed to be losing in conversation with Adam."

³⁰ Nyquist ("Reading the Fall" 221) says the "brevity" of Eve's reply to Satan (in which she reiterates the prohibition) "signals a degree of acquiescence, a degree of intellectual surrender to the oppressive voice of doubt." While I would argue that Eve is sinless until she eats the fruit, however increasingly bent to sinning she may be, I do agree with Nyquist that Eve loses the ability to mediate between the Word and her newly confusing experience, a loss Eve finally chooses to ignore, at the instant of plucking and eating.

lying magic of Satan to the authentic science of God.³¹

When Eve aspires to godhead, we witness the logical extension of the aspiration built into Paradise. And when Adam, domestic Adam, knits a garland of roses for departed Eve, an Eve whose commanding presence he has so heroically insisted upon to his frowning angelic visitor, we witness Adam's desire, not for godhead, but for a love as full and generative as Eve's beauty and grace show her to be. God's authentic science would have brought them both their heart's desires, as it was already doing. But that authentic science, explosively compounded of absolute constraint, temperance, and the near-license of an antinomian Paradise "wild above rule or art," was an intricate science whose tempo God set, and whose action was in many respects unpredictable, though not thereby meaningless. By contrast, the serpent's science "swiftly rolled / In tangles, and made intricate seem straight..." (9.631-632). Satan is shortcut; they do not serve who cannot stand to wait.

³¹ Kerrigan, *The Sacred Complex* 216-217.

III. Dialogue Lost

As Eve left in Book 8, "from about her shot darts of desire / Into all eyes to wish her still in sight"(62-63). As she leaves again at the close of the separation scene, she withdraws her hand from Adam's hand, the hand she has been holding throughout this painful and strenuous dialogue. Adam alone watches her leave, but now what might have seemed mere *scopophilia* in Book 8, however devoted or sanctified, has been transformed into a hunger for Eve's real presence, her intransigent otherness that permits and creates dialogue, change, growth, improvement through tract of time: "Her long with ardent look his eye pursued / Delighted, but desiring more her stay" (9.397-398, my emphasis). That final clause measures the distance between courtly love, even (or especially) in its Neoplatonic hallowing, and marriage.³² We are therefore not surprised that it is their voices, currents of air

³² Eve's return marks a degeneration back into the Petrarchan mode: "The temptation Eve designs for Adam is a love trial. He must again reckon her worth. And again, eating, he pays the price, choosing against another Eve. Courtly love was charged early on with idolatry, and Adam's Fall is in this sense a medieval one. Eve's is the more modern ... [with a] distinctly Renaissance flavor" (Kerrigan and Braden, *The Idea of the Renaissance* 211-12).

from each that continue to touch the other, try to span for awhile the widening space between them. The dialogue trails away into a proleptic lament in which, like the one at the beginning of this book, the author's empathy is a window on the coming world of pain and loss:

Oft to her his charge of quick return
Repeated, she to him as oft engaged
To be returned by noon amid the bower,
And all things in best order to invite
Noontide repast, or afternoon's repose.
O much deceived, much failing, hapless Eve,
Of thy presumed return! Event perverse!
Thou never from that hour in Paradise
Found'st either sweet repast, or sound repose;
Such ambush hid among sweet flowers and shades
Waited with hellish rancour imminent
To intercept thy way, or send thee back
Despoiled of innocence, of faith, of bliss....
(9.399-411)

If we have been at all sensitive to the "enormous bliss" Milton has shown us in his extraordinary portrait of prelapsarian life, the pain in these lines will be nearly unbearable. We know what will be lost: "all" (9.784).

One of the losses is dialogue. When Eve returns to Adam, they do not converse. They simply make speeches at each other, specious speeches in which a courtliness of address merely mocks the elevated tone of their earlier addresses. Eve's "bland words" are met by Adam's words "to himself," which result in a submission to "what seemed remediless." The serenity here is false, the stasis and submission now a mark of incipient decay; the conversation

is replaced by willful resolution, histrionics, bad faith all around.³³ Adam does not fall with Eve simply (or, perhaps, even primarily) because he loves her, but because he loves himself: "to lose thee were to lose my self"

³³ Turner (*One Flesh* 297-8) makes the persuasive case that our investment in Milton's ravishing prelapsarian Eden keeps us from sharing Milton's negative judgment upon Adam's "solemn music of love-sacrifice," a judgment Turner says "will seem [in such a context] discordant and mean." Turner's allusive rhetoric, however, elides several important considerations. What "music" in fact accompanies Adam's sacrifice? Milton the musician shows us. Adam has already felt in his heartbeat "the faltering measure" (9.846) of misgivings, the bad gifts of a mother whose wounds he senses (9.782--see Fowler's note, p. 487). Moreover, also before Adam makes his impassioned speech announcing his intention to fall with Eve--that is, while he can still feel horror in prelapsarian Paradise--he feels his body grow chill, "astonied," "blank" (recalling the "universal blank" Milton's blindness brings before him [3.48]). Most poignantly of all: "From his slack hand the garland wreathed for Eve / Down dropped, and all the faded roses shed" (9.892-3). The last *rosa sine spina* ever seen on Earth dropped from that garland; we find to our horror that domestic Adam wove a wreath of extinct innocence for his fallen wife. Perhaps, to make Adam's subsequent love-speech less seductive to his readers, Milton should have dwelled longer on Adam's shocked paralysis, although I for one could not endure more than he gives us. Certainly careful, empathic attention to these few lines, however, will make us less apt to identify so completely with Adam's "chivalry" toward fallen Eve--a set of attractive gestures and resolves, true, but only part of the story, and perhaps not so "solemn" a music as Turner believes it to be.

(9.959).³⁴ Noble words, perhaps, but following Adam's rejection of God's providence in the preceding lines they ring of idolatry (or perhaps the "enlightened self-interest" some believe to be the source of what we think is love), not obedience or devotion or faith:

... for with thee
 Certain my resolution is to die;
 How can I live without thee, how forgo
 Thy sweet converse and love so dearly joined,
 To live again in these wild woods forlorn?
 Should God create another Eve, and I
 Another rib afford, yet loss of thee
 Would never from my heart; no no, I feel
 The link of nature draw me: flesh of flesh,
 Bone of my bone thou art, and from thy state
 Mine never shall be parted, bliss or woe.
 (9.906-916)

I, me, mine; a rhetorical question; a double negative ("no no") that, a rarity for Milton, bears no implied positive. This is an Adam of the motions, a puppet to his own confidence that God could not make good from this evil. The "glorious trial of exceeding love" Eve celebrates upon hearing of Adam's decision (9.961ff.) is really no trial at all. The dialogue is over. Nothing will surprise its participants or intrude on their resolutions. Adam first

³⁴ Nyquist, "Reading the Fall" 222: "We are shown Adam's undeceived perception of reality becoming, in the very process of reflection, an oppressive experience of tragic isolation, compelling him to surrender his mental lucidity to the self-mirroring pathos of personal loss and despair."

ate "against his better knowledge, not deceived"; then, as he completed "the mortal sin," he "took no thought, / Eating his fill..." (9. 998, 1005-1005). Here, at the moment of the Fall's full realization, "fill" becomes "surfeit" before our eyes: Adam and Eve take their fill of the fruit and of each other, and wake to find no satisfaction. And as Adam and Eve copulate after the Fall, they "their fill of love and love's disport / Took largely": instead of spurring new growth in each other by restraint, they use each other for a dissatisfying, "carnivorous" meal.³⁵ Moreover, in alluding to Homer in Adam's seduction of Eve, Milton makes it clear that genuine contest is at an end:

For never did thy beauty since the day
I saw thee first and wedded thee, adorned
With all perfections, so inflame my sense
With ardour to enjoy thee, fairer now
Than ever, bounty of this virtuous tree.
(9.1029-1033)

In *The Iliad* (3.441ff.), Aphrodite snatches Paris from certain death at the hands of Menelaos, spiriting him into Helen's bedchamber. Adam's words echo Paris', not because he has been saved from death, but because, like Paris, he now finds it all too inviting to rest from battle. Venus

³⁵ See Kerrigan and Braden, *The Idea of the Renaissance* 213.

takes Adam, like Paris, from the arena of trial, conflict, and struggle.³⁶ The new air of indolence these lovers breathe, even as they are inflamed by their fallen passions, brings on a "dewy sleep" that nevertheless "oppressed them." Donne's "sorrowing dulness" is here. The lovers eat their fill of each other, but entropy and breakdown ensue: "up they rose / As from unrest." Their fallen love-making takes its force from "that fallacious fruit," and sexual intimacy loses (at least for now) its generative power.³⁷

Another of Adam's and Eve's losses after the Fall is their growing, fruitful internalization of sexual differentiation. Like all good things after man's first disobedience, this good thing remains, but the dialogue

³⁶ The degeneration and collapse of the fruitful action of trial and struggle may also be seen in the last words of Book 9, in which "contest" has become "vain" with "no end" (9.1189), not unlike the sterile dialectic the philosophical demons practice in Book 2.

³⁷ The Homeric allusion may also be to *The Iliad* 14, in which "Hera, bent on deceiving Zeus, comes to him with Aphrodite's zone, and seems more charming to him than ever before" (*Paradise Lost*, ed. Fowler 498). In context, however, the allusion to Paris (which Fowler also notes, without much comment) rings more forcefully here: the gods' deceptive love-play is less relevant to Adam and Eve than the disastrous human drama of Paris and Helen, especially with its contrast between deadly battle and indolent sensuality.

within Adam and Eve that is caused by the dialogue *between* them is forever impaired. Sickness and death are primary obstacles; the dis-ease that promotes growth will become the disease that impairs it:

When Satan perverts Eve's 'feminine' open, generous sympathy she loses both that ('Shall I ... keep the odds') and her growing 'masculine' integrity learned from Adam, Raphael, and Abdiel. And when Adam colludes in the Fall he loses both that integrity and his growing 'feminine' bond with nature learned from Eve.³⁸

Yet this is not the end of the story. Unlike the fallen Lucifer, whose dialogic powers wither and petrify with his refusal to accept the humiliation of penitence and remorse, Adam and Eve move from the strife of "mutual accusation" (9.1187), through the resolve to "strive / In offices of love, how we may lighten / Each other's burden in our share of woe" (10.959-961), to the mutual devotion to their Creator--now with tears of contrition, "sorrow unfeigned, and humiliation meek" (10.1103-1104)--that marked their unfallen lives, waking and sleeping. We learn at last that the chilling quarrel that begins Adam's and Eve's first fallen awakening is, ironically, the rebirth of their dialogue. This dialogue, begun in pain and ending in tears, prostrate before the God they have

³⁸ McColley, "Milton and the sexes" 162.

disobeyed, will bring them, hand in hand, out of Paradise and into time, time that brings redemption. Providence will once again be their guide.

Their fallen life should begin where Milton's thoughts on marriage and divorce began--with the stubborn determination to recreate the Solomonic rapture, and the Edenic union of 'one flesh, one heart, one soul,' within the limits of practicality. They must relearn the arts of affectionate 'conversation' and erotic companionship. Their dialogue of reconciliation and their final hand-clasp reassure us that they have started this process....³⁹

But the drama of these fallen pilgrims' progress is no more intense or perceptively drawn than the drama of their prelapsarian progress. For the drama of a provocative Paradise, and its profound implications for Milton's dialogic, conflict-tried image of humanity, is precisely this: in Milton's antinomian Paradise, especially in the scene in which Adam and Eve, yet sinless, cause each other pain and eventually separate, neither Adam nor Eve do the right thing, but both Adam and Eve do a right thing.⁴⁰ No

³⁹ Turner, *One Flesh* 308.

⁴⁰ Nyquist observes that " ... Book 9's cleverly designed closure attempts to persuade its readers that to be concerned about the decision to separate, as if there were a necessary causal nexus between separation and Fall, is to be as deluded as the fallen couple themselves are about the genuine origin of their change in fortune." See "Reading the Fall" 227.

greater freedom can be imagined.⁴¹ To learn and grow in such freedom, to work out better ways without the blots of wrong ways fouling our accounts, would be a Paradise of striving, a Garden of soul-making where, its creator obeyed, every wound not only heals, but brings new growth.

That Adam's and Eve's individual identities and mutual devotion and understanding might have been increased by such a rigorously and dangerously capacious exercise is an opportunity for our wonder, and makes the sad event tear at us all the more. Time and eternity are now at odds in a way they didn't have to be, and we--including John Milton--must all suffer for it. Our "suffering," our "trial by what is contrary," could have been the paradisiacal "suffering" of the separation scene: concluded, leaving no trace of rancor or bitterness in either party, with the husband and wife learning from each other, even acting each other out on the way to more mutuality, a more sharply defined (and hence more unified)

⁴¹ Of course Milton cannot wholly consign such radical freedom to prelapsarian Eden alone. When he writes of a sorrowing, wandering Adam and Eve that "The world was all before them, where to choose / Their place of rest," he (among other things) asserts that radically free, soul-making choice does not disappear from human experience even after disobedience has severely narrowed the fields in which such choice may be exercised.

"unlike resemblance/resembling unlikeness."⁴² Alas, the contrarities in our lives seem more like Brownian motion, mere random, entropic buffeting. Our agons end in death, and our revelations are confused reflections. Thus we may find more of the selves we know and have resigned ourselves to in the relentless closing of Satan's soul, or the "vain contest" of a husband and wife who, in their fear and pain, cannot see themselves or each other. Yet as many readers of Milton have noted, to imagine Paradise as Milton has, and as we do as we read *Paradise Lost*, is to have in part what Adam and Eve once enjoyed fully. And as we learn to recognize the wanton, profuse complexities and potentials of Milton's Paradise, we may learn to recognize the "Paradise within" that is our inheritance from our parents, its first inhabitants, an inheritance whose counterpoint and fierce equation of "brotherly dissimilitudes" will allow "our happiness" to "orb itself into a thousand vagancies of glory and delight, and with a kind of eccentric equation be, as it were, an invariable planet of joy and felicity." An eccentric orbit, an invariable planet: freedom and discipline: companion poems. This is Milton's image of humanity: subtle,

⁴² *Tetrachordon*, YE 2: 597.

exuberant, wanton, devout. To know and experience Milton's image of humanity is to hear and sound within ourselves a complex harmony of opposition and faithfulness that may once again dissolve us into ecstasies, one day bring all heaven before our eyes.

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