

PAUL HAMMOND
MILTON'S
COMPLEX WORDS



Essays on the Conceptual
Structure of *Paradise Lost*

OXFORD

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*Essays on the Conceptual Structure
of Paradise Lost*

PAUL HAMMOND

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To David and Sandra Hopkins

Preface

Men's Names, of very compound *Ideas*, such as for the most part are moral Words, have seldom, in two different Men, the same precise signification; since one Man's complex *Idea* seldom agrees with anothers, and often differs from his own, from that which he had yesterday, or will have to morrow.¹



Every major poet or philosopher develops his own distinctive semantic field around those terms which matter most to him, or which contribute most profoundly to the imagined world of a particular work: examples might be 'Nature' in Wordsworth, or 'Dasein' in Heidegger.² Such specially deployed terms may be drawn from the common linguistic stock, but are subtly, sometimes drastically, redefined, and no longer quite coincide with what seem to be the same words as used by contemporaries. So Milton's 'reason' is not Hobbes' 'reason', nor his 'freedom' Winstanley's 'freedom', nor do his ideas of 'chance', 'fate', and 'providence' coincide with Dryden's understanding of those terms. As for Milton's 'God', that idea seems entirely idiosyncratic, an eclectically constructed concept which none of those other three writers would share—any more than they would agree about the meaning of 'God' amongst themselves. The aim of this book is to explore the specific meanings which Milton develops around key words in *Paradise Lost*. Some of these are theological or philosophical terms ('evil', 'grace', 'reason'); others are words which define the imagined world of the poem ('dark', 'fall', 'within'); yet others are small words or even prefixes which subtly move the argument in new directions ('if', 'not', 're-'). Milton seems to expect his readers to be alert to the special semantic field which he creates around such words, often by infusing them with biblical and literary connotations, and activating their etymological roots.³ Not all these words are complex in the same way: some, such as 'free' or 'evil', are concepts with a rich and varied conceptual structure and a contested history; others including 'if' or 'perhaps' add complexity to the narrative when they open out alternative possibilities which are also alternative ways of responding to God. Some words are made complex through repetition, and through their diverse use (and often their blatant misuse) by different characters: 'wise' in the mouth of Satan means something quite other than 'wise' in the mouth of Raphael, and it is important to notice when Eve begins to use 'wise' in a Satanic rather than a celestial

¹ John Locke, *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding*, edited by Peter H. Nidditch (Oxford, 1975), p. 478.

² I appended short essays on some of Shakespeare's complex words to my edition of *Shakespeare's Sonnets: An Original-Spelling Text* (Oxford, 2012).

³ See John K. Hale, *Milton's Languages: The Impact of Multilingualism on Style* (Cambridge, 1997).

sense. To understand the migrations and malleability of key words is part of the education of Milton's reader.⁴

This book is neither a dictionary nor an encyclopaedia, but, in effect, a series of extended annotations to words whose meaning often seems to appear too obvious to merit glosses in editions of the poem. But if it seems obvious what 'love' means, its mutations are far from simple; nor is 'I' just a pronoun in a poem in which the metaphysical and experiential grounding of the self takes such different forms. The list of words chosen for discussion had perforce to be limited if the book were not to swell into a *Key to all Mythologies*, but I hope that readers may be prompted to select further terms for their own explorations. Some important passages are discussed more than once within different contexts, and I trust that readers will find the repetition of such examples instructive rather than irritating. While this book is focused on the language of *Paradise Lost* I have occasionally ventured into Milton's other writings where this seemed likely to be fruitful.

I should also say that in attempting to explicate theological concepts I have drawn eclectically on the Christian tradition, often citing works which Milton would not have known—nor approved of if he had known them—if they seemed to me to provide illuminating reflections on the questions which the poem raises. This approach should not be interpreted as an attempt to draw *Paradise Lost* into a comfortable conformity with traditional theology (which is, of course, in itself very diverse); the poem fashions its own world, imaginatively and conceptually, and it is this distinctive conceptual structure which the book seeks to define by means of close attention to its key words. Milton's 'evil' or 'hope' or 'God' are his own characteristic ideas, though our approach to understanding them may sometimes lie through terrain which he would have shunned.



The work for this book was begun whilst I was Visiting Fellow Commoner of Trinity College, Cambridge, for the Michaelmas term 2007, and Leverhulme Senior Research Fellow for the academic year 2007–8. I am grateful to the College and to the Trust for their generosity in supporting my work. I am also grateful to the then Librarian of Trinity, Professor David McKitterick FBA, for allowing me free access to the treasures of the Wren Library, including the manuscript of Milton's shorter poems. The School of English and the Faculty of Arts at the University of Leeds have granted me study leave to work on this book, and the University's Brotherton Library has been an essential resource for my research over many years.

⁴ In this respect two works to which the present book bears an obvious debt are Stanley Eugene Fish, *Surprised by Sin: The Reader in 'Paradise Lost'* (Berkeley, Calif., 1967), and Christopher Ricks, *Milton's Grand Style* (Oxford, 1963). My title, of course, is indebted to William Empson's *The Structure of Complex Words* (London, 1951), though I would not enrol myself amongst the admirers of his work on Milton. Isabel Gamble MacCaffrey also discusses Milton's complex words in her book *'Paradise Lost' as 'Myth'* (Cambridge, Mass., 1959), esp. pp. 81ff and ch. 4. One structuring method in the poem is, she says, 'the accumulation of meaning in words that shoot invisible virtue through the poem' (p. 54).

Papers derived from this work were read at seminars at the universities of Birmingham, Edinburgh, Leeds, and Oxford, and I thank the audiences in these various venues for their stimulating questions and their kind encouragement. I am also particularly indebted to the perceptive comments of Professor Gordon Campbell FBA, who generously read the entire book in draft.

I have confined my citations of scholarly and critical work on Milton to those books and articles which I have found particularly insightful and helpful; and although I have attempted to record locally my particular debts to the work of previous students of Milton, I should acknowledge here my general and profound obligation to generations of scholars, notably to the editors of the Columbia, Yale, and Oxford editions of Milton's works (and especially the invaluable index volumes to the Columbia edition); to Alastair Fowler's edition of *Paradise Lost* in the Longman Annotated English Poets series; to Matthew Stallard's biblically annotated edition of the poem; to Earl Miner's variorum commentary; and to William Ingram and Kathleen Swaim's concordance.

Above all, this book is due, once again, to Nick.

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A Note on Texts and Abbreviations

Unless otherwise stated, all quotations from Milton's poetry and prose are from the Columbia edition of *The Works of John Milton*, edited by Frank Allen Patterson et al., 18 vols (New York, 1931–8); this is abbreviated as *Works*. In some cases I have silently altered the Columbia translation of Milton's Latin writings where the translation is inaccurate or antiquated, and for *De Doctrina Christiana* I have preferred the text and translation in the new Oxford edition of *The Complete Works of John Milton: Volume VIII: De Doctrina Christiana*, edited by John Hale et al. (Oxford, 2012).

The Bible is normally quoted from the Authorized or King James Version (1611) in the quatercentenary reprint of the original edition (Oxford, [2011]). The Geneva Bible is quoted from *The Geneva Bible: A Facsimile of the 1560 Edition* (Peabody, Mass., 2007). *The Book of Common Prayer* is quoted from *The Book of Common Prayer: The Texts of 1549, 1559, and 1662*, edited by Brian Cummings (Oxford, 2011).

Classical texts and their translations are cited from the editions in the Loeb Library unless otherwise stated. St Augustine's *Confessiones* and *De Civitate Dei* are quoted from the Loeb Library editions, his other works mostly from the *Patrologia Latina*. The *Summa Theologiae* of St Thomas Aquinas is quoted from the bilingual Latin and English edition edited by John Mortensen and Enrique Alarcón and translated by Fr. Laurence Shapcote O. P., which constitutes volumes 13–20 of the ongoing *Works of St Thomas Aquinas* published by the Aquinas Institute for the Study of Sacred Doctrine in Lander, Wyoming. Other texts by Aquinas are usually quoted from the *Corpus Thomisticum* available on the website <<http://www.corpusthomisticum.org>>.

Shakespeare is quoted from *The Complete Works of William Shakespeare*, edited by Herbert Farjeon, the Nonesuch Edition, 4 vols (London, 1953), with act, scene, and line numbers added from the most recent Arden Shakespeare edition. Dryden is quoted from *The Poems of John Dryden*, edited by Paul Hammond and David Hopkins, 5 vols (London, 1995–2005).

Abbreviations and Short Titles for Milton's Works

1667	The first edition of <i>Paradise Lost</i> (1667)
1674	The second edition of <i>Paradise Lost</i> (1674)
<i>Animadversions</i>	<i>Animadversions upon The Remonstrants Defence, Against Smectymnuus</i> (1641)
<i>Apology</i>	<i>An Apology against a Pamphlet Call'd A Modest Confutation of the Animadversions upon the Remonstrant against Smectymnuus</i> (1641)
<i>Carey and Fowler</i>	The Longman Annotated English Poets edition of <i>The Poems of Milton</i> , edited by John Carey and Alastair Fowler (Harlow, 1968); revised second edition issued in two volumes as <i>Paradise Lost</i> , edited by Alastair Fowler (London, 1998) and <i>Complete Shorter Poems</i> , edited by John Carey (London, 1997). References are to the second edition unless otherwise stated
<i>Considerations</i>	<i>Considerations Touching the Likeliest Means to Remove Hirelings out of the Church</i> (1659)
CPW	<i>The Complete Prose Works of John Milton</i> , edited by Don M. Wolfe et al., 8 vols (New Haven, Conn., 1953–82)
<i>De Doctrina</i>	<i>De Doctrina Christiana</i>
<i>Defensio</i>	<i>Joannis Miltoni Angli Pro Populo Anglicano Defensio</i> (1651)
<i>Defensio Secunda</i>	<i>Joannis Miltoni Angli Pro Populo Anglicano Defensio Secunda</i> (1654)
<i>Divorce</i>	<i>The Doctrine and Discipline of Divorce</i> (1643)
<i>Episcopacy</i>	<i>Of Prelaticall Episcopacy</i> (1641)
<i>Maske</i>	<i>A Maske Presented at Ludlow Castle</i> , commonly referred to as <i>Comus</i> (1637)
OCW	<i>The Complete Works of John Milton</i> , edited by Thomas N. Corns and Gordon Campbell et al., 11 vols (Oxford, 2008–)
PL	<i>Paradise Lost</i> (1667)
PR	<i>Paradise Regain'd</i> (1671)
<i>Readie Way</i>	<i>The Readie & Easie Way to Establish a Free Commonwealth</i> (1660)
<i>Reason</i>	<i>The Reason of Church-governement</i> (1641)
<i>Reformation</i>	<i>Of Reformation Touching Church-Discipline in England</i> (1641)
SA	<i>Samson Agonistes</i> (1671)
<i>Tenure</i>	<i>The Tenure of Kings and Magistrates</i> (1649)
<i>Treatise</i>	<i>A Treatise of Civil Power in Ecclesiastical Causes</i> (1659)
Trinity MS	Trinity College Library, Cambridge, MS R. 3. 4
<i>True Religion</i>	<i>Of True Religion, Heresie, Schism, Toleration, And what Best Means may be us'd Against the Growth of Popery</i> (1673)

Other Abbreviations

Bauer	Walter Bauer, <i>A Greek–English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature</i> , translated by William F. Arndt and F. Wilbur Gingrich, second edition (Chicago, 1979)
CCC	<i>Catechism of the Catholic Church</i> , second edition (Vatican City, 2000)
Chantraine	Pierre Chantraine, <i>Dictionnaire étymologique de la langue grecque</i> (Paris, 1999)
Denzinger	Heinrich Denzinger, <i>Enchiridion Symbolorum Definitionum et Declarationum de Rebus Fidei et Morum</i> , edited by Peter Hünermann et al., forty-third edition (San Francisco, 2012)
Ernout and Meillet	Alfred Ernout and Antoine Meillet, <i>Dictionnaire étymologique de la langue latine</i> (Paris, 2001)
FQ	Spenser, <i>The Faerie Queene</i> , edited by A. C. Hamilton, revised second edition (London, 2007)
Hume	P[atricks] H[ume], <i>Annotations on Milton's 'Paradise Lost'</i> (London, 1695)
LSJ	Henry George Liddell and Robert Scott, <i>A Greek–English Lexicon</i> , revised by Sir Henry Stuart Jones, with a revised supplement (Oxford, 1996)
Miner	' <i>Paradise Lost</i> ', 1668–1968: <i>Three Centuries of Commentary</i> , edited by Earl Miner (Lewisburg, 2004)
ODNB	<i>The Oxford Dictionary of National Biography</i> , online edition
OED	<i>The Oxford English Dictionary</i> , second edition (1989); online version. (The online <i>OED</i> is subject to a continuous process of revision, with entries being updated to constitute a third edition, so some of the information cited from it, e.g. the numbering of different senses within an entry, or information about earliest uses of a word, may differ from the version consulted by subsequent readers. The siglum <i>OED</i> ³ indicates that the citation is to entries revised for the third edition.)
OLD	<i>Oxford Latin Dictionary</i> , edited by P. G. W. Glare (Oxford, 1982)
<i>Patrologia Graeca</i>	<i>Patrologiae Cursus Completus... Series Graeca</i> , edited by J.-P. Migne, 161 vols (Paris, 1857–1904)
<i>Patrologia Latina</i>	<i>Patrologiae Cursus Completus... Series Latina</i> , edited by J.-P. Migne, 217 vols (Paris, 1841–55)
ST	St Thomas Aquinas, <i>Summa Theologiae</i>
Tremellius	<i>Biblia Sacra, sive, Testamentum Vetum ab Im. Tremellio et Fran. Iunio ex Hebraeo Latine redditum; et Testamentum Novum à Theod. Beza à Graeco in Latinum versum</i> (London, 1640)
Vulgate	<i>Biblia Sacra Iuxta Vulgatam Versionem</i> (Stuttgart, 1994)

Wilson

Thomas Wilson, *A Complete Christian Dictionary: Wherein the Significations and Several Acceptations of All the Words Mentioned in the Holy Scriptures of the Old and New Testament, Are Fully Opened, Expressed, Explained*, seventh edition (London, 1661)

1

Alone

Midst came thir mighty Paramount, and seemd
Alone th' Antagonist of Heav'n.

Paradise Lost ii 508–9



The narrative of *Paradise Lost* begins with Satanic solitude. It is Satan alone whom we first encounter chained on the burning lake, and Satan's own vision initially sees only 'The dismal Situation waste and wilde | ... No light, but rather darkness visible'.¹ Then he discerns his followers. It is Satan's own self-consciousness, his own interior solitude, which dominates the initial books; it is his 'I' to which we draw close, particularly in his soliloquy in Book IV. In Books I and II Satan presents his solitude as a form of heroism; he alone will undertake the expedition against God's new-created world as if he were 'Alone th' Antagonist of Heav'n',² and he asserts his sole dominance in a fashion which no one is permitted to challenge: 'this enterprize | None shall partake with me', he says.³ But this solitary consciousness struggles with itself, and the solitude of his journey through Chaos is apparent when he admits that he has travelled 'Alone, and without guide, half lost':⁴ the almost poignant admission is a brief spiritual allegory, in that it is Satan's insistence on journeying alone that is a manifestation of his alienation from God. In his journey towards Earth, Satan

Walk'd up and down alone bent on his prey,
Alone, for other Creature in this place
Living or liveless to be found was none.⁵

When he does alight on Earth in Book IV, he assumes that he is alone and gives free vent to his despair; but he is not alone, he is observed by Uriel:

his gestures fierce
He markd and mad demeanour, then alone,
As he suppos'd, all unobserv'd, unseen.⁶

Satan's solitude is, in effect, a mistaken assumption; he may act—to quote *Coriolanus*—'As if a man were Author of himself, | & knew no other kin'⁷—in taking sole responsibility for this expedition, and in communing with himself on Mount

¹ *PL* i 60–3.

² *PL* ii 509.

³ *PL* ii 465–6.

⁴ *PL* ii 975.

⁵ *PL* iii 441–3.

⁶ *PL* iv 128–30.

⁷ Shakespeare, *Coriolanus* V iii 36–7.

Niphates, but the form of aloneness that he has entered is not simply physical: rather, it is a radical alienation from God, self-willed yet not ultimately capable of separating him from God's scrutiny or power. God sees his journey,⁸ and on Earth Uriel sees the impassioned gestures which are the external manifestation of Satan's despair, that is, Satan's self-exile from God, his willed aloneness.

When Satan sees Adam and Eve, he sees them as a couple and envies their marital companionship.⁹ Milton neatly underlines their joyous self-sufficiency, or mutual sufficiency, by slipping in the word 'alone' to signal their happy state:

Nor gentle purpose, nor endearing smiles
Wanted, nor youthful dalliance as beseems
Fair couple, linkt in happie nuptial League,
Alone as they.¹⁰

And again:

Thus talking hand in hand alone they pass'd
On to thir blissful Bower.¹¹

In contrast to its connotations when applied to Satan, 'alone' here shows that the oneness of Adam and Eve is richly sufficient for them as they enclose themselves in their mutual love. Their union had been the result of an exchange between Adam and God in which Adam respectfully asks for a mate, telling God that he cannot be happy alone in Eden:

In solitude
What happiness, who can enjoy alone...?¹²

Then God asks him why he thinks that his present state is rightly called 'solitude' when he has all the animals for company,¹³ leading Adam to formulate his realization that what he seeks is companionate marriage, for

⁸ *PL* iii 56–79. ⁹ *PL* iv 505–11. ¹⁰ *PL* iv 337–40.

¹¹ *PL* iv 689–90. God sees the pair 'In blissful solitude' (*PL* iii 69). There is a marked contrast between Milton's ideal of marital solitude and Marvell's preference:

Such was that happy garden-state,
While man there walked without a mate:
...
But 'twas beyond a mortal's share
To wander solitary there:
Two Paradises 'twere in one
To live in Paradise alone.

('The Garden' ll. 57–64)

Marvell's use of three key Miltonic words—'wander', 'solitary', and 'alone' (and cf. 'delicious solitude' in l. 16)—suggests that he composed the poem after reading *PL*, and strengthens the case for dating 'The Garden' c.1668. For the date of the poem see *The Poems of Andrew Marvell*, edited by Nigel Smith, second edition (London, 2007), p. 152. For Marvell's interest in the solitary 'I' see my 'Marvell's Pronouns', *Essays in Criticism* 53 (2003) 225–40.

¹² *PL* viii 364–5. See David Quint, *Inside 'Paradise Lost': Reading the Designs of Milton's Epic* (Princeton, N.J., 2014), pp. 176ff, for a discussion of Adam's request for a companion.

¹³ *PL* viii 369–75.

Among unequals what societie
Can sort, what harmonie or true delight?
Which must be mutual.¹⁴

When God replies that he himself is 'alone | From all Eternitie',¹⁵ Adam (a rapidly self-taught theologian) argues that the divine aloneness is a state of perfection, and so needs no other, no companion, whereas he, Adam, is imperfect, and therefore in need of help and solace. God agrees: he 'Knew it not good for Man to be alone',¹⁶ and their discussion has been a test to see whether Adam truly understood his own solitary state and its needs.

This conversation about solitude and self-sufficiency, and Adam's recognition of his need for support against his own imperfections, prepares the way for the dialogue between Adam and Eve in which she expresses her desire to work alone.¹⁷ There had already been a warning imparted to Eve in her dream, when she sees herself walking 'alone' towards the Tree of Knowledge.¹⁸ Now, in Book IX, Adam, in trying to dissuade her from working away from him, is trying to avert danger

From thee alone, which on us both at once
The Enemie, though bold, will hardly dare.¹⁹

Her solitude would make her vulnerable. But Eve in her reply maintains that virtue is not true virtue unless it has been tested, and tested alone, for

what is Faith, Love, Vertue unassaid
Alone, without exterior help sustaind?²⁰

Superficially this may sound like Milton's own argument in *Areopagitica* that

I cannot praise a fugitive and cloister'd vertue, unexercis'd & unbreath'd, that never sallies out and sees her adversary... That vertue therefore which is but a youngling in the contemplation of evill, and knows not the utmost that vice promises to her followers, and rejects it, is but a blank vertue, not a pure.²¹

But there Milton was arguing in favour of postlapsarian man coming to understand evil through his reading, which is different *toto caelo* from the unfallen Eve exposing herself to assault by an enemy whose form she does not know and cannot therefore easily recognize. Being alone—choosing to be alone—in the face of

¹⁴ PL viii 383–5. This had been the principle upon which Milton had based his arguments for divorce in the 1640s, namely that a man's wife must be able to provide him with intellectual, moral, and spiritual companionship, not just with sexual satisfaction. Cf. *Divorce* for the importance of Adam being given a companion, and the need for divorce to avoid 'perpetual betrothed lonelines and discontent' (*Works* iii 396–7, 492).

¹⁵ PL viii 405–6. For Milton's exposition of the oneness of God see *De Doctrina*: OCW viii 38–43, 136–57, the latter discussion being part of Milton's anti-Trinitarian explanation of the Son of God.

¹⁶ PL viii 445.

¹⁷ See Mary Beth Long, 'Contextualizing Eve's and Milton's Solitudes in Book 9 of *Paradise Lost*', *Milton Quarterly* 37 (2003) 100–15, for a discussion of Adam and Eve's different understandings of solitude, and solitude as a state in which one may face moral challenge; cf. R. V. Young, 'Milton and Solitude', *Ben Jonson Journal* 21 (2014) 92–113.

¹⁸ PL v 50.

¹⁹ PL ix 303–4.

²⁰ PL ix 335–6.

²¹ *Areopagitica*: *Works* iv 311.

subtle temptation is not a form of heroic virtue; rather, it is a form of unwise self-assertion. And so it is unsurprising that Satan is delighted to find Eve 'alone'.²²

Part of Satan's technique in his seduction of Eve is his suggestion that her beauty is wasted on Adam alone:

one man except,
Who sees thee? (and what is one?) who shouldst be seen
A Goddess among Gods.²³

After her Fall, Eve greets Adam's decision to take the fruit as if it were a welcome demonstration of their unity; but her repeated emphasis on 'one', which might in other circumstances have been a celebration of recovered unity after unhappy separation, is now ominous. She would

gladly of our Union heare thee speak,
One Heart, one Soul in both; whereof good proof
This day affords, declaring thee resolv'd,
Rather then Death or aught then Death more dread
Shall separate us, linkt in Love so deare,
To undergoe with mee one Guilt, one Crime,
If any be, of tasting this fair Fruit.²⁴

Here the vocabulary darkens: the oneness of their God-given marriage has been redefined as a oneness in transgression; the words 'good' and 'Love' likewise no longer mean what they used to mean; there is an unrecognized pun in 'dear' (now with the meaning 'costly'); and when 'one' returns in 'one Guilt, one Crime' it seems to mean 'just one little' in an attempt to diminish what the couple had previously acknowledged to be supremely significant, 'This one, this easie charge . . . | . . . not to taste that only Tree . . . | The only sign of our obedience left.'²⁵ Finally the fatally self-deceiving 'if' completes the Fall of language.²⁶ Eve's rhetoric is equally specious when she claims that she would willingly endure death on her own:

Were it I thought Death menac'd would ensue
This my attempt, I would sustain alone
The worst, and not perswade thee, rather die
Deserted.²⁷

This is a rhetorical ploy, not a real offer of self-sacrifice, as the implicit reproach in 'Deserted' reveals; we know that what she particularly fears is that if she were to die Adam might find companionship with another Eve.²⁸ Adam in his turn refuses

²² *PL* ix 457, 480. ²³ *PL* ix 545–7.

²⁴ *PL* ix 966–72. This is one of several points in the poem at which Milton seems to expect his reader to judge the sentiments of a speaker by implicit reference to a biblical text, in this case St Paul's words to the Romans: 'neither death, nor life . . . shalbe able to separate vs from the loue of God' (Romans viii 38–9). The collocation in Eve's speech of 'death', 'Shall separate' and 'love'—but the omission of 'God'—invites the reader to measure her wilful misunderstanding of death and love by the words of the Apostle.

²⁵ *PL* iv 421–8.

²⁶ See Chapter 20 *IF AND PERHAPS*.

²⁷ *PL* ix 977–80.

²⁸ *PL* ix 827–30.

the solitude of a life in Eden without Eve, and prefers to take the consequences of adhering to his deep bond of union with her.²⁹

But set against this there are forms of aloneness which are genuinely heroic. There is Noah; there is Abraham.³⁰ Both oppose the corruptions of their times: Noah is 'One Man... the onely Son of light | In a dark Age',³¹ and Abraham's obedience to God causes 'a Nation from one faithful man to spring'.³² Abdiel, 'The flaming Seraph fearless, though alone | Encompass'd round with foes',³³ stands out singly against Satan's rebellion; and yet when he subsequently confronts Satan in the war in Heaven, Abdiel shows that what had then seemed to be a dangerously weak isolation was not really so, for he is part of a huge mass of loyal angels:

All are not of thy Train; there be who Faith
Prefer, and Pietie to God, though then
To thee not visible, when I alone
Seemd in thy World erroneous to dissent
From all: my Sect thou seest, now learn too late
How few somtimes may know, when thousands err.³⁴

In Satan's eyes, Abdiel had 'alone | Seemd', but because of his loyalty to God Abdiel was actually never truly alone, and the strength of his groundedness in God is now manifest in his being surrounded by a mass of unfallen angels. The godly may appear as the 'few'³⁵ or as a 'Sect',³⁶ but only through Satanic eyes which do not see their spiritual strength. Similarly, when Milton as narrator speaks of the solitude in which he composes, he says that he works

In darkness, and with dangers compast round,
And solitude; yet not alone, whilst thou
Visit'st my slumbers Nightly.³⁷

'Thou' here is the heavenly Muse Urania, implicitly thought of as a manifestation of the Holy Spirit. So Milton himself, like Abdiel, is not truly alone, but sustained by God as he composes in his solitude, isolated in a fallen England.

²⁹ *PL* ix 908–16.

³⁰ *PL* xi 719ff, xii 113ff.

³¹ *PL* xi 808–9.

³² *PL* xii 113.

³³ *PL* v 875–6.

³⁴ *PL* vi 143–8.

³⁵ For Milton's hope that the poem would 'fit audience find, though few' cf. *PL* vii 31. In the final years of the republic and the first years of the restored monarchy, Milton seems to have placed his religious and political hopes in a smaller and smaller group of the godly and the enlightened: see my *Milton and the People* (Oxford, 2014), pp. 227–30. In *Eikonoklastes* (1649) he had envisaged that his book would 'finde out her own readers; few perhaps, but those few, such of value and substantial worth, as truth and wisdom, not respecting numbers and bigg names, have bin ever wont in all ages to be contented with'; these would be 'some few, who yet retain in them the old English fortitude and love of Freedom' (*Works* v 65, 69). As the years passed, the few seem to have dwindled, in Milton's estimation, to solitary individuals such as Samson and the Son of *PR*.

³⁶ The word 'sect' was applied disparagingly by Milton's contemporaries to Nonconformist groups outside the established Church of England; in choosing this term (which Abdiel implies is Satan's dismissive characterization of Abdiel's party) Milton invites his readers to see that a 'Sect' may actually be a victorious (albeit sometimes invisible) multitude of the godly. See N. H. Keeble, 'Milton's Christian Temper', in *John Milton: Life, Writing, Reputation*, edited by Paul Hammond and Blair Worden (Oxford, 2010), pp. 107–24, at p. 122.

³⁷ *PL* vii 27–9.

Milton's use of the word 'solitude' here reminds us that just as 'alone' (derived from Old English) is braided through *Paradise Lost*, so too the Latinate 'sole' (from *solus*, 'one, alone') and its cognates 'solitary' and 'solitude' invite us to a continued reflection upon the moral condition of solitude: moral, because Milton asks us to distinguish between the individual self which is alone through egoistic, proud choice (as exemplified in Satan, and for a while in Eve) and the solitary individual whose isolation is itself a sign of his attachment to God and to God's commands, and of his detachment from the crowd and their desires: examples of this latter form of solitude would be Abdiel, Milton himself as narrator, and the Son in *Paradise Regain'd*. (Samson, incidentally, moves through three forms of solitude: proud self-reliance, before the opening of *Samson Agonistes*; then abject despair and self-recrimination; then the final isolation of God's servant obeying a divine command.)

The uses of 'sole' often focus our thoughts upon the one thing that is needful.³⁸ When the protoplasts have transgressed the 'sole Command'³⁹ of God, they have to accept 'sole' responsibility for their Fall,⁴⁰ and resolve 'ever to observe | His providence, and on him sole depend'.⁴¹ Earlier in the poem there have been various forms of solitude: diabolical, egoistic solitude as Satan embarked upon his 'solitary flight' towards the gates of Hell, alone on his mission of destruction;⁴² God's acknowledgement that Adam before the creation of Eve will 'taste | No pleasure, though in pleasure, solitarie';⁴³ and the desperate state into which Adam thinks he might escape after the Fall and 'In solitude live savage'.⁴⁴ Being 'sole', a solitary individual, like Satan undertaking his 'uncouth errand sole',⁴⁵ is not a good state; better to have a 'sole partner and sole part of all these joyes', as Adam greets Eve.⁴⁶ Eve addresses Adam as 'O Sole in whom my thoughts find all repose, | My Glorie, my Perfection',⁴⁷ but this prefaces the dream of her solitary expedition to the Tree of Knowledge: she may say this, and she may think it, but what we now call the unconscious, the desire which shapes her dream, speaks otherwise. This 'Sole' is not, in fact, her 'Sole': Adam is not her only object of desire, nor the only way in which her sense of herself might be satisfied. But their mutuality—at least as it is experienced by Adam—is signalled by Adam's use of the same term to her in Book IX: 'Sole *Eve*, Associate sole',⁴⁸ where the collocation of 'Associate' and 'sole' is a near oxymoron which now emphatically marks her status. The collocation is repeated a few lines later when Adam reluctantly agrees that they should separate, saying 'Solitude sometimes is best societie'.⁴⁹ But in this second clashing of the antithetical *sol-* and *soc-* stems, the paradox is harder to sustain, particularly in the light of Adam's earlier plea that God will grant him a companion to ease his solitude. If we hear behind Adam's words the classical commonplace *nunquam*

³⁸ 'But one thing is needefull', says Jesus about the choice which Mary makes to set aside mundane tasks and attend only to him: Luke x 42.

³⁹ *PL* iii 94–5; emphatically repeated at vii 47 and vii 329.

⁴⁰ *PL* x 935.

⁴¹ *PL* xii 563–4.

⁴² *PL* ii 632.

⁴³ *PL* viii 401–2.

⁴⁴ *PL* ix 1084–5.

⁴⁵ *PL* ii 827.

⁴⁶ *PL* iv 411.

⁴⁷ *PL* v 28–9.

⁴⁸ *PL* ix 227. 'Associate' derives from the Latin *socius*, 'companion'.

⁴⁹ *PL* ix 249.

minus solus quam cum solus,⁵⁰ that may spur us to reflect that, far from being in a space of contemplative retirement, Adam is about to be faced with tragic choices concerning these very concepts of selfhood and mutuality. Given the couple's repeated use of 'sole' to mark their inseparability, it is especially poignant when Adam's forgiveness of Eve in Book X begins when 'his heart relented | Towards her, his life so late and sole delight',⁵¹ and when Eve in turn, seeking 'to regaine | Thy Love, the sole contentment of my heart', acknowledges to Adam that she was 'sole cause to thee of all this woe'.⁵² But when the Son descends to find Adam, no one comes to meet him; instead he is 'Not pleas'd, thus entertain'd with solitude'.⁵³ This form of solitude is the couple's attempt at evading responsibility.

Having led us carefully through these instances where 'sole' marks out both the individual's self-awareness and the dynamics of the couple, Milton concludes his poem by redefining the idea yet again, as Adam and Eve 'Through *Eden* took thir solitarie way'.⁵⁴ The joint solitude which Adam and Eve recover at the end of the poem is a partial recuperation of the Edenic state when they enjoyed 'Uninterrupted joy, unrival'd love | In blissful solitude',⁵⁵ but now in a darker key: they leave Eden unaccompanied by the playful animals, and the angels are no longer their affable guests but guards waving flaming swords. The pair have wandered through destructive forms of selfhood and individual self-assertion, mistaking desire for love, and will for reason, before finding this new unity. The poetry calls us to witness this new form of heroism with which Adam and Eve face their future: 'hand in hand', solitary but not separate.

There will also, in the due course of time, be another example of heroic solitude, for in *Paradise Regain'd* we read that the Son

tracing the Desert wild,
Sole but with holiest Meditations fed,
Into himself descended, and at once
All his great work to come before him set.⁵⁶

This solitude is sought in order that the Son may discover himself and his 'great work': it is a withdrawal from the world only in order to meditate that world's salvation. So the true solitary hero is the Son. God addresses him as 'Son who art alone | My word, my wisdom, and effectual might'.⁵⁷ The Son alone fulfils the heroic potential of man; 'alone' because only he is fully the image of God; and 'alone' because he 'Into himself descended', seeking that depth of solitude which is the encounter with God—the flight of the alone to the alone.⁵⁸

⁵⁰ 'Never less alone than when alone': Cicero, *De Re Publica* i 27, quoting Scipio. Cowley uses it as the starting point for his essay 'Of Solitude' (*The Works of Mr Abraham Cowley* (London, 1668), p. 91 (final sequence of pagination) in the section 'Several Discourses by Way of Essays, in Verse and Prose'). For the seventeenth-century tradition celebrating rural retirement see Maren-Sofie Røstvig, *The Happy Man: Studies in the Metamorphoses of a Classical Ideal: Volume I: 1600–1700*, second edition (Oslo, 1962).

⁵¹ *PL* x 940–1.

⁵² *PL* x 972–3, 935.

⁵³ *PL* x 105.

⁵⁴ *PL* xii 649.

⁵⁵ *PL* iii 68–9.

⁵⁶ *PR* ii 109–12.

⁵⁷ *PL* iii 169–70.

⁵⁸ *φύγη μόνου πρὸς μόνον*: Plotinus, *Ennead* vi 9.

2

Art

Now had they brought the work by wondrous Art
Pontifical, a ridge of pendent Rock
Over the vext Abyss, following the track
Of *Satan*.

Paradise Lost x 312–15



Why is ‘art’ in *Paradise Lost* so frequently diabolical?¹ The work which the fallen angels carry out in Book X is the building of a bridge over Chaos down to Hell, a pathway for sinners towards damnation. Milton takes the opportunity to include a punning insult to the papacy by calling the diabolical artistry ‘Pontifical’: for him it is the papacy (as Antichrist) which builds the road to damnation, implicitly—or so this reference to ‘Art’ suggests—by cultivating the elaborate artistry of religious images which unwary worshippers might treat as idols.² In the anti-prelatical tracts of 1641–2 he had written scathingly about Laudian ceremonial,³ and associated Catholic ritual with idolatry and paganism.⁴ The beauty of art had, Milton maintained, replaced the beauty of true religion: as early as the age of Constantine,

a Deluge of Ceremonies...set a glosse upon the simplicity, and plainnesse of Christianity...for the beauty of inward Sanctity was not within their prospect... [bishops] thought the plaine and homespun verity of *Christs* Gospell unfit any longer to hold their Lordships acquaintance, unlesse the poore thred-bare Matron were put

¹ For aspects of the concept of art in *PL* see Ann Torday Gulden, ‘Is Art “Nice”? Art and Artifice at the Onset of Temptation in *Paradise Lost*’, *Milton Quarterly* 34 (2000) 17–24.

² See Chapter 19 IDOL AND IMAGE.

³ *Reformation: Works* iii 1–4. Earlier Milton had seemed sympathetic to the Laudian Church of England, with its cultivation of imagery and ceremony: for Milton’s likely Laudian sympathies in his youth see Gordon Campbell and Thomas N. Corns, *John Milton: Life, Work, and Thought* (Oxford, 2008), pp. 45, 51, 61–2. See also Nicholas McDowell, ‘How Laudian Was the Young Milton?’, *Milton Studies* 52 (2011) 3–22, and Deborah Shuger, ‘Milton’s Religion: The Early Years’, *Milton Quarterly* 46 (2012) 137–53. For a detailed set of objections to Laudian liturgical practice, which give a vivid (if jaundiced) account of such ceremonial, see *The Petition and Articles Exhibited in Parliament against Doctor Heywood, Late Chaplen to the Bishop of Canterburie, by the Parishioners of S. Giles in the Fields* (London, 1641), pp. 5–7. Similar grievances are set out in *The First and Large Petition of the City of London and of Other Inhabitants Thereabouts: For a Reformation in Church-Government, as Also for the Abolishment of Episcopacy* (London, 1641). For opposition in London to Laudian ritual and the associated church furnishings see Keith Lindley, *Popular Politics and Religion in Civil War London* (Aldershot, 1997), pp. 36–45. For Laudian art see Graham Parry, *The Arts of the Anglican Counter-Reformation* (Woodbridge, 2006).

⁴ *Reformation: Works* iii 4, 24–5, 59.

into better clothes; her chaste and modest vaile surrounded with celestiall beames they overlaid with wanton *tresses*, and in a flaring tire bespeckled her with all the gaudy allurements of a Whore.⁵

Contemporary Anglican prelates had also clothed the gospel in showy dress, as if the pure nakedness of the gospel needed to be covered up as a source of shame, as Adam and Eve covered their nakedness; indeed, what the bishops have effected is a kind of Fall which disfigures the original brightness of the gospel:

Now for their demeanor within the Church, how have they disfigur'd and defac't that more then angelick brightnes, the unclouded serenity of Christian Religion with the dark overcasting of superstitious coaps and flaminical vestures; wearing on their backs; and, I abhorre to think, perhaps in some worse place the unexpressible Image of God the father. Tell me ye Priests wherfore this gold, wherfore these roabs and surplices over the Gospel? is our religion guilty of the first trespassed, and hath need of cloathing to cover her nakednesse? what does this else but cast an ignominy upon the perfection of Christs ministry by seeking to adorn it with that which was the poor remedy of our shame? Beleive it, wondrous Doctors, all corporeal resemblances of inward holinesse & beauty are now past; he that will cloath the Gospel now, intimates plainly, that the Gospel is naked, uncomely, that I may not say reproachfull. Do not, ye Church-maskers, while Christ is cloathing upon our bareness with his righteous garment to make us acceptable in his fathers sight, doe not, as ye do, cover and hide his righteous verity with the polluted cloathing of your ceremonies to make it seem more decent in your own eyes. *How beautifull*, saith *Isaiah*, *are the feet of him that bringeth good tidings, that publisheth salvation!* Are the feet so beautiful, and is the very bringing of these tidings so decent of it self? what new decency then can be added to this by your spinstry? ye think by these gaudy glisterings to stirre up the devotion of the rude multitude.⁶

Laudian art is not only superfluous but distracts worshippers from perceiving the purity of the gospel. When Truth is thus dressed up, says Milton, she and Falsehood are almost indistinguishable.⁷ Negligent ministers have failed to learn 'the least | That to the faithfull Herdmans art belongs',⁸ the true, humble art of the conscientious pastor.

In *Paradise Lost* Milton particularly associates art with diabolical skill, drawing attention to the artistic skill of the fallen angels, beginning in Books I and II with the rhetorical skills of Satan, Belial, and others, and the architectural ambitions of Mulciber, and passing on in Book VI to write of the 'suttle Art'⁹ with which the

⁵ *Reformation: Works* iii 24–5. *flaring*: spreading out, waving conspicuously; showy, gaudy (*OED s.v. flaring adj.* 1, 2). *tire*: attire, dress.

⁶ *Reason: Works* iii 246–7. *flaminical*: pertaining to a flamen, a pagan Roman priest (*OED's* only example). *church-maskers*: implies that the liturgy is merely a 'masque', a performance.

⁷ *Reason: Works* iii 249: 'when any Falshood comes that way, if they like the errand she brings, they are so artfull to counterfeit the very shape and visage of Truth, that the Understanding not being able to discern the fucus which these inchantresses with such cunning have laid upon the feature sometimes of Truth, sometimes of Falshood interchangeably'. *fucus*: cosmetics.

⁸ 'Lycidas' ll. 120–1: *Works* i 81. This condemnation of the clergy is voiced by 'the uncouth Swain' (l. 186) to whom most of the poem is attributed. *uncouth*: unknown, unfamiliar (*OED s.v. uncouth adj.* 3).

⁹ *PL* vi 513.

rebel angels manufacture their ammunition for the war in Heaven. In Hell the devils outdo the monumental architecture of Egypt and of Babylon, for

thir greatest Monuments of Fame,
And Strength and Art are easily out-done
By Spirits reprobate.¹⁰

Here art is linked to fame and strength as manifestations of the grandiose folly of kings, and perhaps of all mortals. As the fallen angels continue their work, some 'With wond'rous Art found out the massie Ore' and 'scum'd the Bullion dross';¹¹ their art may be 'wond'rous', but it is restricted here to the technical crafts of smelting ore and extracting precious metals. Then the great structure of Pandaemonium 'Rose like an Exhalation',¹² complete with pillars, architraves, cornices, and sculptures:

Not *Babilon*,
Nor great *Alcairo* such magnificence
Equal'd in all thir glories, to inshrine
Belus or *Serapis* thir Gods, or seat
Thir Kings.¹³

Milton is associating the devils' building with the magnificence of Babylonian and Islamic architects, the homes of pagan gods and kings.

The passage includes a small signal as to how we should be responding to this artistry, for the phrase 'in all thir glories' invites us to remember the words of Jesus:

Consider the lillies of the field, how they grow: they toile not, neither doe they spinne: And yet I say vnto you, that euen Solomon *in all his glory*, was not arrayed like one of these... Therefore take no thought, saying, What shall we eate? or, what shall we drinke? or wherewithall shall wee be clothed?... But seeke ye first the kingdome of God, and his righteousness, and all these things shalbe added vnto you.¹⁴

In this passage Jesus is urging his hearers not to be anxious about material things; the message is not simply that they do not need luxuries, but that God's care for them will ensure that they do not lack the necessities of life. Their priority should be his kingdom. The fallen angels, however, are busy pursuing material things as a substitute for the kingdom of God which they have just abandoned. Trust in divine providence, and you need no art—whether diabolical or pontifical. Mammon, in his speech to the convocation, advocates the use of their 'skill or Art, from whence to raise | Magnificence',¹⁵ but this is an empty imitation of divine power, offered with the rhetorical question, 'As he our darkness, cannot we his Light | Imitate when we please?'.¹⁶ The answer to that question, of course, is no: this

¹⁰ *PL* i 692–7.

¹¹ *PL* i 703–4.

¹² *PL* i 711.

¹³ *PL* i 717–21.

¹⁴ Matthew vi 28–33; italics added.

¹⁵ *PL* ii 272–3. In scholastic philosophy and theology 'magnificence' is one of the virtues (see *OED*³ s.v. magnificence 1, 6), but for Milton this diabolical magnificence is an empty show, and the word reappears in contexts where it is rejected by the Son (*PR* iv 111) and associated with Islam (*PL* i 718). It is contrasted with the true magnificence of God's creation at *PL* iii 502, vii 568, viii 101, ix 153.

¹⁶ *PL* ii 269–70.

diabolical art can be deployed only in imitation; it is counterfeit creativity, and can produce only counterfeit forms.

Besides this diabolical architecture, there is another form of art which Satan practises, namely the art of deception (though one might say that Mammon and his associates also practise the art of self- and mutual deception in their building of lofty, glittering structures). When speaking to his followers Satan holds their attention through the ‘calumnious Art | Of counterfeted truth’.¹⁷ He is the ‘Artificer of fraud; and was the first | That practis’d falshood under saintly shew’.¹⁸ ‘Artificer’ is a striking word here, with a range of meanings: he is ‘a person who makes things by art or skill; an artisan, a craftsman’,¹⁹ like those who built the imperial palace on the Palatine Hill in Rome which Satan exhibits to the Son in *Paradise Regain’d*:

The Imperial Palace, compass huge, and high
The Structure, skill of noblest Architects,
With gilded battlements, conspicuous far,
Turrets and Terrases, and glittering Spires.
Many a fair Edifice besides, more like
Houses of Gods (so well I have dispos’d
My Aerie Microscope) thou may’st behold
Outside and inside both, pillars and roofs
Carv’d work, the hand of fam’d Artificers
In Cedar, Marble, Ivory or Gold.²⁰

What these artificers and architects have built is a grand, showy edifice of imperial power which resembles a pagan temple. The Son is not impressed. An artificer is also ‘an artful, cunning, or devious person; a trickster, a dissembler’.²¹ But also well established was the use of ‘artificer’ to refer to God as Creator of the world.²² By contrast with the divine Artificer, then, Satan and his companions are creators only of falsehoods, whether verbal or architectural. To find his way across Chaos to Earth he will require ‘strength’ and ‘art’—that is, cunning—to elude God’s sentries.²³ When Satan tries to incite Eve to evil thoughts, the passage describes Satan

Assaying by his Devilish art to reach
The Organs of her Fancie, and with them forge
Illusions as he list, Phantasms and Dreams.²⁴

In attempting to gain access to Eve’s fancy, Satan is trying to take over and pervert the creative faculty which, in the absence of reason, is liable to produce ‘Wilde work’ by ‘misjoyning shapes’.²⁵ Fancy is an artist, but a dangerously wild one unless she is directed by reason. Satan is, in effect, endeavouring to provoke Eve to deceive herself, which he will succeed in doing later in the poem, beginning with his very

¹⁷ *PL* v 770–1. ¹⁸ *PL* iv 121–2. ¹⁹ *OED* s.v. artificer n. 1. ²⁰ *PR* iv 51–60.

²¹ *OED*³ s.v. artificer n. 3. ²² *OED*³ s.v. artificer n. 4b. ²³ *PL* ii 410–11.

²⁴ *PL* iv 801–3. ²⁵ *PL* v 111–12. See Chapter 13 FANCY AND REASON.

appearance as if this serpent were a work of art fashioned by some baroque goldsmith:

his Head
Crested aloft, and Carbuncle his Eyes;
With burnisht Neck of verdant Gold, erect
Amidst his circling Spires.²⁶

And what of human arts and artists? Philosophers seek in vain the elusive stone, and 'though by thir powerful Art they binde | Volatil *Hermes*'²⁷ this is to no effect. The writers of romance who offer minutely detailed descriptions of feasts and tournaments display merely "The skill of Artifice or Office mean"²⁸ in contrast with what is needed for a truly heroic poem. When himself describing Eden, Milton pauses in his account to demur with the parenthesis 'if Art could tell',²⁹ thus acknowledging the limitations of his own poetic art; and just a few lines later he disparages the art of gardening by extolling instead the hand of Nature:

Flours worthy of Paradise which not nice Art
In Beds and curious Knots, but Nature boon
Powrd forth profuse on Hill and Dale and Plaine.³⁰

Why 'not nice Art'? The word 'nice' has a range of meanings in Milton's day, some of which express approval of actions and objects which are refined and precise ('meticulous, intricate, delicate'), while other uses regard that which is 'nice' as morally reprehensible, because too luxurious or extravagant.³¹ The horticultural art which Milton regards here as 'nice' is therefore both skilful, delicate, and extraordinary but also excessive, a wantonly luxurious intervention in nature.³² Nature, by contrast, is 'boon' (good, gracious, bounteous³³) and 'profuse', as we see again in this later passage, which also describes Eden:

Nature here
Wantond as in her prime, and plaid at will
Her Virgin Fancies, pouring forth more sweet,
Wilde above Rule or Art; enormous bliss.³⁴

²⁶ *PL* ix 499–502.

²⁷ *PL* iii 602–3.

²⁸ *PL* ix 39.

²⁹ *PL* iv 236.

³⁰ *PL* iv 241–3. *curious*: elaborately wrought (*OED s.v. curious adj.* 7a). In its seventeenth-century usage the word sometimes suggests excessive elaboration or inquiry into occult matters. See A. Bartlett Giamatti, *The Earthly Paradise and the Renaissance Epic* (Princeton, N.J., 1966), pp. 309–13 for a discussion of the relationship between art and nature in Eden.

³¹ *OED*³ *s.v. nice adj.*

³² Cf. Marvell's arguments, in the voice of his Mower, in "The Mower against Gardens", that art has corrupted nature (for his Mower poems see *The Poems of Andrew Marvell*, edited by Nigel Smith, second edition (London, 2007), pp. 128–43). The poem may have been an early response to Milton's presentation of Eden in *PL*: see my "The Date of Marvell's 'The Mower against Gardens'", *Notes and Queries* 251 (2006) 178–81. Polixenes and Perdita also debate whether the gardener's art unjustifiably interferes with nature or is itself a part of nature (Shakespeare, *The Winter's Tale* IV 79–100). See further Edward William Tayler, *Nature and Art in Renaissance Literature* (New York, 1964).

³³ *OED s.v. boon adj.* 1, 3.

³⁴ *PL* v 294–7.

To 'wanton' is to play unrestrainedly, exuberantly, and while the word was often used of lascivious play,³⁵ Milton in adding the adjective 'Virgin' reassures us of the purity of Nature's wild and fanciful creativity.

In his thinking in this way about art and nature, about the unnaturalness of art and the artistry of nature, Milton was probably drawing upon

our sage and serious Poet *Spencer*, whom I dare be known to think a better teacher then *Scotus* or *Aquinas*, [who] describing true temperance under the person of *Guion*, brings him in with his palmer through the cave of Mammon, and the bowr of earthly blisse that he might see and know, and yet abstain.³⁶

The passage to which Milton refers here is to be found in Book II of *The Faerie Queene*, where Spenser indicates that the Bower of Blisse is the product not of nature but of art, and of an art which is designed to deceive and corrupt. After describing 'the most daintie Paradise on ground', Spenser remarks on 'that, which all faire workes doth most aggrace, | The art, which all that wrought, appeared in no place'. Indeed,

One would haue thought, (so cunningly, the rude
And scorned partes were mingled with the fine,)
That nature had for wantonnesse ensude
Art, and that Art at nature did repine.

...

And ouer all, of purest gold was spred,
A trayle of yuie in his natiue hew:
For the rich metall was so coloured,
That wight, who did not well aui's'd it vew,
Would surely deeme it to bee yuie true.³⁷

Here—as so often in *The Faerie Queene*—Spenser is giving us a lesson in how to read appearances, how not to be deceived into accepting the truth of an image, particularly when the image appeals so strongly to our desires, as the images of the Bower do, with their painted flowers, silver fountains, and naked boys. Spenser's art is designed to test art, to prove its veracity, like Ithuriel's spear which by touching an angel reveals him to be the disguised figure of Satan.³⁸ Milton's art would do likewise.

³⁵ OED *s.v.* wanton *v.*

³⁶ *Areopagitica: Works* iv 311.

³⁷ FQ II xii 58–61. *aggrace*: add grace to. *ensude*: imitated. *well aui's'd*: carefully. See further *The Spenser Encyclopedia*, edited by A. C. Hamilton (Toronto, 1990), *s.vv.* 'nature' and 'nature and art', and Giamatti, *The Earthly Paradise*, pp. 273ff. In *PR* the Son sees 'a pleasant Grove',

That open'd in the midst a woody Scene,
Natures own work it seem'd (Nature taught Art)
And to a Superstitious eye the haunt
Of Wood-Gods and Wood-Nymphs.

(*PR* ii 294–7)

The passage challenges the reader to distinguish between the work of Art and the work of Nature; 'seem'd' alerts us to the danger of misleading appearances, while the reference to pagan gods and nymphs reminds us not to look on the scene with 'a Superstitious eye'. We would be right to be cautious, for this turns out to be the place where Satan, wearing a new disguise, reappears to tempt the Son again with renewed art.

³⁸ *PL* iv 810–19.

In Book XI Michael shows Adam a vision which strikes him as a reason to hope that the future of his offspring will not be uniformly bleak:

With Feast and Musick all the Tents resound.
Such happy interview and fair event
Of love and youth not lost, Songs, Garlands, Flours,
And charming Symphonies attach'd the heart
Of *Adam*, soon enclin'd to admit delight.

But Michael corrects him:

Judg not what is best
By pleasure, though to Nature seeming meet,
Created, as thou art, to nobler end
Holie and pure, conformitie divine.
Those Tents thou sawst so pleasant, were the Tents
Of wickedness, wherein shall dwell his Race
Who slew his Brother; studious they appere
Of Arts that polish Life, Inventers rare,
Unmindful of thir Maker, though his Spirit
Taught them, but they his gifts acknowledg'd none.³⁹

So the offspring of Cain refuse to acknowledge their Maker whose Spirit gave them their artistic abilities. It is, then, inevitable that the works which they produce should be a debased and debasing form of art, 'amorous Ditties' sung by women in 'wanton dress' which catch men in their 'amorous Net', and move them 'in heat'.⁴⁰ The Son in *Paradise Regain'd* is also dismissive of the human arts in so far as they are exemplified by the culture of ancient Greece and Rome. Their philosophy is either false or redundant, since 'he who receives | Light from above, from the fountain of light, | No other doctrine needs, though granted true',⁴¹ while their poetry is also derivative or vicious, praising 'the vices of thir Deities', whereas the Hebrew Psalms provide the only songs which one might need.⁴²

Is there, then, according to this most learned of poets, no role for an art devoted to truth? In *A Maske* the malevolent magician Comus 'Excels his Mother at her mighty Art', and says that 'by mine Art' he can distinguish the treat of the approaching Lady, but art may also be pure and salvific, for we hear the 'artful strains' of the Attendant Spirit's music,⁴³ and the aid of Sabrina is solicited in song. Early in his career Milton had celebrated the prolific genius of Shakespeare, whose ease and fertility shamed the 'slow-endeavouring art' of other poets.⁴⁴ But Shakespeare was specifically associated, by Milton and others, with nature rather than art.⁴⁵ In 'L'Allegro' a reference to the plays of Jonson and Shakespeare ('sweetest *Shakespeare* fancies childe, | Warble his native Wood-notes wilde') comes in a passage in which

³⁹ *PL* xi 592–6, 603–12.

⁴⁰ *PL* xi 583–9.

⁴¹ *PR* iv 288–90.

⁴² *PR* iv 330–40.

⁴³ *Maske* ll. 63, 149, 493; *Works* i 87, 90, 103.

⁴⁴ 'On *Shakespeare*. 1630' l. 9; *Works* i 32.

⁴⁵ See my 'The Janus Poet: Dryden's Critique of Shakespeare', in *John Dryden (1631–1700): His Politics, His Plays, and His Poets*, edited by Claude Rawson and Aaron Santesso (Newark, NJ, 2004), pp. 158–79.

poetry and music are celebrated as consolations 'against eating Cares'.⁴⁶ The pleasures of this way of life, or disposition of mind, are counterpoised with those of 'Il Penseroso', which sees the artistry of architecture, of music, and of stained glass (glories of the Laudian church) as stimuli to divine contemplation:

But let my due feet never fail,
To walk the studious Cloysters pale,
And love the high embowed Roof,
With antick Pillars massy proof,
And storied Windows richly dight,
Casting a dimm religious light.
There let the pealing Organ blow,
To the full voic'd Quire below,
In Service high, and Anthems cleer,
As may with sweetness, through mine ear,
Dissolve me into extasies,
And bring all Heav'n before mine eyes.⁴⁷

It is specifically the sensuous 'sweetness' of the music, playing on the ear, which dissolves the hearer into a vision of heaven. 'Il Penseroso', which follows 'L'Allegro', does not precisely correct or rebuke the previous poem, nor refute its conception of art, yet it does offer a reply which is in part a redefinition, a loftier definition, of the purposes of art. Milton was always aware that for a Christian artist poetry had to have its own vocation, its proper place in a divinely ordered world, and as his own sense of his poetic vocation developed he seems to have adopted a sterner view of the responsibilities of poetry. In an entry in his *Commonplace Book* on 'Spectacula' in the late 1630s he noted that Tertullian condemned the spectacles of the ancient world and would bar Christians from attending them. Better to prepare for the ultimate spectacle of the Second Coming and the Last Judgement. Lactantius likewise stigmatized all theatre. But, says Milton, while the corrupting influence of the theatre should be avoided, it is not necessary to abolish drama altogether. That would be foolish, for

immo potius nimis insulsum esset quid enim in totâ philosophiâ aut gravius aut sanctius aut sublimius tragœdia recte constitutâ quid utilius ad humanæ vitæ casus et conversiones uno intuitu spectandos?⁴⁸

So there is nothing more useful (*utilius*) than tragedy in forming the mind's contemplation of the instability of human life, and thus, implicitly, directing it towards eternity. In his *Artis Logicæ* (1672) Milton writes that the prime mover of every art is God, who is the author of all wisdom,⁴⁹ and that every art which is worthy of

⁴⁶ 'L'Allegro' ll. 132–5: *Works* i 39.

⁴⁷ 'Il Penseroso' ll. 156–66: *Works* i 45.

⁴⁸ 'For what in the whole of philosophy is more impressive, purer, or more uplifting than a noble tragedy, what more helpful to a survey at a single glance of the hazards and changes of human life?' (*Commonplace Book*, c.1637–8: *Works* xviii 206–7).

⁴⁹ *Efficiens artis primarius neminem reor dubitare quin sit Deus, author omnis sapientie (Artis Logicæ Plenior Institutio: Works* xi 10).

the name should aim to offer something which is good or useful, and honourable, to human life.⁵⁰ Art must be useful, in the most elevated, spiritual sense.⁵¹

And what of the artistry of *Paradise Lost*? No poem in English is so carefully, so intricately, contrived, in its structure, rhetoric, and verbal nuances, or its network of allusions to other literary works. But in the proem to Book IX Milton disclaims his own personal artistry and reverently assigns his poem to the unbidden influence of the heavenly Muse Urania,

my Celestial Patroness, who deignes
Her nightly visitation unimplor'd,
And dictates to me slumbring, or inspires
Easie my unpremeditated Verse.⁵²

This poetry comes 'unimplor'd' and 'unpremeditated': Milton is not its artificer. This is an art which is divinely authored.

⁵⁰ *indignamque esse artis nomine, quæ non bonum aliquod sive utile ad vitam hominum, quod idem quoque honestum sit, sibi proponat* (*Artis Logicae: Works* xi 14).

⁵¹ Herbert in 'Jordan (I)' addresses the question of the relationship between art and truth for the Protestant poet: 'Who sayes that fictions onely and false hair | Become a verse? Is there in truth no beautie?' (ll. 1–2) (*The English Poems of George Herbert*, edited by Helen Wilcox (Cambridge, 2007), p. 200). See further Barbara Kiefer Lewalski, *Protestant Poetics and the Seventeenth-Century Religious Lyric* (Princeton, N.J., 1979).

⁵² *PL* ix 21–4.

3

Chance, Fate, *and* Providence

and reason'd high
Of Providence, Foreknowledge, Will and Fate,
Fixt Fate, free will, foreknowledg absolute,
And found no end, in wandring mazes lost.

Paradise Lost ii 558–61



Bewildered by their sudden Fall, the devils attempt to grasp the cause of their defeat, and the nature of their likely future. But they cannot properly present to their minds the true nature of the universe which they inhabit, and the forces which are, or are not, at work in it, giving it form and purpose. Their confusion, which is at once an intellectual and a spiritual error, is evident in the penultimate line of this epigraph: ‘Fixt Fate, free will, foreknowledg absolute’. There are multiple contradictions here, and a syntactical ambiguity. If ‘Fixt’ is an adjective qualifying ‘Fate’, then the line is a chiasmic variation of its predecessor, explaining that the devils reasoned about fixed fate, about free will, and about absolute foreknowledge (though there is no room in this subsequent line for providence, as if they have quickly abandoned that disturbing topic). But if ‘Fixt’ is a verb,¹ and ‘absolute’ qualifies all three nouns, then they determined in their discussion that fate is absolute, and so is free will, and so is foreknowledge—which is a multiple contradiction. This is indeed a maze.

Confusion—or rather, deception and self-deception—is evident whenever the fallen angels debate their past and imagine their future, and in particular whenever they ponder questions of power and autonomy. For some, chance seems to be their likely salvation, as Belial suggests when he invokes

what hope the never-ending flight
Of future dayes may bring, what chance, what change
Worth waiting.²

This is a misunderstanding of hope (which for Milton is a distinctively Christian virtue³) and an illusion that change is possible when it is their revolt against God which has determined what is now their unchanging state, their eternal damnation; and Belial’s false supposition is grounded on the self-delusion that chance may

¹ *OED* s.v. *fix* v. 12: ‘To settle definitely; to appoint or assign with precision; to specify or determine’.

² *PL* ii 221–3.

³ See Chapter 17 *HOPE*.

bring about some favourable alteration in their condition. Several possible senses of 'chance' may be in play here: 'a happening or occurrence of things in a particular way; a casual or fortuitous circumstance'; or 'an opportunity that comes in any one's way'; or, with more serious philosophical and theological implications, an 'absence of design or assignable cause, fortuity; often itself spoken of as the cause or determiner of events, which appear to happen without the intervention of law, ordinary causation, or providence'.⁴ But in none of these senses can 'chance' operate to the fallen angels' advantage in a world overseen by divine providence.⁵ Belial, a more sinister Micawber, seems simply to be hoping that something will turn up, but in placing his trust in chance he is assuming that divine providence is non-existent or inactive. Like Eve, who later on will imagine that God might happen not to notice what she is doing,⁶ Belial chooses not to think about divine knowledge and providence, and imagines that the sheer passage of time might bring their way some event which could offer them an opportunity for change. Mammon is more realistic, arguing that

him to unthrone we then
May hope when everlasting Fate shall yeild
To fickle Chance, and *Chaos* judge the strife:
The former vain to hope argues as vain
The latter.⁷

However he understands 'Fate' (and we shall return to this), Mammon is clear that chance is not going to create opportunities for them to unthrone God. (Chance may rule in Chaos,⁸ but, as we soon find out, Chaos is an adjunct to

⁴ *OED s.v. chance n.* 1b, 4a, 6. Chance is usually invoked as an explanation for either (i) an event occasioned by the intersection of two causes which produce an event which is in itself unmotivated (as when two friends meet 'by chance' at a railway station: the presence of each man was separately caused, but the coincidence of their meeting was not itself caused); or (ii) an event produced by a purely random motion (as happens when Lucretian atoms 'swerve' for no reason in an entirely material world); or (iii) an event which lies beyond our powers of assigning a causal explanation (as when a glass 'chances' to shatter, but if we knew more about the stresses in its physical structure, and the atmospheric conditions surrounding it, we could trace the sequence of physical changes which led to it breaking). See further *The Great Ideas: A Syntopicon of Great Books of the Western World*, edited by Mortimer J. Adler and William Gorman, 2 vols (Chicago, 1952), i 179–92. Milton maintains that nothing can happen by chance to one who is truly wise (*Prologues* VII: *Works* xii 266–7). In an important discussion Sidney's Pamela argues at length against her aunt Cecropia that the world did not come about by chance but is created and sustained by God (Sir Philip Sidney, *The Countesse of Pembroke's Arcadia* (London, 1590), fols. 281^r–284^r).

⁵ In *A Maske* Comus asks the Lady 'What chance good Lady hath bereft you thus?' (l. 277), which suggests that he thinks in terms of chance and opportunity, whereas when the Elder Brother defies 'the threats | Of malice or of sorcery, or that power | Which erring men call Chance' (ll. 586–8), he is implicitly asserting a belief and trust in divine providence, and rebutting those whose spiritual or moral imperception leads them to attribute to chance what is really the work of providence. At several points in *PL* the rebel angels place their trust in 'occasion', which, with its roots in the Latin *ocasio*, is associated in early modern texts with the opportunities which Fortune holds out for the Machiavellian man to grasp. Satan exclaims 'Then let me not let pass | Occasion which now smiles, behold alone | The Woman, opportune to all attempts' (*PL* ix 479–81; cf. i 178, ii 341, and *PR* iii 173 for a clear association of 'occasion' with grasping Fortune's forelock).

⁶ *PL* ix 811–15.

⁷ *PL* ii 231–5.

⁸ *PL* ii 910; cf. 965.

Hell, not a universal force, and the nature of the rule of chance is to disorder rather than to create.)

Other fallen angels also canvass the idea that chance may come to their aid. Beelzebub speculates whether the 'high Supremacy' of God is 'upheld by strength, or Chance, or Fate'.⁹ That evasive 'or'—a sign of the speaker refusing to acknowledge the true power of God—is equally evident when the devils 'complain that Fate | Free Vertue should enthrall to Force or Chance'.¹⁰ But Fate has not enthralled them, for they have brought their condition on themselves; they are not free, nor are they examples of virtue; and they have not been subjected to force (in the sense that they understand it, mere military power) nor to chance: a five-fold mistake. When they await the return of their leader, the devils are 'sollicitous what chance | Might intercept thir Emperour',¹¹ preferring to imagine Satan vulnerable to chance than subject to providence. Satan assures his followers that their deliberations

Will once more lift us up, in spite of Fate,
Neerer our ancient Seat; perhaps in view
Of those bright confines, whence with neighbouring Arms
And opportune excursion we may chance
Re-enter Heav'n; or else...¹²

Hedged around by 'perhaps',¹³ 'may', and 'or', this scenario is clearly a forlorn fantasy, so thin, so devoid of any substantially imagined causes is the narrative which he sketches in that glib 'we may chance | Re-enter Heav'n', as if to re-enter Heaven might be a matter of sneaking in unobserved.

However, chance does play some part in creating local circumstances which aid Satan. As he journeys through Chaos, Satan falls through the air,

and to this hour
Down had been falling, had not by ill chance
The strong rebuff of som tumultuous cloud
Instinct with Fire and Nitre hurried him
As many miles aloft.¹⁴

Why 'ill chance'? This seems to be the random, chaotic movement of atoms in a quasi-Lucretian universe,¹⁵ though since the cloud is 'Instinct with Fire and Nitre',

⁹ *PL* i 132–3. In Dryden's adaptation of *PL* Asmodey is more definite in saying that the rebels 'shook the Pow'r of Heavens Eternal State, | Had broke it too, if not upheld by Fate' (*The State of Innocence, and Fall of Man: An Opera* (London, 1677), p. 2).

¹⁰ *PL* ii 550–1.

¹¹ *PL* x 428–9. The adjective 'opportune' has an ironic etymology, as it originally signified in Latin a favourable wind which brings a ship safely to harbour, Portunus being the god of harbours. No such wind will blow Satan back into his original harbour. Satan also thinks that 'chance' may lead him to gain some intelligence about man from a passing angel (*PL* iv 530–3).

¹² *PL* ii 393–7.

¹³ See Chapter 20 IF AND PERHAPS.

¹⁴ *PL* ii 934–8.

¹⁵ For Milton's use of Lucretius in *PL* see Philip Hardie, 'The Presence of Lucretius in *Paradise Lost*', *Milton Quarterly* 29 (1995) 13–24; David Quint, *Inside 'Paradise Lost': Reading the Designs of Milton's Epic* (Princeton, N.J., 2014), ch. 3; John Leonard, 'Milton, Lucretius, and "the Void Profound of Unessential Night"', and John Rumrich, 'Of Chaos and Nightingales', in *Living Texts: Interpreting Milton*, edited by Kristin A. Pruitt and Charles W. Durham (Selinsgrove, 2000), pp. 198–217 and 218–27.

diabolical elements, it appears to be Satan's ally. As readers we know that God sees and foresees all, and that such apparent accidents or instances of 'ill chance' do not absolve the agent of responsibility: ill chance may create opportunities for ill will, but no more than that. Similarly, Satan in Eden

wish'd his hap might find
Eve separate, he wish'd, but not with hope
 Of what so seldom chanc'd, when to his wish,
 Beyond his hope, *Eve* separate he spies.¹⁶

His 'hap', that is, his luck, his fortuitous success, has brought him within reach of Eve unaccompanied, but it is his will and her will that accomplish her Fall.

Another misunderstanding, or misrepresentation, occurs when the rebel angels speak of 'Fate'. In so doing they seem to imagine that they inhabit a pagan world in which Fate is at work.¹⁷ Satan insists to Abdiel that the angels created themselves 'when fatal course had circl'd his full Orbe'.¹⁸ Beelzebub had spoken vaguely of God's supremacy being upheld 'by strength, or Chance, or Fate',¹⁹ and Satan

William Poole says perceptively of this example: 'at the epistemological outworks of Milton's poem, such conceptual monsters are allowed brief incursions into the otherwise orderly world of *Paradise Lost*, in recognition of the impossibility of finally resolving certain divine mysteries, notably those associated with the origin of evil' (*Milton and the Idea of the Fall* (Cambridge, 2005), pp. 156–7).

A striking use of 'chance' is found in *Episcopacy*, where Milton says that the writings of the early church Fathers have been preserved for later generations not by providence (as Catholic writers might have argued in their defence of church tradition) but by chance: not satisfied with the Scriptures, men 'run to that indigested heap, and frie of Authors, which they call Antiquity. Whatsoever time, or the heedlesse hand of blind chance, hath drawne down from of old to this present, in her huge dragnet, whether Fish, or Sea-weed, Shells, or Shrubbs, unpickt, unchosen, those are the Fathers' (*Works* iii 82). *indigested*: from Ovid's description of primordial chaos as *rudis indigestaque moles*, 'a rough and unformed mass' (*Metamorphoses* i 7). The Fathers are therefore components of a chaotic universe ruled by chance, conceptual monsters rather than revered sources of true doctrine.

¹⁶ *PL* ix 421–4.

¹⁷ Satan tells his followers (falsely) that '*Night and Chaos* wilde',

jealous of thir secrets fiercely oppos'd
 My journey strange, with clamorous uproare
 Protesting Fate supream.

(*PL* x 477–80)

OED cites this last line *s.v.* protest *v.* 7, 'To call (someone) to witness something; to appeal to', so Night and Chaos would be calling upon a pagan notion of supreme Fate to thwart Satan's incursion. But of course this is Satan's interpretation of what they may have said, presenting his view of the universe for the benefit of his followers. In *PR* Satan extols the Greek tragedians:

teachers best
 Of moral prudence, with delight receiv'd
 In brief sententious precepts, while they treat
 Of fate, and chance, and change in human life.

(*PR* iv 262–5)

But the Son replies that

he who receives
 Light from above, from the fountain of light,
 No other doctrine needs, though granted true.

(iv 288–90)

¹⁸ *PL* v 862.

¹⁹ *PL* i 133.

claims that 'by Fate the strength of Gods | And this Empyrean substance cannot fail',²⁰ while also asserting that the rebel angels can lift themselves up 'in spite of Fate, | Neerer our ancient Seat'.²¹ Yet if 'Fate' is their fixed destiny, this is impossible; and if 'Fate' is (as we shall see) an expression of the will of God, this is also impossible. Belial acknowledges that 'fate inevitable | Subdues us, and Omnipotent Decree, | The Victors will',²² but he seems to think that fate and the will of God—or the will of the victor, as he reductively conceives of him—are separate powers, while the conjunction 'and' smudges whatever link it is that he imagines to exist between the two. Moloc imagines that they might be able 'to Allarme, | Though inaccessible, his fatal Throne',²³ which assumes that God's throne is maintained by fate (though also implicitly confessing that his power is fatal to those who oppose him). When Satan promises airily that his companions

will appear
More glorious and more dread then from no fall,
And trust themselves to fear no second fate.²⁴

the word 'fate' seems to have been degraded into meaning little more than 'unlucky setback'.

By contrast with such confusions, the voice of God defines 'fate' for the reader of the poem, and in so doing banishes any idea that fate in the pagan sense has any role in this world. God says: 'Necessitie and Chance | Approach not mee, and what I will is Fate'.²⁵ Fate, then, in the conceptual structure of the poem, is that which God wills. The word 'fate' derives etymologically from *fatum*, the past participle of the Latin verb *fari*, 'to speak'; *fatum* is primarily that which the gods have spoken.²⁶ God makes it clear that in the universe which he has created there is no autonomous power or activity which we could call chance, and no form of necessity; nothing compels God, and nothing erupts to disturb his will.²⁷ Whatever he wills, will necessarily come about. Such a usage of 'fate' is deployed by the narrator when he tells us that when the fallen angels attempt to slake their thirst 'Fate

²⁰ *PL* i 116–17.

²¹ *PL* ii 393–4.

²² *PL* ii 197–9.

²³ *PL* ii 104–5.

²⁴ *PL* ii 15–17.

²⁵ *PL* vii 172–3. The *OED* cites this usage under fate *n.* 3 as its first example of the meaning 'that which is destined or fated to happen'. By contrast, fate in the ancient world was regarded as a power superior to the gods, who cannot change the fate which has been allotted to a man (Homer, *Odyssey* iii 236–8).

²⁶ *OLD s.v.* *fatum* 1. In *De Doctrina* Milton says: *et fatum quid nisi effatum divinum omnipotentis cuiuspiam numinis potest esse?* ('And what can fate [*fatum*] be but the divine decree [*effatum*] of some almighty deity?') (*OCW* viii 24–5). As Dennis Danielson observes, in *De Doctrina* Milton 'seeks to purge terms such as "nature" and "fate" of their absolute or deterministic connotations... In this way Milton signals... that even when he uses terms drawn from pagan philosophy, he does so unidialectically—within the bounds, one might say, of the full sense of theodicy's cardinal proposition... that God is omnipotent' (*Milton's Good God: A Study in Literary Theodicy* (Cambridge, 1982), p. 42). Dryden's Asmodeus understands that the word of God makes Fate, but phrases the idea in pagan classical form: 'He swore it, shook the Heav'ns, and made it Fate' (*The State of Innocence*, p. 5).

²⁷ When God says to Adam, 'what change | Absents thee, or what chance detains?' (*PL* x 107–8) he knows, of course, what the 'change' is, and that no 'chance' has detained Adam.

withstands... and of it self the water flies | All taste of living wight',²⁸ for here in Hell water obeys the divine command. Milton similarly uses 'Fate' to refer to the divine will when he says:

Hell heard th' unsufferable noise, Hell saw
Heav'n ruining from Heav'n and would have fled
Affrighted; but strict Fate had cast too deep
Her dark foundations, and too fast had bound.²⁹

It is the divine power that has laid Hell's foundations. However, what God wills does not circumscribe man's freedom—he is not in that sense 'fated'—for Raphael tells Adam that neither fate (in the pagan sense here) nor necessity constrain man, since God has willed that man's will should be free: God, he explains,

ordaind thy will
By nature free, not over-rul'd by Fate
Inextricable, or strict necessity.³⁰

Consequently, as God himself says, men cannot

justly accuse
Thir maker, or thir making, or thir Fate,
As if predestination over-rul'd
Thir will, dispos'd by absolute Decree
Or high foreknowledge.³¹

For what *is* decreed, is man's freedom.³²

Yet after the Fall Adam seems confused when he says to Eve, 'But past who can recall, or don undoe? | Not God Omnipotent, nor Fate',³³ as if Fate operated separately from God. Is he momentarily imagining an alternative, pagan universe? Eve is also muddled, for she has been listening to Satan, who in the guise of the

²⁸ *PL* ii 610–13. Moreover, when Milton says that 'the water flies | All taste of living wight, as once it fled | The lip of *Tantalus*' he implies that the divine will is operative and revealed in classical pagan mythology. When Sin says that 'Fate pronounc'd' that Sin and Death would be overcome simultaneously (*PL* ii 809) she may be supposing that a pagan Fate is the power which rules the universe, but the reference is clearly to a divine promise that sin and death will be overcome by the Son. Whatever the character understands by 'Fate' here, the reader understands it to mean God's will.

²⁹ *PL* vi 867–70.

³⁰ *PL* v 526–8. Cf. God saying that man's Fall is 'without least impulse or shadow of Fate' (*PL* iii 120) in the pagan sense of that word.

³¹ *PL* iii 112–16.

³² Cf.

I formd them free, and free they must remain,
Till they enthrall themselves: I else must change
Thir nature, and revoke the high Decree
Unchangeable, Eternal, which ordain'd
Thir freedom, they themselves ordain'd thir fall.

(*PL* iii 124–8)

Cf. *De Doctrina: Nihil itaque Deus decrevisse absolutè censendus est quod in potestate liberè agentium reliquit* ('We must therefore conclude that God did not decree anything absolutely which he left in the power of free agents') (*OCW* viii 54–5).

³³ *PL* ix 926–7.

serpent told her that by taking the fruit himself he 'life more perfet have attained then Fate | Meant mee, by ventring higher then my Lot'.³⁴ Eve repeats Satan's pagan vocabulary when she in turn says to Adam:

Thou therefore also taste, that equal Lot
May joyne us, equal Joy, as equal Love;
Least thou not tasting, different degree
Disjoyne us, and I then too late renounce
Deitie for thee, when Fate will not permit.³⁵

Satan has ostensibly circumvented the 'Lot' which 'Fate' had ordained for him by his courageous aspiration which led him to take the fruit; Eve offers Adam an opportunity to share the elevated 'Lot' which she has procured for herself through her own act, and to encourage him imagines that 'Fate' will not allow her to renounce that deity which she supposes she now enjoys. Her embrace of the Satanic conceptual framework of 'Fate' is one sign amongst many of her Fall. Later, Eve supposes that they will be able to remain in Eden,

but Fate
Subscrib'd not; Nature first gave Signs, imprest
On Bird, Beast, Aire, Aire suddenly eclips'd
After short blush of Morn.³⁶

Fate here seems to be the will of God acting through nature, which begins to show the signs that death has entered the world; and 'death' we know is another of the meanings of 'fate',³⁷ in effect a meaning which Adam and Eve have added to its semantic field through their Fall, their 'fatal Trespass'.³⁸



Beyond the local appearances of seeming chance, and behind what some see as fate, is the work of divine providence.³⁹ Three elements to this concept may be distinguished: the first is foresight (the root meaning in Latin: *providéo*, to see in

³⁴ *PL* ix 689–90.

³⁵ *PL* ix 881–5. The *OED* defines 'lot' in this sense as 'That which is given to a person by fate or divine providence; esp. one's destiny, fortune, or "portion" in this life; condition (good or bad) in life' (2b), which leaves open different possible answers to the question of who assigns such lots.

³⁶ *PL* xi 181–4.

³⁷ *OED* s.v. fate n. 4b. In *PL* ii 725 and 871 Sin takes 'the fatal Key' to unlock the gates of Hell, where 'fatal' means 'producing death' (cf. 'fatall hands' (712) and 'fatal Dart' (786)).

³⁸ *PL* ix 889.

³⁹ In his *Artis Logicae* Milton says that men attribute events which they do not understand to fortune, fate, or chance, whereas they should acknowledge them as the work of providence (*Works* xi 44–51; cf. *De Doctrina* I xiii: *OCW* viii 320–1). For the understanding of providence in Milton's day see Alexandra Walsham, *Providence in Early Modern England* (Oxford, 1999); Blair Worden, *God's Instruments: Political Conduct in the England of Oliver Cromwell* (Oxford, 2012), pp. 33–62; John Spurr, 'Virtue, Religion, and Government: The Anglican Uses of Providence', in *The Politics of Religion in Restoration England*, edited by Tim Harris et al. (Oxford, 1990), pp. 29–47. For Milton's understanding of providence in his *History of Britain* see Nicholas von Maltzahn, *Milton's History of Britain: Republican Historiography in the English Revolution* (Oxford, 1991), pp. 84–90. For Renaissance writers' insistence that nothing in the world occurs by chance see C. A. Patrides, *Milton and the Christian Tradition* (Oxford, 1966), pp. 55–7.

advance), God's perception and knowledge of what is to come, which is an aspect of his simultaneous knowledge of past, present, and future; the second is the nurturing care and guidance which the divine presence provides; and the third is God himself considered in his exercise of beneficent foresight and protection.⁴⁰ Milton discusses providence theologically in Book I chapter viii of *De Doctrina Christiana*, distinguishing between ordinary providence, 'whereby God maintains and preserves that consistent order of causes which was established by himself in the beginning', which is commonly called Nature; and extraordinary providence, 'whereby God produces something outside the usual order of things', which men call a miracle.⁴¹ Milton himself introduces his poem by announcing that his aim is

That to the highth of this great Argument
I may assert Eternal Providence,
And justifie the wayes of God to men.⁴²

In this case 'Providence' is probably intended mainly in the second of our three senses, for it is the loving care with which God nurtures his creation that Milton seeks to explain and defend. Satan, whose rhetoric so often obfuscates the workings of a world which he cannot control, nevertheless acknowledges the beneficent aim of providence, and his own aim which is to thwart it:

If then his Providence
Out of our evil seek to bring forth good,
Our labour must be to pervert that end,
And out of good still to find means of evil.⁴³

Eventually Adam avows:

Henceforth I learne, that to obey is best,
And love with feare the onely God, to walk
As in his presence, ever to observe
His providence, and on him sole depend,
Mercifull over all his works, with good
Still overcoming evil.⁴⁴

What might it mean to 'observe' providence, as Adam says? To observe is more than to see, to look at; it is 'to follow, practise; obey, adhere to; treat with worship or

⁴⁰ The first two senses are *OED*³ *s.v.* providence *n.* 2, the third sense 6a.

⁴¹ *Ordinaria, qua Deus constantem illum causarum ordinem qui ab ipso constitutus in principio est, retinet ac servat... Haec vulgo et nimis etiam frequenter Natura dicitur... Providentia Dei extraordinaria est, qua Deus quicquam extra solitum rerum ordinem producit... Miraculum dicitur.* (*OCW* vii 338–9; cf. *De Doctrina* I iii ('De Divino Decreto')).

⁴² *PL* i 24–6. *assert*: maintain the cause of, champion (*OED* *s.v.* *assert* *v.* 2).

⁴³ *PL* i 162–5. Cf. *PL* i 210–20, and *De Doctrina*: *Nec voluntatem efficit malum ex bona, sed iam malam eò convertit, ubi possit ex ipsa malitia sua vel bonum aliquod aliis, vel poenam sibi insciens, longèque aliud cogitans, producere* ('Nor does he bring about an evil will out of a good one, but he turns an already evil one towards where—unknowing, and intending something far different—it may be able to draw from its very evilness either some good for others, or punishment for itself') (*OCW* viii 326–7).

⁴⁴ *PL* xii 561–6.

honour'.⁴⁵ Adam therefore envisages a life which will be cared for by providence, as he in his turn abides by its laws and honours its source. The poem closes, as it had begun, with a reference to providence:

The World was all before them, where to choose
Thir place of rest, and Providence thir guide.⁴⁶

Here in the world which opens up outside Eden—which is the world as we know it—'Providence' seems primarily to be a synonym for God himself, God acknowledged and experienced as a beneficent guide.

⁴⁵ *OED*³ *s.v.* observe *v.* 1, 2, 4.

⁴⁶ *PL* xii 646–7.

4

Change

But O how fall'n! how chang'd
From him, who in the happy Realms of Light
Cloth'd with transcendent brightness didst out-shine
Myriads though bright.

Paradise Lost i 84–7



Quantum mutatus ab illo, says Aeneas as he contemplates the ghost of Hector who has appeared to him in a dream as Troy burns around him; how much he has changed from that hero who led the Trojans against the besieging Greeks.¹ Hector, bloodied and disfigured, appears to Aeneas to warn him that it is useless to resist the enemies who are rampaging through their captured city. Satan's appropriation of the Virgilian phrase as he surveys the transformed Beelzebub serves to mark out his distance from classical heroism—he is no Aeneas, and his quest for a new homeland will only lead him deeper into Hell. This is the first of the externally manifested metamorphoses which are allegories of a spiritual and moral decline.² There is another echo here, of Isaiah:

How art thou fallen from heauen, O Lucifer, sonne of the morning? *how* art thou
cut downe to the ground, which didst weaken the nations?
For thou hast said in thine heart: I wil ascend into heauen, I wil exalt my throne
about the starres of God: I wil sit also vpon the mount of the congregation, in
the sides of the North.
I wil ascend aboute the heights of the cloudes, I wil bee like the most High.
Yet thou shalt be brought downe to hel, to the sides of the pit.³

'O how fall'n! how chang'd' is the first instance in the poem of the word 'change'.⁴ Not surprisingly, perhaps, in a poem about the Fall of man, change is generally a change for the worse. Theologically and philosophically this is because these changes are movements away from, defections from, the original perfection in which these individuals—be they Satan or Adam or Eve—were created. In the Platonic scheme, change in the world around us is a manifestation of imperfection:

¹ Virgil, *Aeneid* ii 274.

² Fowler, *ad PL* i 84.

³ Isaiah xiv 12–15.

⁴ For a discussion of change and the resistance to change across Milton's works see John Creaser, "Fear of Change": Closed Minds and Open Forms in Milton', *Milton Quarterly* 42 (2008) 161–82. One of the classic texts which would have informed Milton's poetic interest in change was Ovid's *Metamorphoses*: see Maggie Kilgour, *Milton and the Metamorphosis of Ovid* (Oxford, 2012).

only the world of ideal forms is unchanging. In the Christian scheme, man is created in the image of God,⁵ but—as Raphael warns Adam—he is not immutable.⁶ Only God is unchanging, *immutabilis* as Milton says.⁷ Man has an ideal form, the shape and purpose which God intends for him, and the potential either to fulfil or to betray that God-given form.⁸

Change astonishes Satan and the rest of the fallen angels as they contemplate their new state, although at least at this point Satan recognizes that what has occurred is indeed a Fall: later he and others will use all their rhetorical resourcefulness to evade this idea, and to redefine their Fall as something else. The fallen angels lie scattered and abject, ‘Under amazement of thir hideous change’⁹—‘Under’, as if this amazement has crushed them and held them down. ‘Amazement’ carries some senses which are no longer current:

1. The condition of being mentally paralyzed, mental stupefaction, frenzy. 2. Loss of presence of mind; bewilderment, perplexity, distraction (due to doubt as to what to do). 3. Overwhelming fear or apprehension, consternation, alarm.¹⁰

This is a change which stupefies him. Satan, surveying his new kingdom, exclaims in astonishment, ‘Is this the Region . . . | That we must change for heav’n?’, ‘change’ here meaning ‘take in exchange’. A poor bargain.

Satan maintains that he himself has not changed in the face of his defeat by what proved to be God’s overwhelming forces:

not for those,
Nor what the Potent Victor in his rage
Can else inflict, do I repent or change,
Though chang’d in outward lustre;

and is rather determined to maintain

that fixt mind
And high disdain, from sence of injur’d merit,
That with the mightiest rais’d me to contend.¹¹

The phrase ‘repent or change’ acknowledges that a further change is theoretically possible, a repentance, turning back to God rather than remaining in the ‘fixt mind’ which sees God only as ‘the Potent Victor’. Satan is, he says,

One who brings
A mind not to be chang’d by Place or Time.
The mind is its own place, and in it self
Can make a Heav’n of Hell, a Hell of Heav’n.
What matter where, if I be still the same.¹²

⁵ See Chapter 19 *IDOL AND IMAGE*.

⁶ ‘be advis’d. | God made thee perfet, not immutable’ (*PL* v 523–4).

⁷ *De Doctrina: OCW* viii 36.

⁸ For some thoughtful theological reflections on change see Antonio López, ‘On Restlessness’, *Communio: International Catholic Review* 34 (2007) 176–200, esp. pp. 192ff.

⁹ *PL* i 313.

¹⁰ Abridged from *OED* s.v. amazement.

¹¹ *PL* i 94–9.

¹² *PL* i 252–6.

This attitude might be the laudable, possibly Stoic, philosophy of one who refuses to be buffeted by change and chance, but remains true to his principles and to himself. But the rhetoric is specious. It is true that the mind is its own place, true that it can make a Hell of Heaven, as Satan has proved by importing pride and resentment into Heaven; but it is not true that the mind can make a Heaven of Hell. It can change Hell into a parody of Heaven—as happens in the first two books of the poem—but it cannot change Hell into Heaven, since Hell is the ultimate state of alienation from God, and Heaven union with him. One cannot be changed into the other, except in the self-delusions of the mind. Satan, the master of rhetoric, has allowed rhetoric to deceive him into thinking that because he can slot these names into a neat chiasmus—‘Can make a Heav’n of Hell, a Hell of Heav’n’—the spiritual states for which these are signs can also be as easily manipulated and metamorphosed. The narrator explains this later when he says:

horror and doubt distract
His troubl’d thoughts, and from the bottom stirr
The Hell within him, for within him Hell
He brings, and round about him, nor from Hell
One step no more then from himself can fly
By change of place.¹³

Now the different chiasmus ‘Hell within him, for within him Hell’ encloses Satan within his own place of damnation. A Satanically willed change of place can achieve nothing, since the Fall from Heaven into Hell is not a change of place per se but the physical manifestation of a spiritual and moral change.¹⁴ And Satan’s inability or refusal to understand the true nature of change is apparent when he tells Sin that he recalls the joys which he once shared with her,

Then sweet, now sad to mention, through dire change
Befalln us unforeseen, unthought of.¹⁵

‘Befalln’ suggests that this change is some accident for which Satan is not responsible, rather than it being the ineluctable consequence of his rebellion.

Deception and self-deception characterize the rhetoric of Satan and his principal followers when they contemplate their change. Beelzebub says:

Thrones and Imperial Powers, off-spring of heav’n
Ethereal Vertues; or these Titles now
Must we renounce, and changing stile be call’d
Princes of Hell?¹⁶

¹³ *PL* iv 18–23. Dryden’s Asmodey recognizes that mere change of place avails nothing: ‘if that be gain | Which is but change of place, not change of pain’ (John Dryden, *The State of Innocence, and Fall of Man: An Opera* (London, 1677), p. 2).

¹⁴ Satan tells Gabriel that he too would seek to change his place in order to escape pain, but Gabriel points out that his flight merely exacerbates Satan’s sin and therefore his punishment (*PL* iv 885–916).

¹⁵ *PL* ii 820–1. *dire*: stronger than now: ‘Dreadful, dismal, mournful, horrible, terrible, evil in a great degree’ (*OED s.v. dire* Aa, quoting Johnson’s definition). Sin herself was transformed when giving birth to Death (*PL* ii 785).

¹⁶ *PL* ii 310–13.

It is symptomatic of their willed misunderstanding that the emphasis here is on titles, on styles, which have meaning only within the heavenly order which the fallen angels have abandoned, and now are empty signifiers without a signified. Belial likewise imagines change fallaciously when he speaks of

what hope the never-ending flight
Of future dayes may bring, what chance, what change
Worth waiting.¹⁷

For Belial, hope, chance, and change seem almost synonymous as agents in his wishful thinking. But hope is a theological virtue, specifically the virtue by which man desires the kingdom of Heaven,¹⁸ so for Belial to hope only for an easier life in Hell, for him to invest his hope in the mere progression of time, and to associate it with chance, indicates how far his understanding and his language have fallen. Belial's reliance upon chance is a denial of divine providence. His assumptions are, in effect, rebutted when the narrator later describes the fate of the damned in Hell:

Thither by harpy-footed Furies hail'd,
At certain revolutions all the damn'd
Are brought: and feel by turns the bitter change
Of fierce extreams, extreams by change more fierce,
From Beds of raging Fire to starve in Ice
Thir soft Ethereal warmth, and there to pine
Immovable, infixt, and frozen round,
Periods of time, thence hurried back to fire.¹⁹

It is only 'bitter change' that awaits the damned, a state in which each change only accentuates rather than relieves their torment: these are 'revolutions'²⁰ which exchange one torment for another and repeatedly return the damned to their previous states, in an unending cycle. The chiasmus in 'Of fierce extreams, extreams by change more fierce' locks the devils into a state in which change is only an intensification of torment. Like the inhabitants of Dante's *Inferno*, they are 'infixt' in postures and tortures from which any change is no relief but only part of what Dryden's Lucifer calls 'all the sad Variety of Hell'.²¹ So much for being the proud possessor of a 'fixt mind'. Belial, however, imagines a change which will accommodate them to Hell, a state in which

Our purer essence then will overcome
Thir noxious vapour, or enur'd not feel,
Or chang'd at length, and to the place conformed
In temper and in nature, will receive
Familiar the fierce heat, and void of pain;
This horror will grow milde, this darkness light.²²

¹⁷ *PL* ii 221–3.

¹⁸ See Chapter 17 HOPE.

¹⁹ *PL* ii 596–603.

²⁰ *revolution*: circular movement (*OED*³ s.v. *revolution* n. 1).

²¹ Dryden, *The State of Innocence*, p. 1.

²² *PL* ii 215–20.

But once more the rhetoric tells us how to understand this scenario. The repeated verb 'will' may seem to be a confident future indicative, but it follows on from a passage which is flimsily hypothetical:

This is now
Our doom; which *if* we can sustain and bear,
Our Supream Foe in time *may* much remit
His anger, and *perhaps* thus farr remov'd
Not mind us not offending, satisfi'd
With what is punish't; whence these raging fires
Will slack'n, *if* his breath stir not thir flames.²³

If, may, perhaps:²⁴ this is the precarious basis upon which Belial constructs his narrative of soothing change.²⁵

To some extent Satan is in control of his appearance, and can change his shape at will.²⁶ It is to pursue the Fall of man that Satan changes his outward form, first to a 'stripling Cherube'—implicitly a faked return to an earlier innocence—and later to a wolf, a cormorant, lion, tiger, toad, and serpent.²⁷ He appears to Ithuriel and Zephon to be 'transform'd'²⁸ from the shape which he had in Hell, but nevertheless is still recognizable as one of the fallen. After the Fall of Eve he 'unminded slunk | Into the Wood fast by . . . changing shape | To observe the sequel'.²⁹ As with Spenser's Archimago, such changes of shape connote evil,³⁰ whereas truth (figured in *The Faerie Queene* by Una) is single and unchanging. But when Satan contemplates his own wretched state, the passions which this stirs up in him change his countenance beyond his control:

Thus while he spake, each passion dimm'd his face
Thrice chang'd with pale, ire, envie and despair,
Which marrd his borrow'd visage.³¹

Ultimately a change occurs which makes clear the complete subjection of the fallen angels to the power of God:

down he fell
A monstrous Serpent on his Belly prone,
Reluctant, but in vaine, a greater power
Now rul'd him, punisht in the shape he sin'd,
...
for now were all transform'd
Alike, to Serpents all.³²

To this we might add the vision of the Elder Brother in *A Maske* who imagines evil involved in unending self-destructive change,

²³ *PL* ii 208–14; italics added.

²⁴ See Chapter 20 IF AND PERHAPS.

²⁵ Mammon thinks the same: *PL* ii 274–8.

²⁶ For a discussion of the metamorphoses in *PL* see Barbara K. Lewalski, 'Paradise Lost' and the Rhetoric of Literary Forms (Princeton, N.J., 1985), pp. 71–6.

²⁷ *PL* iii 636; list from Fowler, *ad loc.*

²⁸ *PL* iv 824.

²⁹ *PL* x 332–4.

³⁰ Fowler, *ad loc.*

³¹ *PL* iv 114–16.

³² *PL* x 513–20.

when at last
 Gather'd like scum, and setl'd to it self
 It shall be in eternal restless change
 Self-fed, and self-consum'd.³³



In Heaven, however, there is constancy. God himself is unchanging and unchangeable. The angels hymn God as 'Omnipotent, | Immutable, Immortal, Infinite'.³⁴ The faces of God—the aspects under which he is experienced—do change, however: the Son changes his appearance (but not his nature) when confronting the rebel angels:

So spake the Son, and into terrour chang'd
 His count'nance too severe to be beheld
 And full of wrauth bent on his Enemies.³⁵

The angels are also unchanging, though not unchangeable; Abdiel contrasts with his adversary Satan not simply in remaining loyal, but in manifesting a different form of constancy—not Satan's self-promoting fixity, but loyalty:

His Loyaltie he kept, his Love, his Zeale;
 Nor number, nor example with him wrought
 To swerve from truth, or change his constant mind
 Though single.³⁶

This is an encomium which Milton would no doubt have wished to deserve himself.

There is a form of change in Heaven, but it is simply the pleasurable alternation of day and night, 'For wee have also our Eevning and our Morn, | Wee ours for change delectable, not need', as Raphael explains,³⁷ and the darkness in Heaven is not night as experienced by humans nor the 'darkness visible' of Hell, but a pleasing twilight which springs from the mount of God when 'the face of brightest Heav'n had changd | To grateful Twilight'.³⁸ For here

light and darkness in perpetual round
 Lodge and dislodge by turns, which makes through Heav'n
 Grateful vicissitude, like Day and Night.³⁹

Such change is 'Grateful vicissitude', vicissitude being 'alternation, mutual or reciprocal succession, of things or conditions', especially 'alternating succession of opposite or contrasted things'.⁴⁰ It is an ordered 'perpetual round' rather than that change which is felt as a decline or fall by the devils and by man. Moreover, such variety is actually a form of praise to the Creator:

Aire, and ye Elements the eldest birth
 Of Natures Womb, that in quaternion run

³³ *Maske* ll. 593–6; *Works* i 107.

³⁴ *PL* iii 372–3.

³⁵ *PL* vi 824–6.

³⁶ *PL* v 900–3.

³⁷ *PL* v 628–9.

³⁸ *PL* v 644–5. *grateful*: pleasing, welcome (*OED s.v. grateful adj.* 1).

³⁹ *PL* vi 6–8.

⁴⁰ *OED s.v. vicissitude* 4. Cf. the 'vicissitude' whereby sun and moon alternately rule day and night (*PL* vii 351).

Perpetual Circle, multiform; and mix
 And nourish all things, let your ceaseless change
 Vary to our great Maker still new praise.⁴¹

Whereas Satan has imagined that Hell might be changed into Heaven, God envisages that man may at length transform his state so that Earth may be changed into Heaven:

till by degrees of merit rais'd
 They open to themselves at length the way
 Up hither, under long obedience tri'd,
 And Earth be chang'd to Heav'n, & Heav'n to Earth,
 One Kingdom, Joy and Union without end.⁴²

This is a change which is apparently within men's capacity to achieve, as they 'open to themselves' the way, by 'merit rais'd', a phrase which echoes the opening of Book II where Satan was 'by merit rais'd | To that bad eminence' on the throne of Hell.⁴³ But there are two different kinds of merit here: Satanic merit—cunning, self-assertion, tenacity in evil—which thoroughly deserves the 'bad eminence' of the throne of Hell, and the merit which man may acquire through obedience to the divine will. Thus would 'Earth be chang'd to Heav'n, & Heav'n to Earth', another chiasmic line which by echoing Satan's 'Can make a Heav'n of Hell, a Hell of Heav'n'⁴⁴ holds out to us the difference between the two forms of change—Satanic downfall and spiritual ascent.



But this is not the kind of change which Adam and Eve experience, though God's words hold out an eschatological hope to postlapsarian man. Eve initially professes herself to be content within an unchanging hierarchical order, saying to Adam:

My Author and Disposer, what thou bidst
 Unargu'd I obey; so God ordains,
 God is thy Law, thou mine: to know no more
 Is womans happiest knowledge and her praise.
 With thee conversing I forget all time,
 All seasons and thir change, all please alike.⁴⁵

The succession of hours is a pleasing change, and there are other forms of change in Eden which give pleasure: Eve prepares a meal for Raphael which will 'bring | Taste after taste upheld with kindest change',⁴⁶ a pleasure similar to the 'grateful vicissitude' of Heaven. But when Adam tells Raphael of the pleasure which he takes in paradise, there is a distinction (the seriousness of which he seems not fully

⁴¹ *PL* v 180–4; Adam and Eve's prayer.

⁴² *PL* vii 157–61.

⁴³ *PL* ii 5–6.

⁴⁴ *PL* i 255.

⁴⁵ *PL* iv 635–40. Fowler notes that 'seasons' here means 'times of day'; seasonal change has not yet happened.

⁴⁶ *PL* v 335–6.

to understand) between the delight which he takes in the natural world around him and his passion for Eve:

I... must confess to find
 In all things else delight indeed, but such
 As us'd or not, works in the mind no change,
 Nor vehement desire, these delicacies
 I mean of Taste, Sight, Smell, Herbs, Fruits and Flours,
 Walks, and the melodie of Birds; but here
 Farr otherwise, transported I behold,
 Transported touch; here passion first I felt,
 Commotion strange, in all enjoyments else
 Superiour and unmov'd.⁴⁷

The sensuous pleasures of Eden work 'in the mind no change', whereas his relationship with Eve works in him change and 'vehement desire'. 'Vehement' is etymologically *vehe* + *mens*, 'lacking mind',⁴⁸ so Adam's passion for Eve produces a change in him which destroys his rational capacities. There is a parallel here with Satan, whose successive passions changed his countenance, and the narrator's comment in his case—that 'heav'nly minds from such distempers foule | Are ever cleere'⁴⁹—applies also to Adam, judging him: if his passion for Eve distorts his mind, then it is a change which draws him away from Heaven.

Eve had professed herself content with her place in the Edenic order, but in her dream she ominously delights in change:

Forthwith up to the Clouds
 With him I flew, and underneath beheld
 The Earth outstretcht immense, a prospect wide
 And various: wondring at my flight and change
 To this high exaltation.⁵⁰

After she has taken the fruit, she knows that she has changed, even though she is as yet unaware of what this change is. She muses:

But to *Adam* in what sort
 Shall I appeer? shall I to him make known
 As yet my change, and give him to partake
 Full happiness with mee, or rather not,
 But keep the odds of Knowledge in my power
 Without Copartner?⁵¹

Change now has instigated a new world in which 'power' is the key term, in which knowledge is an instrument of power, and in which a gift is also a marker of power.



⁴⁷ PL viii 523–32. For Milton's treatment of passion see Christopher Tilmouth, *Passion's Triumph over Reason: A History of the Moral Imagination from Spenser to Rochester* (Oxford, 2007), pp. 190–209.

⁴⁸ As Fowler notes, *ad loc.*; cf. Chapter 7 *DESIRE*, p. 65 n. 14.

⁴⁹ PL iv 118–19.

⁵⁰ PL v 86–90.

⁵¹ PL ix 816–21.

After the transformation of the couple into warring, recriminatory monads, each defending their own 'I', they face the more radical change into mortality and exile: they 'now | Must suffer change',⁵² and Death 'snuff'd the smell | Of mortal change on Earth'.⁵³ Whereas prelapsarian Eden had known no change, or rather had known no decay or death,⁵⁴ the consequences of the Fall include changes to the Earth itself. 'Sin, not Time, first wraught the change',⁵⁵ which is seen to

bring in change
Of Seasons to each Clime; else had the Spring
Perpetual smil'd on Earth with vernant Flours,
Equal in Days and Nights.⁵⁶

'Spring Perpetual'—'perpetual' being an adjective which Milton twice applies to the grateful vicissitudes of Heaven⁵⁷—is now out of reach for mankind. And this change is destructive:

These changes in the Heav'ns, though slow, produc'd
Like change on Sea and Land, sidereal blast,
Vapour, and Mist, and Exhalation hot,
Corrupt and Pestilent.⁵⁸

Seeing these changes in the natural world around them, Adam says to Eve:

O *Eve*, some further change awaits us nigh,
Which Heav'n by these mute signs in Nature shews
Forerunners of his purpose, or to warn
Us haply too secure of our discharge
From penaltie.⁵⁹

'Haply too secure': this invites some reflection on the uses which Milton makes in *Paradise Lost* of the word 'secure'. The *Oxford English Dictionary* records that its principal sense had both positive and negative inflections: 'Free from care, apprehension, or anxiety; carefree, untroubled. Formerly frequent in negative sense: overconfident; careless; complacent'.⁶⁰ Free from care, or complacent? What would make one secure from the destructive effects of change? The fallen angels seek security as a product of monarchical or military power:⁶¹ Satan says that in Hell 'we may reign secure';⁶² they consider that until their rebellion God 'till then as one secure | Sat on his Throne, upheld by old repute, | Consent or custome',⁶³ and

⁵² *PL* x 212–13. ⁵³ *PL* x 272–3.

⁵⁴ The seasons are simultaneous, with both blossoms and fruit at the same time: see *PL* iv 148, and Fowler's note *ad loc.*

⁵⁵ *PL* ix 70.

⁵⁶ *PL* x 677–80. For contemporary interpretations of the changes in the natural world after the Fall see Philip C. Almond, *Adam and Eve in Seventeenth-Century Thought* (Cambridge, 1999), pp. 204ff.

⁵⁷ *PL* v 182, vi 6. ⁵⁸ *PL* x 692–5. ⁵⁹ *PL* xi 193–7.

⁶⁰ *OED*³ *s.v.* *secure adj.* 1a. cf. the senses of the Latin *securus*: free from fears or anxieties; negligent, indifferent, careless (*OLD s.v.* *securus* 1, 4).

⁶¹ Cf. *PL* i 598, where monarchs fear change as loss of power. God, however, is truly 'secure' in Heaven through his omniscience (*PL* vi 672).

⁶² *PL* i 261.

⁶³ *PL* i 638–40. For Milton's own distrust of custom see my *Milton and the People* (Oxford, 2014), pp. 57–8.

Beelzebub says that 'Heav'ns high Arbitrator sit[s] secure | In his own strength'.⁶⁴ Their notion of security is an illusion, as we see when Satan assures his followers that they may 'in some milde Zone | Dwell not unvisited of Heav'ns fair Light | Secure'.⁶⁵ God asks Raphael to instruct Adam as to the true foundations upon which his happiness rests, to explain

Happiness in his power left free to will,
Left to his own free Will, his Will though free,
Yet mutable; whence warne him to beware
He swerve not too secure.⁶⁶

Why that qualification, 'free, | Yet mutable'? Surely freedom entails the possibility of change? But the warning is not redundant. 'Mutable' means not only 'liable or subject to change or alteration' but 'inconstant in mind, will, or disposition; fickle; variable'.⁶⁷ Adam's will is not only subject to change but potentially inconstant and fickle. Therefore, says God, 'warne him to beware | He swerve not too secure'. In what sense 'swerve'?

2. To turn aside, deviate in movement from the straight or direct course. 3. To turn away or be deflected from a (right) course of action, a line of conduct, an opinion, etc.; to waver, vacillate. To forsake, desert, be disloyal to (a person). To deviate from the right; to err; to go astray, esp. morally; to transgress. 4. To give way; to sway, totter. 5. To rove, stray.⁶⁸

So how might man go astray—defect, even—by being too secure? By being too self-confident, by complacently trusting his own mutable will, by lapsing into change. 'God made thee perfect, not immutable', Raphael warns Adam.⁶⁹

In Eden Eve naïvely maintains that they are 'secure', whether singly or together:

Let us not then suspect our happie State
Left so imperfet by the Maker wise,
As not secure to single or combin'd.⁷⁰

Adam in reply attempts to qualify this simplistic understanding of security, explaining that God in creating them

Nothing imperfet or deficient left
Of all that he Created, much less Man,
Or aught that might his happie State secure,
Secure from outward force; within himself
The danger lies, yet lies within his power:
Against his will he can receive no harme.⁷¹

⁶⁴ *PL* ii 359–60. ⁶⁵ *PL* ii 397–9.

⁶⁶ *PL* v 235–8. Adam angrily reminds Eve that he had declared his love for her to be 'immutable' (ix 1162–5).

⁶⁷ *OED*³ *s.v.* mutable 1a, 2.

⁶⁸ Abridged from *OED* *s.v.* swerve *v.* Abdiel will not 'swerve from truth' (*PL* v 902).

⁶⁹ *PL* v 524. ⁷⁰ *PL* ix 337–9.

⁷¹ *PL* ix 345–50. He then says: 'But if thou think, trial unsought may finde | Us both securer then thus warnd thou seemst, | Go;' (*PL* ix 370–2).

But Eve will not listen, and after their Fall Adam returns to the word 'secure' in the recriminations which they exchange:

But confidence then bore thee on, secure
 Either to meet no danger, or to finde
 Matter of glorious trial.⁷²

Such security was a fatal overconfidence. For Adam the only security which the postlapsarian world now seems to offer is death: 'there I should rest | And sleep secure'.⁷³ Death, as Michael explains, is for many the outcome of changes which are forms of decay:

thou must outlive
 Thy youth, thy strength, thy beauty, which will change
 To witherd weak and gray.⁷⁴

There is spiritual as well as physical change in the world after the Fall as the devils seduce mankind from the true worship of God, transforming devotion into idolatry:

By falsities and lyes the greatest part
 Of Mankind they corrupted to forsake
 God thir Creator, and th' invisible
 Glory of him that made them, to transform
 Oft to the Image of a Brute.⁷⁵

But this is not the end of the story. Michael's account of the birth of the Messiah leads Adam to hail him as 'finisher | Of utmost hope!' and the Messiah as 'our great expectation',⁷⁶ for the dire changes wrought by the Fall are now overwritten by the hope of redemption which Michael holds out, and Adam greets this change in the human condition as the work of

goodness infinite, goodness immense!
 That all this good of evil shall produce,
 And evil turn to good; more wonderful
 Then that by which creation first brought forth
 Light out of darkness!⁷⁷

Man's disobedience has annulled the hope of a gradual ascent towards the heavenly realm, but instead Adam and his heirs are offered a more wonderful transformation as the Messiah changes darkness into light.



There is one form of change which the poem proudly resists, when Milton himself declares:

More safe I Sing with mortal voice, unchang'd
 To hoarse or mute, though fall'n on evil dayes,
 On evil dayes though fall'n, and evil tongues.⁷⁸

⁷² *PL* ix 1175–7.

⁷⁶ *PL* xii 375–8.

⁷³ *PL* x 778–9.

⁷⁷ *PL* xii 469–73.

⁷⁴ *PL* xi 538–40.

⁷⁸ *PL* vii 24–6.

⁷⁵ *PL* i 367–71.

Once again Milton associates the rhetorical figure of chiasmus with change—paradoxically, one might think. But here the repetition invites us to reflect that although Milton may have ‘fall’n on’ evil days, this is quite different from having fallen spiritually; this is a change in circumstances that does not affect his voice, which remains ‘unchang’d’. Chiasmus here figures constancy. This is the only time in the poem when Milton finds occasion to use the word ‘unchang’d’.

5 Choice

Charg'd not to touch the interdicted Tree . . .
and slight that sole command,
So easily obeyd amid the choice
Of all tastes else to please thir appetite,
Though wandering.

Paradise Lost vii 46–50

Before we reach the account of the fatal choices made by Adam and Eve, Milton prepares our understanding of how choices are made by showing us the choices of Satan and his followers.¹ In Book I Satan, with characteristic bravado and self-deception, announces to his comrade Beelzebub:

Here at least
We shall be free; th' Almighty hath not built
Here for his envy, will not drive us hence:
Here we may reign secure, and in my choice
To reign is worth ambition though in Hell.
Better to reign in Hell, than serve in Heav'n.²

A choice is either an act or the object of an act: it is the action of selecting one thing rather than another, the power or right to make such a selection, or the thing chosen.³ Satan's use of the word 'choyce' here implies that he has made a conscious decision to reign in Hell, actually preferring that to other options, though we will discover that no such choice has been made: the decision which he did make was to rebel against God, thus seeking, in effect, to reign in Heaven, and the idea of reigning in Hell is an *ex post facto* rationalization of the catastrophic and unforeseen outcome of that choice. One might argue that in defying God he did choose Hell, which is understood theologically as the state of definitive self-exclusion from God through one's own free choice,⁴ though the full implications of Satan's choice only become clear to him subsequently as he discovers that Hell is both an inward

¹ For a discussion of the importance of choices in Milton's poetry generally see Leslie Brisman, *Milton's Poetry of Choice and Its Romantic Heirs* (Ithaca, N.Y., 1973).

² *PL* i 258–63. *then*: *than*.

³ *OED s.v. choice n.*: (1) the act of choosing; (2) the power, right, or faculty of choosing; (3) that which is specially chosen on account of its excellence.

⁴ CCC § 1033.

and an outward state of being. To say in this opening speech that he has chosen to reign in Hell is false, and so the phrase 'in my choyce' seems to mean little more than 'in my opinion'. Shortly afterwards Satan asks sarcastically whether the fallen angels have chosen their apparently easy recumbent posture:

have ye chos'n this place
After the toyl of Battel to repose
Your wearied vertue, for the ease you find
To slumber here, as in the Vales of Heav'n?⁵

(Actually, they have chosen Hell, but not for repose.) Previously, when inciting them to rebellion, he had challenged them, 'Will ye submit your necks, and chuse to bend | The supple knee?'.⁶ They had a choice in Heaven, but they and we soon realize that any choices which the fallen angels make in Hell are either miserable or illusory. Illusory when Moloc urges that they should not languish in Hell contriving schemes but

rather choose
Arm'd with Hell flames and fury all at once
O're Heav'ns high Towrs to force resistless way.⁷

They might choose to resume their attack on Heaven, but they cannot choose to make that attack 'resistless' (i.e. irresistible); and in any case, as the narrator has already reassured us, all that they do is subjected to 'the will | And high permission of all-ruling Heaven'.⁸ Mammon makes another mistake about choice when he argues that since 'amidst | Thick clouds and dark doth Heav'ns all-ruling Sire | Choose to reside',⁹ they can surely choose to imitate Heaven's light down in Hell. Through their rhetoric the fallen angels maintain the illusion not only that they have the power and the right to exercise choice, but that they constitute a free and orderly polity in which Satan can summon those who are 'By place or choice the worthiest',¹⁰ can claim that their 'free choice' has created him their leader,¹¹ and can urge them to exercise circumspection in their voting ('Choice in our suffrage'¹²) when choosing who will undertake the hazardous expedition to Earth. The poet's comment that

none among the choice and prime
Of those Heav'n-warring Champions could be found
So hardie as to proffer or accept
Alone the dreadful voyage.¹³

plays along ironically with the devils' own mistaken assumption that words such as 'choice'¹⁴ can still apply to them as heroic warriors. In truth, the only kinds of choice which remain to them are miserable, as

⁵ *PL* i 318–21.

⁶ *PL* v 787–8.

⁷ *PL* ii 60–2.

⁸ *PL* i 211–12.

⁹ *PL* ii 263–5.

¹⁰ *PL* i 759.

¹¹ *PL* ii 19.

¹² *PL* ii 415. *Choice*: care in choosing, circumspection, judgement (*OED* 6, citing this example).

¹³ *PL* ii 423–6.

¹⁴ In the sense *OED* *s.v.* choice *adj.* 1a: worthy of being chosen, of special excellence.

each his several way
Pursues, as inclination or sad choice
Leads him perplex.¹⁵

Subsequently, Satan in his soliloquy on Mount Niphates, having first blamed God for his plight, acknowledges that he alone carries responsibility for what he has chosen, 'since against his thy will | Chose freely what it now so justly rues'.¹⁶ This is the most wretched choice of all.

Both men and angels are given the freedom to choose ('the genuinely free choice to be genuinely obedient'¹⁷) as God himself explains. Without such freedom, he says,

What pleasure I from such obedience paid,
When Will and Reason (Reason also is choice)
Useless and vain, of freedom both despoild,
Made passive both, had servd necessitie,
Not mee.¹⁸

That reason is choice had been a prominent message in *Areopagitica* (1644), where Milton, in defending the liberty of unlicensed printing, insisted that 'God uses not to captivat [man] under a perpetuall childhood of prescription, but trusts him with the gift of reason to be his own chooser'; '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'.¹⁹ Explaining what he understands by moral choice as it is encountered in the postlapsarian world, Milton writes:

As therefore the state of man now is; what wisdom can there be to choose, what continence to forbear without the knowledge of evill? 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 wayfaring Christian. I cannot praise a fugitive and cloister'd vertue, unexercis'd & unbreath'd, that never sallies out and sees her adversary, but slinks out of the race, where that immortall 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 triall, and triall is by what is contrary. That vertue therefore which is but a youngling in the contemplation of evill, and knows not the utmost that vice promises to her followers, and rejects it, is but a blank vertue, not a pure; her whitenesse is but an excrementall whitenesse; Which was

¹⁵ *PL* ii 523–5. *perplex*: not only 'baffled, confused, bewildered', but, more strongly, 'troubled, afflicted, tormented' (*OED*³ 1a, b). For the importance of 'or' in *PL* see Peter C. Herman, *Destabilizing Milton: 'Paradise Lost' and the Poetics of Incertitude* (New York, 2005), ch. 2.

¹⁶ *PL* iv 71–2. In this soliloquy we hear Satan articulating his thought processes as he chooses evil, but Brismar also points to the significance of silence at moments of choice: 'The importance of silence as representation of timelessness is that it makes the silent moment an apprehension of presentness, the arrest of time in which choice is real' (*Milton's Poetry of Choice and Its Romantic Heirs*, p. 88).

¹⁷ This happy formulation is J. H. Prynne's in his *George Herbert, 'Love [III]': A Discursive Commentary* (Cambridge, 2011), p. 50.

¹⁸ *PL* iii 107–11; cf. Raphael at v 529–34.

¹⁹ *Areopagitica: Works* iv 310, 319. *motions*: puppet shows.

the reason why our sage and serious Poet *Spencer*, whom I dare be known to think a better teacher than *Scotus* or *Aquinas*, describing true temperance under the person of *Guion*, brings him in with his palmer through the cave of Mammon, and the bower of earthly blisse that he might see and know, and yet abstain.²⁰

In the postlapsarian world, therefore, it is impossible to choose wisely without some knowledge of evil.²¹ Christian virtue is only true Christian virtue if its path is chosen in full knowledge of the alternatives, if it truly knows ‘the utmost that vice promises to her followers’ before rejecting it. Such knowledge can most safely be obtained through wide reading, and as we travel with the characters through *The Faerie Queene*, for example, we not only encounter all manner of ostensibly alluring enticements but we learn to recognize the true from the false—to know the true by means of the false—and we share the process of misapprehension, enlightenment, and choice which Spenser’s characters experience as our surrogates. And the key to this exercise of choice is reason, through which we ‘apprehend’, ‘consider’, and ‘distinguish’, before we ‘prefer’. This process of rational recognition, sifting, and choosing is a world away from the Hobbesian model of decision making, according to which ‘deliberation’ is merely the ‘alternate Succession of Appetites, Aversions, Hopes and Fears’, a process which happens in animals as well as in men, and the ‘will’ is merely the name which we give to whatever mechanistic appetite or aversion immediately precedes an act.²²

The self-determination of which God speaks in Book III means that men are ‘Authors to themselves in all | Both what they judge and what they choose’.²³ By contrast with Calvinist ideas of predestination, Milton’s theology insists that while no one is predestined by God either to salvation or to damnation, for all have the freedom to choose their path,²⁴ there are some whom God himself has chosen to be endowed with special spiritual resources: ‘Some I have chosen of peculiar grace | Elect above the rest; so is my will’.²⁵ Some, like Samson, are, says the Chorus,

²⁰ *Areopagitica*: *Works* iv 311. *excrementall*: of the nature of an outgrowth or excrescence (*OED s.v. excremental adj.*², the first example of only two): i.e. the whiteness of untested virtue is only a superficial purity. Cf. Milton’s note from Lactantius in his *Commonplace Book*: *Cur permittit deus malum? . . . ut haberet ratio et prudentia in quo se exerceret, eligendo bona, fugiendo mala*. (‘Why does God permit evil? . . . that Reason and Judgment may have a field in which they may exercise themselves by choosing the things that are good and shunning the things that are evil’) (*Works* xviii 128–9).

²¹ Milton is well aware, however, that even wise men may choose unwisely, particularly when selecting their marriage partner, because ‘for all the warinesse can be us’d, it may yet befall a discreet man to be mistak’n in his choice’, for ‘The sobrest and best govern’d men are least practiz’d in these affairs’ (*Divorce*: *Works* iii 394). In *SA* Manoa says to Samson, with some understatement, ‘I cannot praise thy Marriage choises, Son’ (*SA* l. 420), but the Chorus thinks that women, being lacking in judgement, are particularly liable to make wrong choices: they do not have the capacity ‘to apprehend | Or value what is best | In choice, but oft to affect the wrong’ (*SA* ll. 1028–30). (The Chorus is not, of course, Milton speaking in *propria persona*.)

²² Thomas Hobbes, *Leviathan*, edited by Noel Malcolm, 3 vols (Oxford, 2012), ii 92.

²³ *PL* iii 122–3. ²⁴ See Chapter 14 *FREE*.

²⁵ *PL* iii 183–4. There are also elect angels: see *PL* iii 136, 360; vi 374–5; and cf. 1 Timothy v 21. In these instances ‘elect’ seems to signify those who have chosen to remain loyal. Milton says that ‘they are called “chosen” only in the sense that they are beloved or excellent’ (*electos non alia ratione quam dilectos vel eximios dici*) (*De Doctrina*: *OCW* viii 348–9).

such as thou hast solemnly elected,
With gifts and graces eminently adorn'd
To some great work, thy glory,
And peoples safety, which in part they effect.²⁶

There will also be a chosen people, the people of Israel,²⁷ inhabiting a 'Promis'd Land to God so dear', over which he casts 'his eye with choice regard',²⁸ though the Jews were, says Milton, subsequently rejected by God, who instead chose all races as recipients of the gospel.²⁹

Adam and Eve, the first of 'A generation, whom his choice regard | Should favour equal to the Sons of Heaven',³⁰ inhabit a garden which God himself has selected for them, a place 'Chos'n by the sovran Planter, when he fram'd | All things to mans delightful use'.³¹ All things, that is, except one tree, as Adam himself acknowledges when he tells Eve that the choice which lies before them is between abundant riches, with just one exception:

Then let us not think hard
One easie prohibition, who enjoy
Free leave so large to all things else, and choice
Unlimited of manifold delights.³²

The choice which first Eve and then Adam will make when presented with the fruit of this forbidden tree is prepared narratorially through a number of instances of them making innocent choices, learning how to choose before they make the crucial choice. Adam's first choice is a good one, the recognition that he needs a companion other than the animals, and it is commended by God:

A nice and suttile happiness I see
Thou to thy self proposest, in the choice
Of thy Associates, *Adam*.³³

God's approving words 'nice and suttile' are validations of Adam's use of his reason in choosing to share his life with someone with whom he can converse rationally.³⁴ Eve, too, chooses well when she selects food with which to entertain Raphael, and

from each bough and break,
Each Plant and juiciest Gourd will pluck such choice
To entertain our Angel guest.

...

²⁶ *SA* ll. 678–81.

²⁷ However, in *De Doctrina* Milton says that although God made a covenant with the whole nation of Israel, some chose to break it; so although God's promise was addressed to, and included, the whole nation, the whole nation was not itself elect (*OCW* viii 660–1).

²⁸ *PL* iii 531, 534.

²⁹ *De Doctrina*: *OCW* viii 74–5: *reiectionis Iudaeis, omnes gentes elegit, quibus annuntiari potius evangelium voluerit*. Milton subsequently says that *electos et credentes*, 'the chosen and believers' are the same (viii 84–5).

³⁰ *PL* i 653–4; Satan speaking. *choice*: *OED* *adj.* 3: 'careful in choosing'; last example 1656.

³¹ *PL* iv 691–2.

³² *PL* iv 432–5. Cf. the epigraph to this chapter.

³³ *PL* viii 399–401.

³⁴ Though 'nice' and 'suttile' are applied here to 'happiness' they are adjectives which relate to the fine-grained operations of the intellect.

She turns, on hospitable thoughts intent
What choice to chuse for delicacie best.³⁵

This is a choice of the choicest fruits for Raphael, who holds out to the couple the prospect of a wondrous choice if they remain obedient, a choice indeed between two paradises, for they

may at choice
Here or in Heav'nly Paradises dwell;
If ye be found obedient.³⁶

Adam in turn reassures Raphael that he understands

The rigid interdiction, which resounds
Yet dreadful in mine eare, though in my choice
Not to incur.³⁷

This interdicted fruit is in his choice, that is, within his power to choose or to reject. As the writer of Ecclesiasticus says:

The Lord...himselfe made man from the beginning, and left him in the hand of his counsell, If thou wilt, to keepe the Commandements, and to performe acceptable faithfulnessse. He hath set fire and water before thee: stretch forth thy hand vnto whether thou wilt. Before man is life and death, and whether him liketh shalbe giuen him.³⁸

At first, the choices which Adam and Eve make when gardening seem not to come anywhere near this rigid interdiction, but Milton shows us that it is Eve who, with increasing insistence, seeks to exercise choice in matters in which choice is either unnecessary or hazardous. Her request to work on her own appears simply to be made in order to work more efficiently, without the erotic distraction of proximity to the naked Adam:

Let us divide our labours, thou where choice
Leads thee, or where most needs.
...
For while so near each other thus all day
Our taske we choose, what wonder if so near
Looks intervene and smiles.³⁹

But Adam is not, it emerges, free to work where choice leads him, because his choice is to work alongside Eve, whereas her choice is to work separately. Their choices are incompatible, and this disparity creates what is in effect a struggle for power within the couple. Since Adam receives added strength to meet any trial when working next to her, he says,

Why shouldst not thou like sense within thee feel
When I am present, and thy trial choose
With me, best witness of thy Vertue tri'd.⁴⁰

³⁵ *PL* v 326–33.

³⁶ *PL* v 499–501. It is also a characteristic of spirits that they can choose their sex and shape (*PL* i 423–31).

³⁷ *PL* viii 332–6.

³⁸ Ecclesiasticus xv 13–17.

³⁹ *PL* ix 214–22.

⁴⁰ *PL* ix 315–17.

But Eve persuades Adam to acquiesce in her choice. Gradually her insistence on choosing becomes a wilful self-assertion which forgets both her proper subordination to Adam and her due obedience to God. At first, in discussing with the serpent the tree with the wondrous fruit she shows an innocent delight in choosing from the abundance of God's gifts,

For many are the Trees of God that grow
In Paradise, and various, yet unknown
To us, in such abundance lies our choice,
As leaves a greater store of Fruit untoucht.⁴¹

But reason is choice, choice is based upon reason, and in the course of her discussion with the serpent Eve tries to reason her way through the question of whether she should take the fruit, but because her reasoning fails to take proper account of the divine prohibition it deviates into a specious reasoning, particularly into rhetorical questions,⁴² and, led by desire rather than by reason, she makes the wrong choice. She rationalizes a choice which she has already made on non-rational grounds. As God says in *Paradise Regain'd*, she falls because she is 'By fallacy surpriz'd',⁴³ but most of these fallacies are of her own making.

Sad ironies begin to cluster around the word 'choice' and its cognates when we see that Adam

Waiting desirous her return, had wove
Of choicest Flours a Garland to adorne
Her Tresses, and her rural labours crown.⁴⁴

But such choicest flowers fall from his hand and fade. It is clear from the silent soliloquy in which Adam reflects upon what Eve has done, and upon what response to make, that his choice is made in full knowledge of the moral character of what he is doing, even if the specific consequences of his choice are as yet unknown to him. When he has told her of his decision, Eve

embrac'd him, and for joy
Tenderly wept, much won that he his Love
Had so enobl'd, as of choice to incurr
Divine displeasure for her sake, or Death.⁴⁵

but these words return in a darker hue later on when she blames him for allowing her a choice ('why didst not thou the Head | Command me absolutely not to go'⁴⁶) and he retorts:

Is this the Love, is this the recompence
Of mine to thee, ingrateful *Eve*, exprest
Immutable when thou wert lost, not I,
Who might have liv'd and joyd immortal bliss,
Yet willingly chose rather Death with thee.⁴⁷

⁴¹ *PL* ix 618–21.

⁴⁵ *PL* ix 990–3.

⁴² See Chapter 30 ?.

⁴⁶ *PL* ix 1155–6.

⁴³ *PR* i 155.

⁴⁷ *PL* ix 1163–7.

⁴⁴ *PL* ix 839–41.

Soon another choice becomes necessary, as they seek to hide their shame with leaves, and

both together went
Into the thickest Wood, there soon they chose
The Figtree.⁴⁸

Eve has blamed Adam for allowing her a choice; now Adam blames God for creating him without giving him any choice in the matter, and imagines that his sons, inheriting the consequences of their father's sin, may also blame him for begetting them without their choosing.⁴⁹ Eventually, Adam admits to himself that

God made thee of choice his own, and of his own
To serve him, thy reward was of his grace,
Thy punishment then justly is at his Will.⁵⁰

Eve counsels that they should pre-empt the inherited punishment which will be inflicted on their progeny by ending their lives themselves, thus seeking the 'easier choice', 'Of many ways to die the shortest choosing'.⁵¹

But God has chosen otherwise. He 'sees not as man sees, chooses not as man chooses'.⁵² The course of human history as revealed to Adam by Michael is in part the story of God's chosen people, the elect nation of Israel, which we see being led through the desert:

the Race elect
Safe towards *Canaan* from the shoar advance
Through the wilde Desert, not the readiest way,
Least entring on the *Canaanite* allarm'd
Warr terrifie them inexpert, and feare
Return them back to *Egypt*, choosing rather
Inglorious life with servitude.⁵³

Milton had thought that in his own times the people of England were also a 'Race elect', entrusted by God with a special vocation to establish an exemplary Protestant nation, a calling which they had abandoned at the Restoration. At the end of *The Readie & Easie Way to Establish a Free Commonwealth* (1660), a work whose title

⁴⁸ *PL* ix 1099–101.

⁴⁹ *PL* x 752–65. In *The State of Innocence* Eve maintains that she and Adam are the victims of God's choice to create them and place them in Eden:

Did we concur to life, or chuse to be,
Was it our will which form'd, or was it he?
Since 'twas his choice, not ours, which plac'd us here;
The laws we did not chuse, why should we bear?
...

Why is life forc'd on man; who might he choose,
Would not accept, what he, with pain, must lose?

(John Dryden, *The State of Innocence, and Fall of Man: An Opera* (London, 1677), pp. 41, 43).

⁵⁰ *PL* x 766–8.

⁵¹ *PL* x 978, 1005.

⁵² *Areopagitica: Works* iv 351.

⁵³ *PL* xii 214–20.

and imagery seem to be recalled in that passage on the Israelites from *Paradise Lost*, he had urged the English people,

though they seem now chusing them a captain back for *Egypt*, to bethink themselves a little and consider whether they are rushing; to exhort this torrent also of the people, not to be so impetuous, but to keep thir due channell; and at length recovering and uniting thir better resolutions, now that they see already how open and unbounded the insolence and rage is of our common enemies, to stay these ruinous proceedings; justly and timely fearing to what a precipice of destruction the deluge of this epidemic madness would hurrie us through the general defection of a misguided and abus'd multitude.⁵⁴

The people are not using their reason in making this choice, so they must pause and 'bethink themselves'; instead, in a kind of madness they are behaving like turbulent water which is overflowing its proper channel.⁵⁵ At the beginning of *Paradise Lost* Milton had sought to emulate Moses,

That Shepherd, who first taught the chosen Seed,
In the Beginning how the Heav'ns and Earth
Rose out of *Chaos*.⁵⁶

He may have failed through his prose writings to lead the chosen Seed of England to make the right political choice,⁵⁷ but Milton could still, in *Paradise Lost*, show individuals how to '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'.⁵⁸ For Adam and Eve at the end of the poem,

The World was all before them, where to choose
Thir place of rest, and Providence thir guide.⁵⁹

So *Paradise Lost* finishes with another choice, a completely free choice of where to live, only excepting Eden, which has been lost irrevocably through wilfully disobedient choices. But postlapsarian man does not have to repeat such fatal choices if he heeds his new guide, providence.

⁵⁴ *Readie Way: Works* vi 149.

⁵⁵ Milton may be recalling here the simile in *Cooper's Hill* ll. 343–58, in which Denham likens the proper relationship between King and people to the Thames flowing smoothly within its banks, and warns against forcing the water into new channels, provoking a dangerous inundation (*The Poetical Works of Sir John Denham*, edited by Theodore Howard Banks, second edition (n.p., 1969), pp. 87–9).

⁵⁶ *PL* i 8–10.

⁵⁷ For Milton's abiding distrust of the capacity of the people to make right choices see my *Milton and the People* (Oxford, 2014).

⁵⁸ *Areopagitica: Works* iv 311. This process of informed choice may also be guided by the eloquence of wise guides, who may 'so incite, and in a manner, charme the multitude into the love of that which is really good as to imbrace it ever after, not of custome and awe, which most men do, but of choice and purpose, with true and constant delight' (*Reason: Works* iii 181).

⁵⁹ *PL* xii 646–7.

6

Dark *and* Light

from those flames
No light, but rather darkness visible
Serv'd onely to discover sights of woe.

Paradise Lost i 62–4



The poem was composed in darkness. The ‘Poet blind, yet bold’, as Andrew Marvell called him,¹ dictated each morning those lines which he had composed overnight.² In the dark times of Restoration England, composing ‘In darkness, and with dangers compast round’, Milton acknowledged to the heavenly Muse Urania that he was nevertheless

not alone, while thou
Visit'st my slumbers Nightly, or when Morn
Purples the East.³

The poem also begins in darkness in two other respects. The narrative opens in the darkness of Hell, and implicitly the process of reading also begins in darkness, since that is the condition of fallen humanity. We shall come to understand that there are two kinds of darkness: one is Satan's and man's refusal of the light of God, the other is the gracious hiding of the light of God which at once ensures our freedom and enables our approach. Darkness has profound biblical connotations which are mapped thus by Thomas Wilson, who says that in Scripture ‘darkness’ signifies:

1. The absence, privation, or want of natural light...
2. Ignorance and unbelief, which is the absence and want of spiritual light...
3. The woful and uncomfortable estate of the damned in hell, which is the absence and want of heavenly light...
4. The minde of all men, such as it is since their fall, full of blindness and sin...
5. Sin and wretchedness, the wages of sin.⁴

¹ Andrew Marvell, ‘On *Paradise Lost*’ l. 1, prefixed to the second edition of *PL* (1674): *Works* ii 3; cf. *The Poems of Andrew Marvell*, edited by Nigel Smith, second edition (London, 2007), pp. 180–4 for annotation.

² The testimony of John Phillips in *The Early Lives of Milton*, edited by Helen Darbishire (London, 1932), p. 33.

³ *PL* vii 27–30.

⁴ Wilson, p. 137.

The minds of men are full of ignorance and error; such is the condition of the reader whom Milton sets out to illuminate, and such is the condition also of the poet, who therefore prays for divine illumination as he commences his poem, and addresses the Spirit:

Instruct me, for Thou know'st; Thou from the first
Wast present, and with mighty wings outspread
Dove-like satst brooding on the vast Abyss
And mad'st it pregnant: What in me is dark
Illumin, what is low raise and support.⁵

A poetic invocation of the Muse, asking for inspiration, but also a prayer to the Holy Spirit such as Aquinas would use before study:

tu, inquam, qui verus fons luminis et sapientiae diceris, atque supereminens principium: infundere digneris super intellectus mei tenebras tuae radium charitatis, duplices, in quibus natus sum, a me removens tenebras, peccatum, scilicet, et ignorantiam.⁶

The double darkness of *peccatum et ignorantia*, sin and ignorance, which is the condition of reading, is dramatically figured when the poem unfolds to us the geography of Hell. There are over thirty instances of the word 'dark' and its cognates in Books I and II, and such intense repetition of 'dark' establishes both the physical and spiritual condition of Hell for the inner sight of the reader.⁷ The narrative of Book IX also begins ominously in darkness, for 'Nights Hemisphere had veild the Horizon round',⁸ and it is through darkness, and carrying darkness with him, that Satan moves towards Earth on his mission to seduce Adam and Eve: 'The space of seven continu'd Nights he rode | With darkness.'⁹

The word carries a range of meanings besides the primary sense of the absence or privation of light. When Satan conceived sin, his eyes 'dizzie swumm | In darkness'¹⁰ which is both the privation of physical light and a sign of his incipient

⁵ *PL* i 19–23.

⁶ *S. Thomae Aquinatis Opuscula Omnia*, edited by Pierre Mandonnet, 5 vols (Paris, 1927), iv 542: 'You, I say, who are confessed to be the true fountain of light and wisdom, and the supreme origin of all things: pour forth a ray of your love onto the darkness of my mind, removing the twofold darkness in which I was born—sin and ignorance' (my translation). *charitatis*: other texts read *claritatis*, 'light'.

⁷ In *A Maske* Milton had made repeated use of metaphors of darkness to signify moral and spiritual corruption. Comus 'betakes him to this ominous Wood, | And in thick shelter of black shades imbowrd' (ll. 61–2) exercises his magic art. He takes possession of darkness for his 'Nocturnal sport' (l. 128; cf. ll. 122–42 generally) and for the attempt to ensnare the Lady, who is lost in the 'blind mazes' of the wood, fearing that 'envious darknes' and 'theevish Night' have stolen her brothers from her (ll. 181, 193–4) (*Works* i 87, 90, 92). The Elder Brother remarks somewhat sententiously that

He that has light within his own cleer brest
May sit i'th center, and enjoy bright day,
But he that hides a dark soul, and foul thoughts
Benighted walks under the mid-day Sun;
Himself is his own dungeon.

(*Maske* ll. 380–4; *Works* i 99)

⁸ *PL* ix 52.

⁹ *PL* ix 58–9, 63–4.

¹⁰ *PL* ii 753–4.

alienation from God; the 'dark designs'¹¹ of Satan are at once secret and sinful and destructive; the fallen angels engage in 'doubtful consultations dark',¹² which are dark because they are futile exercises of a form of reason which is no longer illuminated by the divine light; the 'dark Idolatries | Of alienated *Judah*'¹³ are a form of worship which is apostasy from God; and the 'dark Abyss'¹⁴ through which Sin and Death build a ready and easy way from Earth to Hell signifies the fathomless depth of sin. These varied uses have a common conceptual root, which is that darkness is morally and spiritually a condition of alienation from God. St Augustine says that 'we should understand "dark abyss" as a metaphor meaning that life which is formless unless it is turned towards its Creator. Only in this way can it be formed and cease being an abyss, and be illuminated and cease being dark'.¹⁵ But Milton does not make even the apparently physical darkness a simple matter, for it is, in his famous phrase, 'darkness visible'.¹⁶ This darkness seems to be something more than the privation of light, as Milton's concept of evil is something more than the privation of good, which is the classic Augustinian understanding.¹⁷

We might contrast the darkness of Hell with the different form of darkness which surrounds the Son in *Paradise Regain'd*:

Darkness now rose,
As day-light sunk, and brought in lowring night
Her shadowy off-spring unsubstantial both,
Privation meer of light and absent day.¹⁸

The idea that darkness 'rose' suggests that it may have agency, but that possibility is negated by the definition of both darkness and night as 'unsubstantial', merely the 'Privation' of light; they may be 'lowring' but they have no substantial existence in and of themselves. They have no power to threaten the Son. There is also darkness in Heaven: it is night when Abdiel leaves Satan and returns to the sacred hill:

All night the dreadless Angel unpurs'd
Through Heav'n's wide Champaign held his way, till Morn,
Wak't by the circling Hours, with rosie hand
Unbarr'd the gates of Light. There is a Cave
Within the Mount of God, fast by his Throne,
Where light and darkness in perpetual round

¹¹ *PL* i 213.

¹² *PL* ii 486.

¹³ *PL* i 456–7.

¹⁴ *PL* ii 1027.

¹⁵ *ut translato verbo tenebrosam abyssum intelligamus naturam vite informem, nisi convertatur ad Creatorem: quo solo modo formari potest, ut non sit abyssus; et illuminari, ut non sit tenebrosa* (*De Genesi ad Litteram Libri Duodecim* I i 3; *Patrologia Latina* xxxiv 217; *The Literal Meaning of Genesis*, translated by John Hammond Taylor (New York, 1982), p. 20).

¹⁶ *PL* i 63. The phrase may derive from Augustine, who says that because evil is a defect, to seek its efficient cause is as futile as trying to see darkness or hear silence (*De Civitate Dei* XII vii); the parallel is pointed out by William Poole, *Milton and the Idea of the Fall* (Cambridge, 2005), p. 150; cf. Christopher Tilmouth, 'Milton on Knowing Good from Evil', in *John Milton: Life, Writing, Reputation*, edited by Paul Hammond and Blair Worden (Oxford, 2010), pp. 43–65, at p. 47, and John M. Steadman, *Milton's Biblical and Classical Imagery* (Pittsburgh, Pa., 1984), ch. 6.

¹⁷ See John Hick, *Evil and the God of Love* (London, 1966), *passim*; and Chapter 11 *EVIL*, pp. 106–11.

¹⁸ *PR* iv 397–400.

Lodge and dislodge by turns, which makes through Heav'n
 Grateful vicissitude, like Day and Night;
 Light issues forth, and at the other dore
 Obsequious darkness enters, till her houre
 To veile the Heav'n, though darkness there might well
 Seem twilight here; and now went forth the Morn
 Such as in highest Heav'n, arrayd in Gold
 Empyrean, from before her vanisht Night,
 Shot through with orient Beams.¹⁹

This darkness is only a pleasing veiling of the Heaven, a 'Grateful vicissitude, like Day and Night'—*like* them, but not actually either day or night. Rather, it is 'for change delectable, not need', a 'grateful Twilight (for Night comes not there | In darker veile)'.²⁰ As light and darkness come from the Mount of God in a perpetual round, they are part of a divinely ordered harmony. Such darkness is 'obsequious', that is, obedient, dutiful, complying with the will of God.²¹ It is not oppositional. But Satan disturbs the gentle and obedient darkness of Heaven, for

Soon as midnight brought on the duskie houre
 Friendliest to sleep and silence, he resolv'd
 With all his Legions to dislodge, and leave
 Unworshipt, unobey'd the Throne supream.²²

Thus the symbolic meaning of darkness begins to change.

Because we are told about it so insistently, the darkness of Hell may seem substantial, not simply the absence of light.²³ When Satan is moving through Chaos he wonders 'Which way the neerest coast of darkness lyes | Bordering on light',²⁴ so darkness appears to be sufficiently material to have a coast and a border. Light also seems substantial: Raphael likewise speaks of 'the coasts of Light',²⁵ and God observes Satan flying in 'the Precincts of light'.²⁶ The sun is 'made porous to receive | And drink the liquid Light', and from the sun 'as to thir Fountain other Starrs | Repairing, in thir gold'n Urns draw Light'.²⁷ However, Milton's is not a Manichean universe in which autonomous powers of light and dark are engaged in a perpetual struggle. Cowley in his Pindaric ode on 'The Plagues of Egypt' had written of

the deep, baleful Caves of *Hell* below,
 Where the old *Mother Night* does grow,
Substantial Night, that does disclaime,
Privation's empty Name.²⁸

¹⁹ PL vi 1–15. *Grateful*: agreeable, welcome (*OED* s.v. grateful *adj.* 1). *vicissitude*: change, successive substitution of one thing or condition for another (*OED* s.v. vicissitude *n.* 2).

²⁰ PL v 629, 645–6.

²¹ *OED*³ s.v. obsequious *adj.* 1a.

²² PL v 667–70.

²³ Thomas N. Corns observes that light and dark often appear to have a materiality in *PL* (*Milton's Language* (Oxford, 1990), pp. 101–2). Cf. also the almost substantial 'vacant interlunar cave' which is the darkness in which the moon hides (*SA* l. 89).

²⁴ PL ii 958–9.

²⁵ PL viii 245.

²⁶ PL iii 88. *Precincts*: used particularly for an enclosure surrounding consecrated ground (*OED*³ s.v. precinct *n.* 1a).

²⁷ PL vii 361–2, 364–5.

²⁸ Abraham Cowley, *Poems*, edited by A. R. Waller (Cambridge, 1905), p. 226. The 'Pindarique Odes' were first printed in Cowley's *Poems* (London, 1656).

But Milton is a subtler poet and theologian than Cowley, and he avoids saying that the darkness is substantial. It is 'darkness visible'. Several theologians and poets had imagined that the flames of Hell burn with heat but give out no light.²⁹ What this darkness does is 'to discover sights of woe', that is, it reveals to the fallen angels the contours of their prison, and in so doing it is perhaps an instrument of divine justice, and a revelation of their spiritual condition.

The rebel angels repeatedly seek to redescribe this darkness as something else, trying to escape it by the self-deluding work of their imaginations. Satan rouses his followers by proclaiming:

For this Infernal Pit shall never hold
Cælestial Spirits in Bondage, nor th' Abyss
Long under darkness cover.

...

He spake: and to confirm his words, out-flew
Millions of flaming swords, drawn from the thighs
Of mighty Cherubim; the sudden blaze
Far round illumin'd hell.³⁰

But the darkness of the abyss is not within their power to change or escape, and the blaze from the flaming swords which illumines Hell is only an illusion of power, a diabolical parody of light. In the debate which follows, Belial argues that as they become accustomed to the pains of Hell God will lessen the heat of the flames, and then they

to the place conformd
In temper and in nature, will receive
Familiar the fierce heat, and void of pain;
This horror will grow milde, this darkness light.³¹

But the speciousness of his rhetoric is evident from the string of hypotheses which lead up to this conclusion ('if... may... perhaps... or... or'³²), and his idea that being 'conformd' to their surroundings will afford relief brings into play an ironic echo of St Paul's words to the Romans: 'bee not conformed to this world: but be ye transformed by the renewing of your minde, that ye may proue what is that good, that acceptable and perfect will of God'.³³ This Pauline transformation is the opposite of what Belial intends, and the intertextual echo acts as a judgement upon Belial's proposition. Moreover, in assuming that in time darkness will grow light, Belial makes a double mistake, about the nature of time and about the nature of their darkness: in Heaven or on Earth the regular rhythm of light and dark does allow darkness to grow light, but in Hell there is no temporal progress; besides, darkness is the condition of their punishment and a manifestation of their state, not a temporary aspect of the climate. But perhaps Belial means that this almost material darkness will grow light in the sense that it will become less weighty, easier to bear; if so, he again mistakes its nature as God's punishment on them and their self-inflicted condition of alienation from Heaven, neither of which will change.

²⁹ See the notes by Fowler and Miner, *ad PL* i 63.

³¹ *PL* ii 217–20.

³² See Chapter 20 *IF AND PERHAPS*.

³⁰ *PL* i 657–66.

³³ Romans xii 2.

Mammon also fails to understand the nature of their darkness when he urges:

This deep world
Of darkness do we dread? How oft amidst
Thick clouds and dark doth Heav'n's all-ruling Sire
Choose to reside, his Glory unobscur'd,
And with the Majesty of darkness round
Covers his Throne; from whence deep thunders roar
Must'ring thir rage, and Heav'n resembles Hell?
As he our darkness, cannot we his Light
Imitate when we please? This Desert soile
Wants not her hidden lustre, Gemms and Gold;
Nor want we skill or Art, from whence to raise
Magnificence; and what can Heav'n shew more?³⁴

Rhetorical questions are always liable to be dangerous in *Paradise Lost*: they are part of the deceitful rhetoric of Satan, and a habit which Eve fatally acquires in Book IX.³⁵ In this case, *erotema* helps Mammon to evade scrutiny of several false propositions. By using the same word he suggests that the darkness which they endure is the same as the darkness with which God surrounds himself, whereas the former is their punishment and the latter (as we shall see) is a manifestation of divine glory. As the darkness in Heaven is not an imitation of hellish darkness, so it is false to suppose that the fallen angels can imitate heavenly light when they please. (Even Mammon does not claim that they can *create* such light: imitation is all to which they can aspire.) Mammon the materialist cannot, or will not, see that it is impossible for true light to be generated from gems and gold. All Hell can produce is a dazzling building where

from the arched roof
Pendant by suttile Magic many a row
Of Starry Lamps and blazing Cressets fed
With *Naphtha* and *Asphaltus* yeilded light
As from a sky.³⁶

This is, of course, merely an imitation, wrought by diabolical 'Magic', of the heavens and their light: no stars, but 'Starry Lamps'; no sky, but light 'As from' a sky.

Satan, however, has more understanding. He knows—albeit imperfectly—what light is. Nevertheless, he nurtures the fallen angels' misapprehensions when he holds out the prospect that they might move closer to

those bright confines, whence with neighbouring Arms
And opportune excursion we may chance
Re-enter Heav'n; or else in some milde Zone

³⁴ *PL* ii 262–73. 'Here Mammon draws on the familiar Old Testament metaphor of the darkness surrounding God's self-manifestation... But in Mammon's account, the divine thunder expresses the hellish emotion of "rage", while the dark clouds express "our Darkness", that is, the Satanic darkness of hell... The God of whom Mammon speaks thus hides himself in a darkness that is indistinguishable from the blackness of evil and hell' (Benjamin Myers, *Milton's Theology of Freedom* (Berlin, 2006), p. 69).

³⁵ See Chapter 18 I, and Chapter 30?.

³⁶ *PL* i 726–30.

Dwell not unvisited of Heav'n's fair Light
 Secure, and at the brightning Orient beam
 Purge off this gloom.³⁷

In imagining that they might perhaps have a sight of the 'bright confines' of Heaven, and might dwell somewhere 'not unvisited' (that is, nurtured³⁸) by the light of Heaven, he betrays his awareness of what they have lost, and the desire which he still has (though will shortly renounce) to regain the light and be sustained by its nourishment. He tells his followers that 'long is the way | And hard, that out of Hell leads up to Light',³⁹ for at this point he imagines the recovery of light as a possible, if arduous, task. He is aware that there is no substitute for the light which they have lost, and yet he mistakenly thinks (or so his self-aggrandisement allows the fallen angels to believe) that a journey up to light would be a matter of heroic endeavour, a struggle of the kind that befits an epic hero. This is another example of the category error which the rebel angels make when using the vocabulary of 'light' and 'dark', for they conceive of these primarily in literal, physical terms, as perceptible conditions or geographical goals, instead of understanding that they are symbols of a spiritual state. For Satan 'light' is a synonym for 'Heaven', but only in so far as 'Heaven' signifies a desirable location, not if it means union with God, for which Satan has no desire. The true concepts 'light' and 'dark' are properly a form of grace, in being components of a language which is offered to man by the Spirit as a way of approaching some understanding of the divine.

On his way towards the new world of Earth, Satan stands on the lowest step of the stairs which lead up to Heaven (which are then let down—perhaps, says Milton, to tempt him to ascend, offering him a way back into the light) and sees the 'bright Sea... | Of Jasper'⁴⁰ underneath them, the light of the sun and stars, and the Earth itself, which he surveys 'Undazl'd'.⁴¹ His response to such light shows no reverence. Landing on the top of Mount Niphates, he addresses the sun in words which initially seem to voice wonder:

O thou that with surpassing Glory crown'd,
 Look'st from thy sole Dominion like the God
 Of this new World; at whose sight all the Starrs
 Hide thir diminisht 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 Spheare;
 Till Pride and worse Ambition threw me down

³⁷ *PL* ii 395–400.

³⁸ *unvisited*: this use draws upon the primary sense of the verb *visit*, 'Of the Deity: To come to (persons) in order to comfort or benefit' (*OED* s.v. *visit* v. 1). This is a nurturing form of visitation, but other senses of the verb (*OED* 2, 3) are used for God judging or punishing. The etymology of *visit* goes back to the Latin root *vis-*, meaning 'see'. For God to see man is to nurture him, but also to judge him. When Adam and Eve try to hide from his sight, they attempt to evade his judgement, but at the same time they remove themselves from his nurturing.

³⁹ *PL* ii 432–3.

⁴⁰ *PL* iii 518–19.

⁴¹ *PL* iii 614.

Warring in Heav'n against Heav'ns matchless King:
 Ah wherefore! he deservd no such return
 From me, whom he created what I was
 In that bright eminence.⁴²

Satan's speech—which will turn out to be his definitive rejection of the divine light⁴³ when it culminates in him saying, 'Evil be thou my Good'⁴⁴—begins with him standing in a physical light which he spurns as it reminds him of that heavenly 'bright eminence' in which he once stood before the throne of God. Even in this physical light there is no self-deception, and Satan speaks a truth in acknowledging that his revolt was spurred by pride and ambition. As he turns away from the light 'each passion dimm'd his face',⁴⁵ and he loses that bright countenance which is the mark of the angel. Eventually, Satan will become known as the 'Prince of Darkness'.⁴⁶

Thomas Wilson in his glosses on the theological meanings of 'light' writes that one of its senses is 'God, who is like Light, both for the brightnesse of his majesty, and his most pure and single Nature, being of infinite knowledge and holinesse, without any darknesse of ignorance or sin', but adds a cautionary note: 'God is a light to the good, to cleer their understanding, and cheereth our heart with deliverances and blessings; but he is a flame to the wicked, to devour them, both now and in hell'.⁴⁷ Having rejected God as light, Satan must now experience him as flame. As Alan Watts reflects in a visionary passage,

because God was infinite, because the *shekinah* reached out for ever and ever, the devils found no escape from his light. Turning from it they found it facing them. Above and below, and around on every side, they rushed towards darkness and found—always—the inescapable Light, the hated Love which began to burn them like a raging fire, so that the only escape lay inwards, to the solitary, isolated sanctuary of their own wills. Therefore this place of isolation and solitary confinement, where the light of God torments and gives no gladness, became the place of Satan's dominion, the Kingdom of Hell.⁴⁸



⁴² *PL* iv 32–44.

⁴³ Aelfric said that Satan stands in the light of God as a blind man stands in the light of the sun (Jeffrey Burton Russell, *Lucifer: The Devil in the Middle Ages* (Ithaca, N.Y., 1984), p. 153).

⁴⁴ *PL* iv 110.

⁴⁵ *PL* iv 114. Satan's countenance is already darkened in Book I:

Dark'n'd so, yet shon
 Above them all th' Arch Angel: but his face
 Deep scars of Thunder had intrencht, and care
 Sat on his faded cheek.

(*PL* i 599–602)

⁴⁶ *PL* x 383.

⁴⁷ Wilson, p. 379.

⁴⁸ Alan W. Watts, *Myth and Ritual in Christianity* (London, 1954), p. 43. The *shekinah* is the visible manifestation of the divine majesty, a refulgent light symbolizing the divine presence. The word is used as a periphrasis to designate God when he is said to dwell among the cherubim so as to avoid any approach to anthropomorphic expression (*OED* s.v. *shekinah* n.).

Over against—and implicitly judging—the forms of light and dark as experienced by Satan and the rebel angels, there are the forms of light and dark which the poem attributes to God.⁴⁹ The association of God with light is ancient, and is now perhaps most familiar in the prologue to St John's Gospel, which associates the divine Word (λόγος) with light:

ἐν αὐτῷ ζωὴ ἦν, καὶ ἡ ζωὴ ἦν τὸ φῶς τῶν ἀνθρώπων. καὶ τὸ φῶς ἐν τῇ σκοτίᾳ φαίνει, καὶ ἡ σκοτία αὐτοῦ οὐ κατέλαβεν... ἦν τὸ φῶς τὸ ἀληθινόν, ὃ φωτίζει πάντα ἄνθρωπον, ἐρχόμενον εἰς τὸν κόσμον.

In him was life, and the life was the light of men. And the light shineth in darkness, and the darkness comprehended it not... That was the true light, which lighteth every man that commeth into the world.⁵⁰

And in the First Epistle General of John we read that 'God is light, and in him is no darkness at all': ὁ Θεὸς φῶς ἐστὶ, καὶ σκοτία ἐν αὐτῷ οὐκ ἔστιν οὐδεμία.⁵¹ Such ideas draw upon a tradition of Judaic and Hellenistic mystical thought.⁵² In Jewish writing God is the creator of light, and is clothed in light; he is Lord over the darkness as well as the light.⁵³ In the New Testament Christians are those who are called 'out of darknes into his marueilous light'.⁵⁴

In *Paradise Lost*, Book III opens with an invocation in which the poet approaches the light of God and prays for his own inner illumination:

Hail holy light, ofspring of Heav'n first-born,
Or of th' Eternal Coeternal beam
May I express thee unblam'd? since God is light,
And never but in unapproached light
Dwelt from Eternitie, dwelt then in thee,
Bright effluence of bright essence increate.⁵⁵

These lines are both poetically and theologically complex.⁵⁶ Milton moves us away from embracing too unitary a meaning for 'light' by saying both that God 'is' light and that God dwells 'in' light, the conceptual relationship between 'is' and 'in' being left unexplained—and inexplicable. Neither 'is' nor 'in' can be used of God in anything like their common senses. The light which is being invoked in the first line—the light which Milton later prays will 'Shine inward, and the mind through

⁴⁹ For perceptive discussions of Milton's use of the motif of light in *PL* see Albert R. Cirillo, "Hail Holy Light" and Divine Time in *Paradise Lost*, *Journal of English and Germanic Philology* 68 (1969) 45–56; Michael Lieb, *Poetics of the Holy: A Reading of 'Paradise Lost'* (Chapel Hill, N.C., 1981), chs 9–10; David Quint, *Inside 'Paradise Lost': Reading the Designs of Milton's Epic* (Princeton, N.J., 2014), ch. 4.

⁵⁰ John i 4–5, 9.

⁵¹ 1 John i 5.

⁵² See C. H. Dodd, *The Interpretation of the Fourth Gospel* (Cambridge, 1953), *passim*; C. K. Barrett, *The Gospel According to St John: An Introduction with Commentary and Notes on the Greek Text* (London, 1955, second edition 1978), esp. pp. 27–41, 157–8. For the association of God with light in the NT see Alan Richardson, *An Introduction to the Theology of the New Testament* (London, 1958), pp. 67–71.

⁵³ Richardson, *An Introduction to the Theology of the New Testament*, pp. 67–8.

⁵⁴ 1 Peter ii 9; cf. Richardson, *An Introduction to the Theology of the New Testament*, p. 70.

⁵⁵ *PL* iii 1–6.

⁵⁶ For scholars' different views about how to interpret the light to which these lines refer, see Fowler *ad loc.*

all her powers | Irradiate'⁵⁷—is the first-born offspring of Heaven, which one might assume to be the light which God created on the first day; but the movement in 'Or' shifts the poet's understanding of light as he asks whether the light which he hails is more properly to be thought of as the eternal radiance of the uncreated God, 'Bright effluence of bright essence increate'. Such a light might be interpreted as the Son, or as the Holy Spirit which will inspire the poet.⁵⁸ The light in which God dwells is 'unapproached', for St Paul writes that God dwells 'in the light, which no man can approach vnto'.⁵⁹

Although there is no darkness *in* God (ἐν αὐτῷ) there is darkness around God which shields him from human sight, as Dryden was to write:

Thy throne is darkness in th' abyss of light,
A blaze of glory that forbids the sight.⁶⁰

This tradition derives from the Old Testament, for in the Psalms we are told that 'He made darkenes his secret place: his pavilion round about him *were* darke waters, *and* thicke cloudes of the skies',⁶¹ while in Exodus Moses 'drew neere vnto the thicke darkenes, where God was'.⁶² The mystical writer whom we know as Pseudo-Dionysius says that 'The divine darkness is unapproachable light, in which God is said to dwell'.⁶³ It is this idea upon which Milton draws when he has the angels praising God in these terms:

Fountain of Light, thy self invisible
Amidst the glorious brightness where thou sit'st
Thron'd inaccessible, but when thou shad'st
The full blaze of thy beams, and through a cloud
Drawn round about thee like a radiant Shrine,
Dark with excessive bright thy skirts appeer,
Yet dazle Heav'n, that brightest Seraphim
Approach not, but with both wings veil thir eyes.⁶⁴

⁵⁷ PL iii 52–3.

⁵⁸ In *De Doctrina* Milton says that among the meanings of *spiritus* is *lucem veritatis, sive ordinarium sive extraordinarium, qua suos illuminat Deos atque deducit* ('Sometimes [it means] the light of truth, either ordinary or extraordinary, by which God enlightens and leads his own': *OCW* viii 246–7). This chapter (I vi) is devoted to an exposition of Milton's doctrine of the Holy Spirit. According to the Niceno-Constantinopolitan Creed (Denzinger § 150) the Holy Spirit proceeds from the Father, though such procession is not to be imagined in temporal terms as if the Spirit were chronologically a product of the Father. So 'offspring of Heav'n first-born' would not be an orthodox way of referring to the Spirit. There is, of course, a heated argument in the Christian tradition as to the textual and dogmatic status of the credal phrase *filioque* which says that the Spirit also proceeds from the Son. See John Burnaby, *The Belief of Christendom: A Commentary on the Nicene Creed* (London, 1959), pp. 136–7, and J. N. D. Kelly, *Early Christian Doctrines* (London, 1958; fourth edition 1968), ch. X.

⁵⁹ 1 Timothy vi 16. *unapproached*: see Chapter 25 NOT, p. 363 n. 7.

⁶⁰ John Dryden, *The Hind and the Panther* i 66–7: *The Poems of John Dryden*, edited by Paul Hammond and David Hopkins, 5 vols (London, 1995–2005), iii 54; *q.v.* for notes on the tradition behind these lines.

⁶¹ Psalm xviii 11–12.

⁶² Exodus xx 21.

⁶³ Ὁ θεὸς γνόφος ἐστὶ τὸ ἀπρόσιτον φῶς, ἐν ᾧ κατοικεῖν ὁ Θεὸς λέγεται (*Epistola V: Dorotheo Ministro: Patrologia Graeca* iii 1073–4; my translation). For this mystical tradition see Denys Turner, *The Darkness of God: Negativity in Christian Mysticism* (Cambridge, 1995).

⁶⁴ PL iii 375–82.

God is inaccessible to sight except when he veils his beams with a cloud which is itself not dark but radiant.⁶⁵ (In St Matthew's account of the Transfiguration, it is specifically a 'bright cloud' which overshadows the disciples and out of which they hear the voice of God.⁶⁶) The attendant angels are dazzled even by this cloud, and cover their faces. The angels can, however, look upon the Son,

In whose conspicuous count'nance, without cloud
Made visible, th' Almighty Father shines,
Whom else no Creature can behold.⁶⁷

It is in the Son that one can see the Father.



In Eden there is both light and darkness. Satan sees the Earth as a

Terrestrial Heav'n, danc't round by other Heav'ns
That shine, yet bear thir bright officious Lamps,
Light above Light, for thee alone, as seems,
In thee concentrating all thir precious beams
Of sacred influence: As God in Heav'n
Is Center, yet extends to all, so thou
Centring receav'st from all those Orbs; in thee,
Not in themselves, all thir known vertue appears
Productive in Herb, Plant, and nobler birth
Of Creatures animate with gradual life
Of Growth, Sense, Reason, all summ'd up in Man.⁶⁸

The light that the Earth receives is no ordinary light but a 'sacred influence',⁶⁹ the divine power which produces growth in the natural world, and in man generates sensuous perception and reason. The newly created Adam first addresses the Sun, 'faire Light, | And thou enlight'nd Earth',⁷⁰ not as objects of worship in themselves but because they might be able to speak to him of his Creator. Adam and Eve enjoy 'grateful Eevening mild' and 'silent Night',⁷¹ and before they retire they praise the God who made both day and night.⁷² When light dawns in Eden it is specifically 'sacred Light'.⁷³ At this point any sinister darkness is associated only with Satan, as

⁶⁵ God addresses Abdiel from a 'Golden Cloud' (*PL* vi 28).

⁶⁶ Matthew xvii 5.

⁶⁷ *PL* iii 385–7. *conspicuous*: clearly visible (*OED* *s.v.* *conspicuous* *adj.* 1).

⁶⁸ *PL* ix 103–13.

⁶⁹ Cf.

But now at last the sacred influence
Of light appears, and from the walls of Heav'n
Shoots farr into the bosom of dim Night
A glimmering dawn; here Nature first begins
Her fardest verge, and *Chaos* to retire.

(*PL* ii 1034–8)

It is, therefore, the divine light which defines the realm of nature, beyond which is Chaos. The 'bosom' of Night is not a poetic cliché but a miniature personification which momentarily suggests that Night has a substantial existence.

⁷⁰ *PL* viii 273–4.

⁷¹ *PL* iv 654.

⁷² *PL* iv 721–5.

⁷³ *PL* ix 192.

through each Thicket Danck or Drie,
Like a black mist low creeping, he held on
His midnight search.⁷⁴

Adam explains to Eve that the sun, moon, and stars have their own rounds, 'Least total darkness should by Night regain | Her old possession, and extinguish life'.⁷⁵ The darkness that Adam thinks of as a threat is the primal 'total darkness' out of which life was originally created and which is seemingly ready to extinguish it; this kind of darkness seems more than a privation of light, for it is personified and made the subject of active verbs, ready as an ancient power to 'regain | Her old possession'. So Milton invites us to distinguish between the unthreatening night experienced both by the Son and by Adam and Eve, which is merely the absence of light, and on the other hand that destructive darkness, an active or potentially active power, which is opposed to life and to the Creator, and which can be imagined as a threat to the divinely created order, even though we know that providence will not permit it to triumph.⁷⁶ Indeed, the elements of Chaos are potentially God's 'dark materials to create more Worlds'.⁷⁷

However, the Satanic corruption of both light and dark is evident when the serpent leads Eve towards the Tree of Knowledge:

as when a wandering Fire
Compact of unctuous vapor, which the Night
Condenses, and the cold invirons round,
Kindl'd through agitation to a Flame,
Which oft, they say, some evil Spirit attends
Hovering and blazing with delusive Light,
Misleads th' amaz'd Night-wanderer from his way.⁷⁸

Evil makes light delusive, and night dangerous. After the Fall Adam and Eve discover

thir minds
How dark'nd; innocence, that as a veile
Had shadow'd them from knowing ill, was gon.⁷⁹

Knowledge has not brought illumination, but quite the opposite, and they have, moreover, lost that protective innocence which had 'shadow'd' (protected) them.⁸⁰

⁷⁴ *PL* ix 179–81.

⁷⁵ *PL* iv 665–6.

⁷⁶ In this respect darkness is one of what William Poole calls the 'conceptual monsters' of the poem which seem to disturb its orderly conceptual structure: see p. 20 n. 15. See also John Leonard, 'Milton, Lucretius, and "the Void Profound of Unessential Night"', and John Rumrich, 'Of Chaos and Nightingales', in *Living Texts: Interpreting Milton*, edited by Kristin A. Pruitt and Charles W. Durham (Selinsgrove, 2000), pp. 198–217 and 218–27.

⁷⁷ *PL* ii 916. Hume comments *ad loc.*: 'His dark Materials; His secret Materials, how the World, and all Things it contains, was made of Nothing by the Almighty Architect, is so obscure to our finite Understandings, that the Materials may well be called *Dark*'.

⁷⁸ *PL* ix 634–40.

⁷⁹ *PL* ix 1053–5.

⁸⁰ *shadow'd*: sheltered or protected as with covering wings; enfolded with a protecting and beneficent influence (*OED* *s.v.* shadow *v.* 2a).

Adam cannot bear to see the light, and now seeks only a form of darkness to protect himself from heavenly light which has become 'Insufferably bright', for

those heav'nly shapes
Will dazle now this earthly, with thir blaze
Insufferably bright. O might I here
In solitude live savage, in some glade
Obscur'd, where highest Woods impenetrable
To Starr or Sun-light, spread thir umbrage broad,
And brown as Evening.⁸¹

However, night is no refuge, still less is it a welcome variation on the day as once it had been, but a sign to Adam's guilty conscience which reminds him of his new state:

Thus *Adam* to himself lamented loud
Through the still Night, not now, as ere man fell,
Wholsom and cool, and mild, but with black Air
Accompanied, with damps and dreadful gloom,
Which to his evil Conscience represented
All things with double terror.⁸²

Yet there is a renewal of light. There will, says Michael, be men like Noah, 'the onely Son of light | In a dark Age'.⁸³ Adam greets Michael as 'Enlightner of my darkness',⁸⁴ and when the archangel explains the Son's Resurrection, when

ere the third dawning light
Returne, the Starres of Morn shall see him rise
Out of his grave, fresh as the dawning light,⁸⁵

Adam exclaims that this is

more wonderful
Then that which by creation first brought forth
Light out of darkness!⁸⁶

Moreover, God promises that if postlapsarian men obey their conscience,

Light after light well us'd they shall attain,
And to the end persisting, safe arrive.⁸⁷

—that is, if they use well their inner light they will ultimately attain the heavenly light.



All this is seen by the blind poet. 'Blind' is a word rarely used in *Paradise Lost*. Two uses are metaphorical. In Book III God says that those who neglect and scorn him will never receive his grace, 'But hard be hard'nd, blind be blinded more',⁸⁸ and

⁸¹ *PL* ix 1082–8.

⁸⁵ *PL* xii 421–3.

⁸² *PL* x 845–50.

⁸⁶ *PL* xii 471–3.

⁸³ *PL* xi 808–9.

⁸⁷ *PL* iii 196–7.

⁸⁴ *PL* xii 271.

⁸⁸ *PL* iii 200.

later he refers to those 'who have thir reward on Earth, the fruits | Of painful Superstition and blind Zeal'.⁸⁹ The sole literal use of 'blind' occurs earlier in the same book when Milton compares himself to sightless classical poets and prophets, 'Blind *Thamyris* and blind *Maenides*, | And *Tiresias* and *Phineus* Prophets old.'⁹⁰ But the word which does echo emphatically through this painful passage in which Milton confronts his own physical blindness is the word 'dark'. Before reading that, however, let us turn to Samson's lament for his blindness:

A Little onward lend thy guiding hand
To these **dark** steps, a little further on;
...
Light the prime work of God to me is extinct,
And all her various objects of delight
Annul'd, which might in part my grief have eas'd,
...
I **dark** in light expos'd
To daily fraud, contempt, abuse and wrong,
Within doors, or without, still as a fool,
In power of others, never in my own;
Scarce half I seem to live, dead more then half.
O **dark, dark, dark**, amid the blaze of noon,
Irrecoverably **dark**, total Eclipse
Without all hope of day!
...
The Sun to me is **dark**
And silent as the Moon.⁹¹

The insistent repetition of 'dark' encloses Samson within this inward prison. There is a terrible sameness about this darkness, which cuts him off from the 'various objects of delight' which would otherwise have comforted him. He misses that 'Grateful vicissitude',⁹² the loss of which Milton himself may have found a particularly harsh aspect of his own blindness.⁹³ But while Milton's own autobiographical passage likewise repeats 'dark', here it is conceptually varied. Addressing 'holy light' he says:

before the Sun,
Before the Heavens thou wert, and at the voice
Of God, as with a Mantle didst invest

⁸⁹ *PL* iii 451–2.

⁹⁰ *PL* iii 35–6. In 'De Idea Platonica' l. 25 Milton says that it was the very blindness of Tiresias that gave him boundless light: *profundum cecitas lumen dedit* (*Works* i 268).

⁹¹ *SA* ll. 1–2, 70–2, 75–82, 86–7; emphases added. The idea that the Sun is dark is bold enough; for Milton to add that it is also 'silent' is a poignant expression of his own utter deprivation through his loss of sight.

⁹² *PL* vi 8.

⁹³ In his Cambridge salting Milton described the *vicissitudo* (alternation) of work and pleasure which banishes the boredom of the same thing continued (*Works* xii 204–5; for a modern text and translation see John K. Hale, *Milton's Cambridge Latin: Performing in the Genres, 1625–1632* (Tempe, Ariz., 2005)).

The rising world of waters **dark** and deep,
 Won from the void and formless infinite.
 Thee I re-visit now with bolder wing,
 Escap't the *Stygian* Pool, though long detain'd
 In that obscure sojourn, while in my flight
 Through utter and through middle **darkness** borne
 ...
 Taught by the heav'nly Muse to venture down
 The **dark** descent, and up to reascend.
 ...
 Then feed on thoughts, that voluntarie move
 Harmonious numbers; as the wakeful Bird
 Sings **darkling**, and in shadiest Covert hid
 Tunes her nocturnal Note.
 ...
 ever-during **dark**
 Surrounds me.⁹⁴

Here Milton's optical darkness⁹⁵ is held within—and so defined and redeemed by—a network of different significances which the word is given. There is the primordial darkness from which the Holy Spirit creates the world; hellish darkness through which the poet has travelled in his imagination; and creative darkness in which the poem has been sung. These meanings aerate and enrich the word before we are told that 'ever-during dark | Surrounds me', so that when this description of his physical condition is presented to us we have already understood the power of the Spirit and the Muse to transform some of these kinds of darkness.⁹⁶

⁹⁴ *PL* iii 8–16, 19–20, 37–40, 45–6; emphases added.

⁹⁵ Although Milton uses 'dark' here to refer to his blindness, what he actually experienced was both darkness and an obscure kind of light. In 1654 he described his symptoms in detail to the physician Leonard Philaras, saying that *merus nigror, aut cineraceo distinctus, & quasi intextus solet se effundere: Caligo tamen quæ perpetuo obversatur, tam noctu, quam interdiu albenti semper quam nigricanti propior videtur* ('pure black, marked as if with extinguished or ashy light, and as if interwoven with it, pours forth. Yet the mist which always hovers before my eyes both night and day seems always to be approaching white rather than black') (Latin text from *Works* xii 68; translation from *CPW* iv 869–70). See further Gordon Campbell and Thomas N. Corns, *John Milton: Life, Work, and Thought* (Oxford, 2008), pp. 211–12. It is notable that Milton sometimes refers to feeling rather than seeing light, e.g. 'I... feel thy sovran vital Lamp' (*PL* iii 21–2), and 'beam, that gently warms | The Univers, and to each inward part | With gentle penetration, though unseen, | Shoots invisible vertue even to the deep' (*PL* iii 583–6). Such evocations of feeling light allow Milton to express both a physical and a spiritual reception of the divine light.

⁹⁶ In *Animadversions* Milton uses the imagery of blindness cured by the intervention of God to figure the spiritual condition of the English people after the Reformation:

Let us all... render thanks to God the Father of light, and fountaine of heavenly grace... and let us recount even here without delay the patience and long suffering that God hath us'd towards our blindness and hardnes time after time... opening our drousie eye-lids leasurly by that glimmering light which *Wicklef*, and his followers dispers't, and still taking off by degrees the inveterat scales from our nigh perisht sight. (*Works* iii 145)

In the *Defensio Secunda*, in one of the most moving passages he ever wrote, Milton managed to see his blindness as a heavenly gift which enabled a purer form of sight:

sim ego debilissimus, dummodo in mea debilitate immortalis ille & melior vigor eo se efficaciùs exerat; dummodo in meis tenebris divini vultùs lumen eo clariùs eluceat; tum enim infirmissimus ero simul & validissimus, cæcus eodem tempore & perspicacissimus; hac possim ego infirmitate consummari, hac perfeci, possim in hac obscuritate sic ego irradiari. Et sanè haud ultima Dei cura cæci sumus; qui nos, quò minus quicquam aliud præter ipsum cernere valemus, eò clementiùs atque benigniùs respicere dignatur... nec tam oculorum hebetudine, quàm coelestium alarum umbrâ has nobis fecisse tenebras videtur.⁹⁷

In Book I Milton had prayed, 'What in me is dark | Illumin',⁹⁸ and the whole poem is, in effect, a prayer that the darkness which affects the understanding of poet and reader may be illuminated by the 'Bright effluence of bright essence increate'.⁹⁹ Milton would surely have shared the prayer of the Psalmist: 'in thy light shall we see light'.¹⁰⁰

⁹⁷ 'May I be one of the weakest, provided only in my weakness that immortal and better vigour be put forth with greater effect; provided only in my darkness the light of the divine countenance does but the more brightly shine: for then I shall at once be the weakest and the most mighty; shall be at once blind, and of the most piercing sight. Thus, through this infirmity should I be consummated, perfected; thus, through this darkness should I be enrobed in light. And, in truth, we who are blind, are not the last regarded by the providence of God; who, as we are the less able to discern any thing but himself, beholds us with the greater clemency and benignity... nor would [God] seem to have brought this darkness upon us [blind people] so much by inducing a dimness of the eyes, as by the overshadowing of heavenly wings' (*Defensio Secunda: Works* viii 72–3).

⁹⁸ *PL* i 22–3.

⁹⁹ *PL* iii 6.

¹⁰⁰ Psalm xxxvi 9.

7

Desire

I to Hell am thrust,
Where neither joy nor love, but fierce desire,
Among our other torments not the least,
Still unfulfill'd with pain of longing pines.

Paradise Lost iv 508–11



‘For there is no such thing as perpetuall Tranquillity of mind, while we live here,’ said Thomas Hobbes, ‘because Life it selfe is but Motion, and can never be without Desire, nor without Feare, no more than without Sense.’¹ For Hobbes, desire is morally neutral, because ‘good’ and ‘evil’ are only names which we apply to objects of our appetites and aversions.² We would not expect Milton to concur, and when he uses the word ‘desire’ in *Paradise Lost* it is often with an anxious eye on the moral quality of such desire, a judgement which considers its origin and its aim: is desire an intellectual and spiritual quest for enlightenment, or is it a passion over which the reason has no control? Hobbes thought that desire for knowledge was a distinctively human trait, and something which could be construed as both a rational and a passionate appetite:

Desire to know why, and how, CURIOSITY; such as is in no living creature but *Man*: so that Man is distinguished, not onely by his Reason; but also by this singular Passion from other *Animals*; in whom the appetite of food, and other pleasures of Sense, by praedominance, take away the care of knowing causes; which is a Lust of the mind, that by a perseverance of delight in the continuall and indefatigable generation of Knowledge, exceedeth the short vehemence of any carnall Pleasure.³

For Milton, ‘Lust of the mind’ and lust of the body are both liable to lead man astray, and desire for knowledge turns out to be fatally compromised by other forms of desire.

Adam’s desire is, at first, subordinated reverently to divine direction. Asking God for a suitable companion, he says:

Thou in thy self art perfet, and in thee
Is no deficiencie found; not so is Man,
But in degree, the cause of his desire

¹ Thomas Hobbes, *Leviathan*, edited by Noel Malcolm, 3 vols (Oxford, 2012), ii 96.

² Hobbes, *Leviathan*, ii 80–2. ³ Hobbes, *Leviathan*, ii 86.

By conversation with his like to help,
Or solace his defects.⁴

God does not feel desire because he lacks nothing,⁵ but man desires a companion for conversation and solace, which is the primary purpose of marriage according to Milton throughout his divorce tracts. Contemporary law permitted divorce or annulment only on grounds of the non-consummation of a marriage, but Milton insists that spiritual, moral, and sociable compatibility are much more important than sexual compatibility, and their absence from a marriage should therefore also be grounds for divorce. In *The Doctrine and Discipline of Divorce* (1643) he recalls that St Paul says 'it is better to marrie then to burne',⁶ and asks:

what might this burning mean? Certainly not the meer motion of carnall lust, not the meer goad of a sensitive desire; God does not principally take care for such cattell. What is it then but that desire which God put into *Adam* in Paradise before he knew the sin of incontinence; that desire which God saw it was not good that man should be left alone to burn in; the desire and longing to put off an unkindly solitarines by uniting another body, but not without a fit soule to his in the cheerfull society of wedlock.⁷

So the longing for suitable companionship is indeed a God-given form of desire; moreover, when calling sexual desire 'cattell'—that is, rubbish⁸—Milton associates it firmly with the animals, as does Raphael when he cautions Adam against allowing it to subdue his soul, and uses the same word 'Cattel':

⁴ *PL* viii 415–19.

⁵ Aquinas discusses the perfection of God in *STI*, q. 4. In I, q. 20, art. 1, ad. 1, he refutes the idea that love cannot exist in God because love is a passion and in God there are no passions, arguing that there is a difference between (a) love which, as an act of the sensitive appetite, involves bodily change and is a passion, and (b) love which, as an act of the intellective appetite, is not a passion: the latter applies to God, who loves without passion.

⁶ 1 Corinthians vii 9. *then*: than.

⁷ The passage continues:

Which if it were so needfull before the fall, when man was much more perfect in himselfe, how much more is it needfull now against all the sorrows and casualties of this life to have an intimate and speaking help, a ready and reviving associate in marriage: whereof who misses by chancing on a mute and spiritles mate, remains more alone then before, and in a burning lesse to be contain'd then that which is fleshly and more to be consider'd; as being more deeply rooted even in the faultles innocence of nature. As for that other burning, which is but as it were the venom of a lusty and over-abounding concoction, strict life and labour, with the abatement of a full diet may keep that low and obedient enough: but this pure and more inbred desire of joyning to it selfe in conjugall fellowship a fit conversing soul (which desire is properly call'd love) *is stronger then death*, as the spouse of Christ thought, *many waters cannot quench it, neither can the floods drown it*. This is that rationall burning that mariage is to remedy. (*Divorce: Works* iii 396–7)

Milton similarly contrasts 'that intellectuall and innocent desire which God himselfe kindl'd in man to be the bond of wedlock' with 'a sublunary and bestial burning' (*Works* iii 416). *sublunary*: inferior; earthly; ephemeral (*OED*³ *s.v.* sublunary 1b, 2, 3); cf. the statement that marriage 'includes as an inferior end the fulfilling of natural desire' (*Tetrachordon: Works* iv 101). The animal imagery is resumed in 'bruit desire' (iii 492) and the description of 'the fleshly act' without mutual love as 'beeing at best but an animal excretion, but more truly wors and more ignoble then that mute kindlyness among the heards and flocks' (iv 101). *kindlyness*: sexual relations (this sense is not in *OED*, but cf. the meaning 'sexually available' for 'kind' (*OED* *s.v.* kind *adj.* 6), a common sense in the seventeenth century).

⁸ *OED* *s.v.* cattle *n.* 1e; only example.

But if the sense of touch whereby mankind
 Is propagated seem such dear delight
 Beyond all other, think the same voutsaf't
 To Cattel and each Beast; which would not be
 To them made common and divulg'd, if aught
 Therein enjoy'd were worthy to subdue
 The Soule of Man, or passion in him move.⁹

This physical desire is alluded to obliquely when Adam tells God, 'No need that thou | Shouldst propagat, already infinite'.¹⁰ When God in reply promises to fulfil Adam's desire, what he offers to provide is a companion:

What next I bring shall please thee, be assur'd,
 Thy likeness, thy fit help, thy other self,
 Thy wish, exactly to thy hearts desire.¹¹

But, as Adam confesses to Raphael in the passage which provokes Raphael's association of sexual pleasure with the beasts, more than companionship it is passionate desire that he feels for Eve, beyond any delight which he might take in anything else in nature: he must, he says,

confess to find
 In all things else delight indeed, but such
 As us'd or not, works in the mind no change,
 Nor vehement desire, these delicacies
 I mean of Taste, Sight, Smell, Herbs, Fruits and Flours,
 Walks, and the melodie of Birds; but here
 Farr otherwise, transported I behold,
 Transported touch; here passion first I felt,
 Commotion strange.¹²

Sensual delight in the natural world around him does not provoke in him 'vehement desire',¹³ but Eve does arouse passion and 'Commotion strange',¹⁴ a disturbance which will eventually lead to him preferring his passion for Eve to his obedience to God. Such desire seems in fact to be instilled in all who see her, not just in Adam, for

on her as Queen
 A pomp of winning Graces waited still,

⁹ *PL* viii 579–85. *divulg'd*: *OED* cites this as the only example of the sense 'to make common, impart generally', but it carries strong negative connotations from its Latin root *uulgare*, 'to make available to the mass of the population, make common to all (often with the implication of cheapening); to prostitute' (*OLD s.v.* *uulgo* 1). Similar connotations inflect Samson's self-accusatory reflection that he has 'divulg'd the secret gift of God | To a deceitful Woman' (*SA* ll. 201–2; *Works* i 344): he has not just disclosed his secret, he has prostituted it.

¹⁰ *PL* viii 419–20.

¹¹ *PL* viii 449–51.

¹² *PL* viii 523–31.

¹³ *vehement*: intense; having a strong effect on the body's system; ardent, passionate (*OED s.v.* *vehement adj.* 1, 4a, 6a). Milton speaks of his most vehement desire (*vehementissimo...desiderio*) for the company of his tutor Thomas Young (*Familiar Letters: Works* xii 6). Cf. Chapter 4 CHANGE, p. 33.

¹⁴ *commotion*: tumultuous agitation; insurrection (implicitly, here, the insurrection of the passions against reason); mental agitation (*OED s.v.* *commotion n.* 2a; 4; 5).

And from about her shot Darts of desire
Into all Eyes to wish her still in sight.¹⁵

But it is also, for Adam, Eve's modesty, innocence, and sinlessness which make her particularly desirable:

Yet Innocence and Virgin Modestie,
Her vertue and the conscience of her worth,
That would be woo'd, and not unsought be won,
Not obvious, not obtrusive, but retir'd,
The more desirable.¹⁶

Thus Milton extends the meanings of 'desire' within the context of marriage (as this is) to include admiration for innocence as well as sexual attraction. In *The Doctrine and Discipline of Divorce* Milton interprets the classical myth of Eros and Anteros (the latter signifying requited love) to refer to matrimonial love, saying that while Love seeks Anteros 'his chance is to meet with many fals and faining Desires that wander singly up and down in his likenes'¹⁷ (which might be a summary of some part of *The Faerie Queene*), so one of the challenges that mankind faces is to learn how to distinguish between such false desires and true love. When the couple separate in order for Eve to garden on her own, Adam

Her long with ardent look his Eye pursu'd
Delighted, but desiring more her stay.¹⁸

This is, of course, more than a wish for her company: it is an 'ardent' erotic longing.¹⁹

By contrast, Adam's desire for knowledge is temperate, and expressed with due submission in his dialogue with Raphael. To begin with, he acknowledges that he and Eve desire nothing more than what they already have, for they are 'Full to the utmost measure of what bliss | Human desires can seek or apprehend',²⁰ and his desire for knowledge about creation and the war in Heaven is subordinated to Raphael's permission: he has 'desire to hear, if thou consent, | The full relation'.²¹ Milton emphasizes that this desire is sanctioned by God, as Adam is

Led on, yet sinless, with desire to know
What neerer might concern him, how this World
Of Heav'n and Earth conspicuous first began.²²

The parenthetical 'yet sinless' is crucial here, as it clarifies for us that such desire to know is innocent, while implicitly warning us that later in the poem

¹⁵ *PL* viii 60–3. Presumably the eyes referred to here are those of the animals in Eden.

¹⁶ *PL* viii 501–4. *conscience*: knowledge, awareness.

¹⁷ *Works* iii 401. ¹⁸ *PL* ix 397–9.

¹⁹ The emphasis on the eye here confirms the erotic nature of Adam's longing, since it was often said that desire entered through the eye: cf. *PL* viii 60–3 (quoted above) and ix 743 (quoted below); and cf. Shakespeare, *Sonnets* 24 and 46.

²⁰ *PL* v 517–18.

²¹ *PL* v 555–6. Adam tells Raphael that 'Desire with thee still longer to converse | Induc'd me' (*PL* viii 252–3).

²² *PL* vii 61–3.

a darker version of it will constitute the first sin. Raphael indeed reassures Adam that

such Commission from above
I have receav'd, to answer thy desire
Of knowledge within bounds.²³

Adam's restrained desire for knowledge is contrasted with the unrestrained way in which Eve pursues her desire for knowledge, and the simultaneous corruption of desire and knowledge—the corruption of reason by desire—is part of Satan's strategy. When Milton says that God's ways never 'crosse the just and reasonable desires of men',²⁴ the key word is 'reasonable': man's desires need to be in accord with reason.²⁵ Satan plans that he

will excite thir minds
With more desire to know, and to reject
Envious commands, invented with designe
To keep them low whom knowledge might exalt
Equal with Gods.²⁶

So the desire for knowledge which Satan seeks to instil or to evoke is a form of ambitious rebellion which entails redescribing God (for Satan is a master of *paradiastole*) as an envious tyrant. The narrator explains that Satan intends to raise in Eve

At least distemperd, discontented thoughts,
Vaine hopes, vaine aimes, inordinate desires
Blown up with high conceits ingendring pride.²⁷

²³ PL vii 118–20.

²⁴ *Divorce: Works* iii 496.

²⁵ In *De Doctrina* Milton says that 'all are sufficiently equipped with innate reason to be able by themselves to resist depraved feelings' (*omnes ratione insita satis instructi sunt, quà pravis affectibus obsistere per se queant: OCW* viii 92–3).

²⁶ PL iv 522–6.

²⁷ PL iv 807–9. *distemperd*: A strong word, referring to the imbalance of bodily humours, and the psychological disturbance which this creates (*OED s.v. distempered adj. 1*). *inordinate*: deviating from right or rule; not kept within orderly limits, immoderate, intemperate, excessive (*OED s.v. inordinate adj. 1, 2*). Inordinate desires will be a characteristic of postlapsarian man, as Michael tells Adam:

Reason in man obscur'd, or not obeyd,
Immediately inordinate desires
And upstart Passions catch the Government
From Reason, and to servitude reduce
Man till then free.

(PL xii 86–90)

Milton links 'inordinate desires' with passion, violence, and injury as causes of the breakdown of marriage (*Tetrachordon: Works* iv 152). *conceits*: thoughts (*OED s.v. conceit n. 1*); but also 'flattering opinion of oneself' (5, 6). God says of postlapsarian man:

once more I will renew
His lapsed powers, though forfeit and enthrall'd
By sin to foul exorbitant desires.

(PL iii 175–7)

exorbitant: deviating from its proper path, transgressing a principle; exceeding proper bounds (*OED s.v. exorbitant adj. 1–3, 4*).

Such desires would be 'inordinate', transgressing the divinely crafted order of things, and aiming at ends which would be 'vaine', that is, worthless, empty, foolish, and proud.²⁸ The arousing of inappropriate desires in Eve begins in her dream when a voice tells her that

Heav'n wakes with all his eyes,
Whom to behold but thee, Natures desire,
In whose sight all things joy, with ravishment
Attracted by thy beauty still to gaze.²⁹

The Satanic voice instils in her the idea that she is the object of all nature's desire, awaking her almost narcissistic pride, and this is part of the seducer's strategy to arouse a form of desire which is quite different from Adam's reverent curiosity. She is susceptible to such an approach because as she looked at her image in the water just after her first awakening into consciousness she was so entranced by it that she would have 'pin'd with vain desire' if she had not been warned away.³⁰

Satan's strategy against Eve includes the use of the word 'desire' which ostensibly describes his own feelings but is designed to arouse her own curiosity:

To satisfie the sharp desire I had
Of tasting those fair Apples, I resolv'd
Not to deferr; hunger and thirst at once,
Powerful perswaders, quick'nd at the scent
Of that alluring fruit, urg'd me so keene.³¹

His desire was apparently shared, for

Round the Tree
All other Beasts that saw, with like desire
Longing and envying stood, but could not reach.³²

This narrative entices Eve to share such desire, though this would seem to reduce her to the level of the beasts. It is subsequently an explicitly sensual—and implicitly sexual—desire which leads her towards the fruit:³³

²⁸ *OED s.v. vain adj.* 1–4.

²⁹ *PL* v 44–7.

³⁰ *PL* iv 466.

³¹ *PL* ix 584–8.

³² *PL* ix 591–3.

³³ Milton does not hold that sexual desire caused the Fall, as some early Christian exegetes had (see Chapter 12 FALL, n. 59). Nevertheless, it is worth pondering Milton's verdict that in preparing to take the fruit from Eve, Adam was 'fondly overcome with Femal charm' (*PL* ix 999). Although 'charm' may seem an anodyne word to a modern reader, at the time it had not yet acquired the meaning, 'Any quality, attribute, trait, feature, etc., which exerts a fascinating or attractive influence, exciting love or admiration. In pl., esp. of female beauty, great personal attractions', for which the *OED*'s first example is from Dryden in 1697 (*s.v. charm n.* 1 3a). It is not impossible that Milton intends 'charm' to have this sense here, and that the present example therefore antedates the *OED*'s citation from Dryden, but the primary meaning for Milton's first readers would have been *OED* 1a: 'The chanting or recitation of a verse supposed to possess magic power or occult influence; incantation, enchantment; hence, any action, process, verse, sentence, word, or material thing, credited with such properties; a magic spell; a talisman'. So Eve exercises a quasi-magical power over Adam. There is, however, also an earthier meaning which some of Milton's contemporaries would have encountered in, for example, the poems of Rochester, who used the word to denote

Mean while the hour of Noon drew on, and wak'd
 An eager appetite, rais'd by the smell
 So savorie of that Fruit, which with desire,
 Inclivable now grown to touch or taste,
 Solicited her longing eye.³⁴

It is worth pausing over 'Solicited':

1. To disturb, disquiet, trouble.
2. *a.* To entreat or petition (a person) for, or to do, something; to urge, importune; to ask earnestly or persistently.
3. To incite or move, to induce or persuade, to some act of lawlessness or insubordination.
4. *a.* To incite, draw on, allure, by some specious representation or argument.
b. To court or beg the favour of (a woman), esp. with immoral intention.
c. To make immoral attempts upon.
5. Of things:
 - a.* To affect (a person or thing) by some form of physical influence or attraction.
 - b.* To tempt, entice, allure; to attract or draw by enticement.³⁵

So when the fruit solicits Eve's longing eye, it is persuading and alluring her to some unlawful act, and this is analogous to making an illicit sexual invitation. It may seem that sense 1, to disturb or disquiet, may not be relevant here, but its implications are present. Eve may not feel anxious or concerned, but she should be, for this act will disturb, solicit, her tranquillity. Raphael has already warned Adam not to disturb himself with a desire for inappropriate knowledge, but to be content with what he has:

Sollicit not thy thoughts with matters hid,
 Leave them to God above, him serve and feare.³⁶

But Eve responds to the Satanic solicitation, and so solicits her thoughts more profoundly than she understands.

The desire which Adam feels for Eve shows itself in the garland which he has woven for her during her absence:

Adam the while
 Waiting desirous her return, had wove

the urgent sexual demands of the body: 'Naked she lay clasp'd in my longing Armes, | I fill'd with Love and she all over Charmes, | Both equally inspir'd with eager fire, | Melting through kindness, flaming in desire' ('The Imperfect Enjoyment' ll. 1–4); and, more crudely, 'Against the Charms our *Bollox* have | How weak all human skill is' ('On Mrs Willis' ll. 1–2) (*The Works of John Wilmot Earl of Rochester*, edited by Harold Love (Oxford, 1999), pp. 13, 37). So 'charm' in *PL* may suggest both a kind of bewitchment and a sexual compulsion. There is nothing anodyne about 'charm' in Restoration verse.

³⁴ *PL* ix 739–43.

³⁵ Abridged from *OED* *s.v.* solicit *v.*

³⁶ *PL* viii 167–8.

Of choicest Flours a Garland to adorne
Her Tresses, and her rural labours crown.³⁷

At this point the sinless and conjugal desire which Adam feels for her is expressed through natural imagery, weaving flowers which symbolically weave together the two humans with the innocent products of nature. But soon

that false Fruit
Farr other operation first displaid,
Carnal desire enflaming, hee on *Eve*
Began to cast lascivious Eyes, she him
As wantonly repaid; in Lust they burne.³⁸

Now that both have eaten of the fruit, sexual desire, which has previously been celebrated as a proper element of married love,³⁹ has metamorphosed into mere 'Carnal desire' which enflames and burns; 'desire' has narrowed to become synonymous with 'Lust'. 'Desire' also becomes, in the recriminations which Adam directs at Eve, the word which he chooses to characterize Eve's erring:

Would thou hadst heark'nd to my words, and stai'd
With me, as I besought thee, when that strange
Desire of wandring this unhappie Morn,
I know not whence possessd thee.⁴⁰

Unbeknown to Adam, 'possessd' has an appropriate connotation of diabolical possession: the 'Desire of wandring' which has possessed her is hardly to be distinguished from the egoistic, transgressive disobedience of Satan himself.

Subsequently desire moves close to being despair, when the only desire which the couple can feel is for their own annihilation. The postlapsarian Adam is 'Desirous to resigne, and render back | All I receav'd',⁴¹ and he reflects bitterly on where his desire for Eve has led him: 'what thou desir'st | And what thou fearest, alike destroyes all hope'.⁴² In the desolate world after the Fall, desire and fear, if not quite synonymous, lead to the same place. Eve wishes to assume all the responsibility herself, but Adam replies that this is once again a desire which is ignorant of what it entails, since she is

Unwarie, and too desirous, as before,
So now of what thou knowst not, who desir'st
The punishment all on thy self.⁴³

As for the sexual desire between the couple, this too has a role in what seems to be their unfolding tragedy, for when Eve suggests that they avoid passing their guilt on to their descendants by having no descendants, she acknowledges that it would be hard to abstain from sex; therefore it seems that their only option is death:

But if thou judge it hard and difficult,
Conversing, looking, loving, to abstain

³⁷ *PL* ix 838–41.

⁴⁰ *PL* ix 1134–7.

³⁸ *PL* ix 1011–15.

⁴¹ *PL* x 749–50.

³⁹ *PL* iv 736ff.

⁴² *PL* x 837–8.

⁴³ *PL* x 947–9.

From Loves due Rites, Nuptial imbraces sweet,
And with desire to languish without hope,
Before the present object languishing
With like desire, which would be miserie
And torment less then none of what we dread,
Then both our selves and Seed at once to free
From what we fear for both, let us make short,
Let us seek Death.⁴⁴

In such circumstances, desire would bring only misery and torment. Once desire led Eve into a deadly transgression; now desire leads her towards despair and death.⁴⁵



If man's desire has, in some respects, become Satanic—directed towards disobedience and despair—what of Satan's own desire? The rebel angels' desire, like that of the fallen protoplasts, is closely coupled with fear,

so much the fear
Of Thunder and the Sword of *Michael*
Wrought still within them; and no less desire
To found this nether Empire.⁴⁶

This combination of desire and fear is both transgressive and futile, a doomed wish to escape from the reach of God and to establish some mode of life in opposition to his will. When speaking to Uriel, Satan can pretend that he wishes to admire God's latest handiwork because of his

Unspeakable desire to see, and know
All these his wondrous works, but chiefly Man.⁴⁷

but the angel's response suggests that the word 'desire' causes him some misgivings, and he needs to reassure himself and this supposed junior angel that this

desire which tends to know
The works of God, thereby to glorifie
The great Work-Maister, leads to no excess
That reaches blame, but rather merits praise.⁴⁸

Implicitly, then, Uriel knows that there are many desires which do lead to excess, and do attract blame. He must be vigilant. Satan may be a liar when it suits him, but on some occasions he cannot conceal the truth from himself, and when gazing

⁴⁴ *PL* x 992–1001.

⁴⁵ It may be because he has so carefully mapped the mutations of 'desire' in his poem that Milton decided that the word was out of place in the passage in which Michael describes the Israelites asking Moses to convey to them God's will: Moses 'grants them thir desire' in the first edition (1667) but this is changed to 'grants what they besaught' in the revised 1674 text (*PL* xii 238).

⁴⁶ *PL* ii 293–6.

⁴⁷ *PL* iii 662–3.

⁴⁸ *PL* iii 694–7.

at the naked Adam and Eve he experiences the Hell of unfulfilled, and now unfulfillable, desire:

Sight hateful, sight tormenting! thus these two
 Imparadis't in one anothers arms
 The happier *Eden*, shall enjoy thir fill
 Of bliss on bliss, while I to Hell am thrust,
 Where neither joy nor love, but fierce desire,
 Among our other torments not the least,
 Still unfulfill'd with pain of longing pines.⁴⁹

Satan understands all too well now the difference between 'love' and 'desire', and desire has become one of the punishments of Hell.

But there is a pure form of desire among the angels in Heaven, whether this is for food, as 'from dance to sweet repast they turn | Desirous',⁵⁰ or for victory over the rebels with 'fierce desire | Of Battel',⁵¹ or for one another, 'Union of Pure with Pure | Desiring'.⁵² Such purification of desire may be beyond the reach of mortals, but in *Paradise Regain'd* Milton shows us in the figure of Jesus one from whom all impure desire has been purged. Belial proposes seducing him with sexual temptations, since in his eyes woman

hath the power to soft'n and tame
 Severest temper, smooth the rugged'st brow,
 Enerve, and with voluptuous hope dissolve,
 Draw out with credulous desire, and lead
 At will the manliest, resolute'st brest,
 As the Magnetic hardest Iron draws.⁵³

Belial assumes that desire enervates and emasculates a man, enslaving him and making him credulous. If he were describing Samson's infatuation with Dalilah he would be correct, but Satan derides the idea that Jesus might bestow on any woman 'an eye | Of fond desire',⁵⁴ and proposes instead that

with manlier objects we must try
 His constancy, with such as have more shew
 Of worth, of honour, glory, and popular praise;
 Rocks whereon greatest men have ofttest wreck'd;
 Or that which only seems to satisfie
 Lawful desires of Nature, not beyond.⁵⁵

⁴⁹ *PL* iv 505–11.

⁵⁰ *PL* v 630–1.

⁵¹ *PL* vi 201–2.

⁵² *PL* viii 627–8.

⁵³ *PR* ii 163–8.

⁵⁴ *PR* ii 210–11. *fond*: combines the meanings 'loving' and 'foolish', as in *PL* ix 999, where Adam is 'fondly overcome with Femal charm'.

⁵⁵ *PR* ii 225–30.

It is, finally, for Jesus himself to place desire within the properly ordered human being:

he who reigns within himself, and rules
Passions, Desires, and Fears, is more a King;
Which every wise and vertuous man attains.⁵⁶

For ordinary men such self-rule is a daily struggle, but it is one which brings them to equal or even to surpass the angels, as Milton noted in his *Commonplace Book*:

vir bonus aliquâ ratione etiam angelos excellere videtur, eò quod ille infirmo et mortali corpore involutus cupiditatibus semper colluctans vitam tamen cœlestium similem agere aspirat.⁵⁷

⁵⁶ *PR* ii 466–8. In the *Defensio Secunda* Milton claimed that Cromwell ‘had either destroyed, or reduced to his own control, all enemies within his own breast—vain hopes, fears, desires’ (*quicquid intus hostis erat, spes vanas, metus, cupiditates, apud se prius aut deleverat, aut subactas iam habuerat* (*Works* viii 214–15)).

⁵⁷ *Commonplace Book: Works* xviii 129: ‘A good man in some measure seems to excel even the angels, for the reason that housed in a weak and perishable body and struggling forever with desires, he nevertheless aspires to lead a life that resembles that of the heavenly host.’ Milton is quoting Lactantius.

8

Ease

Thus *Belial* with words cloath'd in reasons garb
Counsel'd ignoble ease, and peaceful sloath,
Not peace.

Paradise Lost ii 226–8



Why is ease suspect? What is the difference between ease and peace? Although many seventeenth-century poets celebrated the sensuous pleasures, as well as the moral and spiritual benefits, of a retirement from the busy world into the tranquil ease of the countryside or the garden,¹ there was also a long tradition of regarding ease, *otium*, as morally suspect or even reprehensible, a dereliction of a man's duty to engage in the world, *negotium*, particularly as a citizen or a soldier.² In *Paradise Lost* there are different versions of ease: diabolical ease and heavenly ease; the truly happy ease of prelapsarian Eden; the temptation of a corrupt and corrupting ease which leads towards the Fall; and the self-indulgent ease of mankind in the postlapsarian world. And played against these forms of ease, either implicitly or explicitly, are the Miltonic demands for a strenuous pursuit of truth and virtue.

¹ For this tradition see Maren-Sofie Røstvig, *The Happy Man: Studies in the Metamorphoses of a Classical Ideal*, second edition (Oslo, 1962).

² For this tradition see Brian Vickers, 'Leisure and Idleness in the Renaissance: The Ambivalence of *otium*', *Renaissance Studies* 4 (1990) 1–37, 107–54. Milton uses *otium* in this pejorative sense in 'Ad Johannes Rousium' (1646):

(Si satis noxas luimus priores
Mollique luxu degener otium).

(ll. 27–8)

('if only we have rendered atonement in full measure for our sins of earlier days, for our ease made degenerate by soft luxury': *Works* i 318–19). The lines occur in the context of a passage lamenting the civil wars, so the implication is that England under Charles I indulged in a corrupt and corrupting *otium*, which is ironically similar to the way in which the Earl of Clarendon recalled the halcyon days of pre-war England:

the Court in great plenty, or rather (which is the discredit of plenty) excess and luxury; the country rich, and, which is more, fully enjoying the pleasure of its own wealth, and so the easier corrupted with the pride and wantonness of it... the Court full of excess, idleness and luxury, and the country full of pride, mutiny and discontent.

(Edward Hyde, Earl of Clarendon, *The History of the Rebellion and Civil Wars in England Begun in the Year 1641*, edited by W. Dunn Macray, 5 vols (Oxford, 1888), i 95–6).

Satan's sarcastic address to his defeated followers as they lie sprawled on the burning lake asks them

have ye chos'n this place
After the toyl of Battel to repose
Your wearied vertue, for the ease you find
To slumber here, as in the Vales of Heav'n?³

One way or another, the speakers in the debate which follows in Book II seek ease, or what seems to them to be ease. Satan himself urges that since it was only with great difficulty that they were expelled from Heaven, their return would be easy.⁴ He had previously told his followers during the war in Heaven that their wounds would be easily healed,⁵ and they themselves imagined an easy victory, for

eternal might
To match with thir inventions they presum'd
So easie, and of his Thunder made a scorn.⁶

But he says whatever suits the occasion: later in the debate, when in order to discourage any rivals he wishes to emphasize the dangers of the venture which he is about to undertake, Satan tells them that 'long is the way | And hard, that out of Hell leads up to light'.⁷ Amongst the fallen angels Belial 'Counsel'd ignoble ease, and peaceful sloath, | Not peace',⁸ and indeed it is difficult to see what true peace there could be for them in Hell. The more vigorous Mammon wishes to be

³ *PL* i 318–21. Dryden's Lucifer is more explicitly sarcastic: 'Are your Beds of Down? | Sleep you so easie there?' (*The State of Innocence, and Fall of Man: An Opera* (London, 1677), p. 3).

⁴ *PL* ii 77–81. Later Satan sees the stairs which lead up to Heaven, which

were then let down, whether to dare
The Fiend by easie ascent, or aggravate
His sad exclusion from the dores of Bliss.

(*PL* iii 523–5)

⁵ 'Of evil then so small as easie think | The remedie' (*PL* vi 437–8; cf. vi 494–5).

⁶ *PL* vi 630–2. By contrast, God tells Abdiel that military victory over the rebels will be easier than the challenging task which he has already accomplished in defying Satan: 'the easier conquest now | Remains thee' (*PL* vi 37–8).

⁷ *PL* ii 432–3. This turns out to be true: 'So he with difficulty and labour hard | Mov'd on, with difficulty and labour hee' (*PL* ii 1021–2); the rhetorical shape of these lines encloses Satan's movement with redoubled difficulty and labour.

⁸ *PL* ii 227–8. For Milton's attitude to 'sloth' see Ruth Mohl, *John Milton and his Commonplace Book* (New York, 1969), pp. 58–9. The phrase 'ignoble ease' translates Virgil's *ignobilis oti* from the passage at the end of the *Georgics* where Virgil reflects on his own work:

Haec super arvorum cultu pecorumque canebar
et super arboribus, Caesar dum magnus ad altum
fulminat Euphraten bello victorque volentis
per populos dat iura viamque adfectat Olympo.
illo Vergilium me tempore dulcis alebat
Parthenope, studiis florentem ignobilis oti,
carmina qui lusi pastorum audaxque iuventa,
Tityre, te patulae cecini sub tegmine fagi.

(*Georgics* iv 559–66)

('So much I sang in addition to the care of fields, of cattle, and of trees, while great Caesar [Augustus] thundered in war by deep Euphrates and bestowed a victor's laws on willing nations, and essayed the

Free, and to none accountable, preferring
 Hard liberty before the easie yoke
 Of servile Pomp.⁹

but the alert reader who recalls Jesus saying that 'my yoke is easie, and my burden is light'¹⁰ knows that Mammon misrepresents service as servility and rebellion as liberty. For all Mammon's rhetorical dismissal of angelic ease and his call to 'labour and indurance'¹¹ it emerges that such heroic labour is only in the service of his own preferred form of ease, not any higher ambition, so that

Useful of hurtful, prosperous of adverse
 We can create, and in what place so e're
 Thrive under evil, and work ease out of pain.¹²

But there are several indications that the ease which the devils seek is illusory. Satan urges them to find

what best may ease
 The present misery, and render Hell
 More tollerable; if there be cure or charm
 To respite or deceive, or slack the pain
 Of this ill Mansion.¹³

They may seek to ease, to alleviate, their present misery, but Satan recognizes that any such ease can only be a temporary and deceiving respite, achieved with the help of some magic 'charm'.¹⁴ Similarly, when Satan is speaking to Gabriel he thinks of ease as simply respite from physical torment.¹⁵ Ease is associated with false hope when the devils disband after their debate:

Thence more at ease thir minds and somewhat rais'd
 By false presumptuous hope, the ranged powers
 Disband.¹⁶

path to Heaven. In those days I, Virgil, was nursed by sweet Parthenope [Naples], and rejoiced in the arts of inglorious ease—I who toyed with shepherds' songs, and, in youth's boldness, sang of you, Tityrus, under the canopy of a spreading beech' (Loeb translation).) Thomas Newton noted the Virgilian echo (see Miner, *ad loc*), though Hume had supplied the Latin parallel, *ignobile otium*, no doubt expecting his readers to recognize its source.

The allusion may be an implicit reflection by Milton himself on his own career: while Augustus was pacifying the Roman world, Virgil was writing of country matters (though the *Georgics* are, *inter alia*, reflections on the harmonious ordering of human life in ways which are often analogous to the work of statesmen in the public sphere); while England was embroiled in its own civil wars, Milton was publishing pastoral and masque in his *Poems* of 1645. When writing of his past days of ignoble ease, Virgil was preparing to start the *Aeneid*. If Milton does not directly apply the term 'ignoble ease' to his own work—and the large volume of polemical prose which he produced during the Commonwealth and Protectorate testifies to his noble vigour—he nevertheless challenges himself and his readers to find their own pathway to Heaven (*viam*... *Olympo*).

⁹ *PL* ii 255–7.

¹⁰ Matthew xi 30.

¹¹ *PL* ii 262.

¹² *PL* ii 259–61.

¹³ *PL* ii 458–62.

¹⁴ *deceive*: beguile, while away (time) (*OED* *s.v.* *deceive* *v.* 5); but the other meanings (betray, mislead, delude, prove false) lurk here in the word's penumbra.

¹⁵ *PL* iv 891–3.

¹⁶ *PL* ii 521–3.

That the mental ease which they think they enjoy is a delusion is amply clear, as it leads to false hope and to aimless wandering, while those who set off

to discover wide
That dismal world, if any Clime perhaps
Might yield them easier habitation.¹⁷

are doomed to find nothing easier than the torments of Hell.

Satan's reflections on his Fall from Heaven include two moments when he uses the word 'ease'. Satan is so often a master of irony, but here there is an unconscious irony in his inadvertent echoing of Jesus' words, 'my yoke is easie' when Satan says of God,

nor was his service hard.
What could be less then to afford him praise,
The easiest recompence, and pay him thanks.¹⁸

What was truly easy, he admits, was the rendering of praise and thanks, which is all that the service of God required of him. But a different use of 'ease' emerges shortly afterwards, when he considers, only to dismiss, the idea of repentance, for if he were to repent,

how soon
Would high recal high thoughts, how soon unsay
What feign'd submission swore: ease would recant
Vows made in pain, as violent and void.¹⁹

Here 'ease' is Satan's sarcastic comment on the state of heavenly joy, conceived now as little more than comfortable indolence, a view which he repeats to Gabriel when he contrasts his own heroic activity with what he derides as the lazy life of the angels in Heaven,

Whose easier business were to serve thir Lord
High up in Heav'n, with songs to hymne his Throne.²⁰

Like Mammon, Satan considers such ease to be supine servility. So what constitutes true ease for Satan? He admits that 'onely in destroying I find ease | To my relentless thoughts'²¹—the psychology of Iago.



There is genuine ease in Eden before the Fall, genuine because it is the ease of creation in harmony with its Creator. In the seas, creatures lie 'in thir Pearlie shells at ease',²² Adam and Eve work because it is necessary for them to prune back the overluxuriant growth of the garden 'if we mean to tread with ease',²³ but they find that their gardening is no hard labour,

¹⁷ *PL* ii 571–3.

¹⁸ *PL* iv 45–7.

¹⁹ *PL* iv 94–7. *violent*: involuntary, enforced (*OED*³ *s.v.* *violent* 6b, citing this example).

²⁰ *PL* iv 943–4.

²¹ *PL* ix 129–30.

²² *PL* vii 407.

²³ *PL* iv 632. Protestant commentators thought it right that Adam should work in paradise (Vickers, 'Leisure and Idleness in the Renaissance', p. 145).

For not to irksom toile, but to delight
 He made us, and delight to Reason joynd.
 These paths & Bowers doubt not but our joynt hands
 Will keep from Wilderness with ease.²⁴

Here ease is easy labour, combining delight with reason, and this work 'suffic'd | To recommend coole *Zephyr*, and made ease | More easie'.²⁵ Adam learns from Raphael the easiest way of living in such a paradise, which is to limit that anxious questing after a knowledge which he does not need: his conversation with the archangel has left him

freed from intricacies, taught to live
 The easiest way, nor with perplexing thoughts
 To interrupt the sweet of Life, from which
 God hath bid dwell farr off all anxious cares.²⁶

Philosophically, ease is the absence of anxiety and care, which sounds like a more spiritual version of Epicurean tranquillity of mind or *ἀταραξία*.²⁷ Moreover, the one condition which God has placed on their easy enjoyment of Eden is itself easy to fulfil; it is

that sole command,
 So easily obeyd amid the choice
 Of all tastes else to please thir appetite.²⁸

Adam himself acknowledges that the command is an 'easie charge',²⁹ and urges Eve,

let us not think hard
 One easie prohibition, who enjoy
 Free leave so large to all things else.³⁰

Nevertheless, divine foreknowledge knows that man will easily succumb to the wiles of Satan,

For man will hark'n to his glozing lyes,
 And easily transgress the sole Command.³¹

Here 'easily' offers two senses, 'without difficulty' and 'in hope of ease', for it is in part the lure of what she takes to be ease which draws Eve to the forbidden fruit. In the dream which prefigures (without, of course, predetermining) the Fall, the serpent had figured the taking of the fruit as a gesture to ease the tree of its burden, a kind of charity, asking 'Deigns none to ease thy load and taste thy sweet',³² and after she has actually taken the fruit herself she echoes Satan's words in envisaging that her subsequent cult of the tree 'Shall tend thee, and the fertil burden ease | Of thy full branches'.³³ Satan's enticement of Eve deploys *inter alia* a rhetoric of ease, suggesting that he is the master of ease, and assuring her that 'Easie to mee it is to

²⁴ *PL* ix 242–5. ²⁵ *PL* iv 328–30. ²⁶ *PL* viii 182–85. ²⁷ See n. 50.

²⁸ *PL* vii 47–9. ²⁹ *PL* iv 421. ³⁰ *PL* iv 432–4. ³¹ *PL* iii 93–4.

³² *PL* v 59. ³³ *PL* ix 801–2.

tell thee all | What thou commandst, and right thou shouldst be obeyd'.³⁴ The association of 'Easie' and 'right' here is a corruption of moral vocabulary which Eve fails to notice, for 'his words replete with guile | Into her heart too easie entrance won'.³⁵ Eve reflects that the tree gives

knowledge of Good and Evil;
Of good, how just? of evil, if what is evil
Be real, why not known, since easier shunnd?³⁶

Eve does not have the patience and humility to ponder her rhetorical questions and discover their fallacies.³⁷ But she and Adam find all too soon that their disobedience has produced dis-ease, for 'not at rest or ease of Mind, | They sate them down to weep', finding that their inner world has become the opposite of ease, for now

high Passions, Anger, Hate,
Mistrust, Suspicion, Discord . . . shook sore
Thir inward State of Mind, calm Region once
And full of Peace, now tost and turbulent.³⁸

As they try to understand their new predicament, Adam denounces God for 'Thy terms too hard, by which I was to hold | The good I sought not',³⁹ forgetting that he had said earlier that the conditions of his obedience were easy. Then Eve suggests suicide as an end to the suffering which would otherwise attend both themselves and their putative descendants, an end 'though sharp and sad, yet tolerable, | As in our evils, and of easier choice'.⁴⁰ Eve proposes what she thinks of as the easier option, but once again, as in the fallacious arguments which precede and follow her Fall, she is trying to use her own reason rather than submitting to the divine will. It is not for her to devise the easiest way.

Some illumination of Eve's error here is provided by Spenser's account of the meeting of the Red Cross Knight with Despair. Having drawn Sir Terwin to kill himself, Despair tempts the Red Cross Knight with a seductive argument, a form of *paradiastole*, which redescribes death not only as 'rest' but as 'ease':

He there does now enioy eternall rest
And happy ease, which thou doest want and craue,
And further from it daily wanderest:
What if some little payne the passage haue,

³⁴ PL ix 569–70.

³⁵ PL ix 733–4. In PR i 120 Milton describes Satan's 'easie steps' as he is 'girded with snaky wiles'. Comus' temptations work on 'the easie-hearted man', a phrase which implies a form of moral slackness which comes from insufficient vigilance:

I under fair pretence of friendly ends,
And well-plac't words of glozing courtesie
Baited with reasons not unplaussible
Wind me into the easie-hearted man,
And hug him into snares.

(Maske ll. 160–4: *Works* i 91)

³⁶ PL ix 697–9.

³⁷ See Chapter 30 ?, pp. 445–50.

³⁸ PL ix 1120–5.

³⁹ PL x 751–2.

⁴⁰ PL x 977–8.

That makes frayle flesh to feare the bitter waue?
 Is not short payne well borne, that brings long ease,
 And layes the soule to sleepe in quiet graue?
 Sleepe after toyle, port after stormie seas,
 Ease after warre, death after life does greatly please.⁴¹

But unrepentant suicides do not enjoy a 'quiet graue' according to Christian doctrine,⁴² and there is another dangerous sleight of hand in the move from the Christian formula of 'eternall rest'—*requies aeterna*—to the more Epicurean one of 'happy ease' which is the object of desire ('which thou doest want and craue'). Such ease, says Despair, 'layes the soule to sleepe in quiet graue', another warning sign, since theologically it is the body which rests in the grave while the soul returns to its Maker. Milton was a careful student of Spenser,⁴³ but Eve was not: the ease which she seeks is a recourse of despair, and despair is the deadliest of all sins because it is the self-exclusion of the individual from the mercy and grace of God.

Adam eventually realizes—through the workings of grace within him—that the solution to the problem of what is easy and what is hard lies in prayer, which is, in effect, an abandonment of the ego with all its desires, fears, and fallacies. Prayer opens what despair closes.

Eve, easily may Faith admit, that all
 The good which we enjoy, from Heav'n descends;
 But that from us ought should ascend to Heav'n
 So prevalent as to concerne the mind
 Of God high-blest, or to incline his will,
 Hard to belief may seem; yet this will Prayer,
 Or one short sigh of humane breath, up-borne
 Ev'n to the Seat of God.⁴⁴

It is easy, then, for faith to acknowledge that man's good descends from God; harder to imagine that man's prayer may ascend to God and be heeded: but the hard idea (here, the path which seems to run counter to what the human mind sees as probable) is indeed the right one. As part of his subsequent illumination, Adam hears from Michael that there are ways for death to come naturally and provide a kind of ease which is a gift from God rather than something devised by them:

So maist thou live, till like ripe Fruit thou drop
 Into thy Mothers lap, or be with ease
 Gatherd, not harshly pluckt, for death mature.⁴⁵

To this Adam replies with a new understanding of ease: he will seek a way of life which leads him patiently to death:

⁴¹ *FQ* I ix 40.

⁴² *CCC* §§ 2280–3.

⁴³ Cf. Chapter 2 ART, p. 13 n. 36.

⁴⁴ *PL* xi 141–8.

⁴⁵ *PL* xi 535–7. The vocabulary of the last line here suggests that Milton is recalling the untimely death of Edward King which he lamented in 'Lycidas': 'I com to pluck your Berries harsh and crude' (l. 3: *Works* i 76). Not all men, not even all godly men, will be 'with ease | Gatherd'.

Henceforth I flie not Death, nor would prolong
 Life much, bent rather how I may be quit
 Fairest and easiest of this combrous charge,
 Which I must keep till my appointed day
 Of rendring up, and patiently attend
 My dissolution.⁴⁶

Patience, now, rather than ease. However, in the often brutal world which the Fall ushers in, 'ease' will appear in corrupted form as one of the vices which men pursue:

Who having spilt much blood, and don much waste
 ...
 Shall change thir course to pleasure, ease, and sloth,
 Surfet, and lust, till wantonness and pride
 Raise out of friendship hostil deeds in Peace.⁴⁷

It is in such a world, as a result of the Fall, that Sin and Death have an easy reign. Satan has promised Sin that he will 'bring ye to the place where Thou and Death | Shall dwell at ease',⁴⁸ and Sin replies that she will then dwell 'among | The Gods who live at ease',⁴⁹ a formulation through which Milton deftly damns the Epicurean notion of ease as the sinful indulgence of pleasure.⁵⁰ Sin unlocks the gates of Hell,

⁴⁶ *PL* xi 547–52.

⁴⁷ *PL* xi 791–6. These men who seek 'ease and sloth' are followers of Belial: cf. the epigraph to this chapter.

⁴⁸ *PL* ii 840–1.

⁴⁹ *PL* ii 867–8; cf. x 621–3, and Satan's comment on the indolent life of the servile angels, quoted earlier (see p. 77). 'Gods' might mean 'angels' here, as well as 'deities' (see Chapter 15 *GOD*, pp. 230–1 for the significance of the plural form).

⁵⁰ Lucretius in *De Rerum Natura* ii 646–51 had written of the gods living at ease. Cf. the implicit critique of Epicureanism in *PR* iv 297–9:

Others in vertue plac'd felicity,
 But vertue joynd with riches and long life,
 In corporal pleasure he, and careless ease.

and the example of Solomon as a kind of Epicurean:

For Solomon he liv'd at ease, and full
 Of honour, wealth, high fare, aim'd not beyond
 Higher design then to enjoy his State;
 Thence to the bait of Women lay expos'd (*PR* ii 201–4).

Dryden's Sathan imagines that the angels

careless of their charge,
 And wanton, in full ease now live at large,
 Unguarded leave the passes of the Skie,
 And all dissolv'd, in Hallelujahs lie.

(*The State of Innocence*, p. 4)

Since 'dissolved' in Restoration usage often has a sexual meaning ('in a post-orgasmic stupor') this evocation of the angels' ease suggests both laziness and sexual indulgence, in effect, a crude version of Epicurean pleasure. However, the pleasure actually proposed by Epicurus as the *summum bonum* is *ἀταραξία*, which is not the indulgence of sensual pleasure but the freedom from passion, with tranquility of mind and body. For seventeenth-century interest in Epicurus and Lucretius see Catherine Wilson, *Epicureanism at the Origins of Modernity* (Oxford, 2008), and Paul Hammond, *Dryden and the Traces of Classical Rome* (Oxford, 1999), pp. 156–70.

and 'every Bolt and Bar | Of massie Iron or sollid Rock with ease | Unfast'ns':⁵¹ 'with ease' tells us that Sin opens the gates of Hell without difficulty, and also by means of ease. Subsequently Satan proceeds on his journey towards Earth 'with less toil, and now with ease',⁵² 'and windes with ease | Through the pure marble Air his oblique way',⁵³ and reaching the walls of Eden, like a wolf 'Leaps o're the fence with ease into the Fould'.⁵⁴ After the Fall Satan tells Sin that he is about to 'Descend through Darkness, on your Rode with ease'.⁵⁵ It is Sin which makes all this easy, and will make the path from Earth down into Hell easier still, for

a Bridge of wondrous length
From Hell continu'd reaching th' utmost Orbe
Of this frail World; by which the Spirits perverse
With easie intercourse pass to and fro
To tempt or punish mortals.⁵⁶

And we know now where the easy path leads: it is 'a passage broad, | Smooth, easie, inoffensive down to Hell'.⁵⁷



After the Fall, ease becomes a temptation in two senses: the indolent surrender to pleasure—seen in the examples of Solomon and of Samson—is to be resisted because it negates virtue, but another form of seduction which leads man away from the path of virtue is the temptation to embrace the easy result. Satan in *Paradise Regain'd* urges Jesus to liberate the Jews from the rule of Tiberius, which he could do easily by leading an armed revolt:

with what ease
Indu'd with Regal Vertues as thou art,
Appearing, and beginning noble deeds,
Might'st thou expel this monster from his Throne.⁵⁸

But such notions of the regal, the virtuous, and the noble are contaminated by receiving Satan's approval, by being subject to Satan's definition. This path may indeed be easy, but it is not the path of the Cross, and the Cross will transform mankind's understanding of what is regal, virtuous, and noble. Satan also regrets Jesus' refusal of

my offer'd aid,
Which would have set thee in short time with ease
On *David's* Throne; or Throne of all the world.⁵⁹

⁵¹ *PL* ii 877–9. ⁵² *PL* ii 1041. ⁵³ *PL* iii 563–4.

⁵⁴ *PL* iv 187. There is an implicit criticism here of the lazy clergy who do little to protect their flock from the attacks of the devil; cf. 'Beware of false prophets which come to you in sheepes clothing, but inwardly they are rauening wolues' (Matthew vii 15), and 'Lycidas' ll. 113–32.

⁵⁵ *PL* x 394. ⁵⁶ *PL* ii 1028–32.

⁵⁷ *PL* x 304–5. Cf. 'Enter ye in at the strait gate, for wide is the gate, and broad is the way that leadeth to destruction' (Matthew vii 13).

⁵⁸ *PR* iv 97–100. ⁵⁹ *PR* iv 377–9.

But it is precisely Satan's proffered aid which damns both the easy path of military success, and the monarchical power to which it leads. As Jesus reflects,

my way must lie
Through many a hard assay even to the death,
E're I the promis'd Kingdom can attain.⁶⁰

Ease does not lead to Gethsemane.⁶¹

For Milton, the virtuous path is always the strenuous one, as he explains in *Areopagitica*: 'I cannot praise a fugitive and cloister'd virtue, unexercis'd & unbreath'd, that never sallies out and sees her adversary, but slinks out of the race, where that immortall garland is to be run for, not without dust and heat'.⁶² By contrast, ease is collocated with a lazy surrender of freedom to tyranny, as Samson says:

But what more oft in Nations grown corrupt,
And by thir vices brought to servitude,
Then to love Bondage more then Liberty,
Bondage with ease then strenuous liberty.⁶³

Love of ease is associated for Milton with lack of strenuous virtue in both the political and the religious spheres. An indolent minister teaches 'here and there at random out of this or that text as his ease or fansie, and oft-times as his stealth guides him'. Nevertheless, Christianity is easy in another sense, for 'Christian religion may be so easily attaind, and by meanest capacities', as its teachings may be easily grasped by even the unlearned if they study the Bible conscientiously.⁶⁴ Poetry too has a role here, and could show readers 'that whereas the paths of honesty and good life appear now rugged and difficult, though they be indeed easy and pleasant, they would then appeare to all men both easy and pleasant though they were rugged and difficult indeed'.⁶⁵ On the other hand, the elaborate liturgy of the Laudian church, with its 'deformed, and fantastick dresses in Palls, and Miters, gold, and giegaw's' enervated both body and soul, inculcating a bodily ease which inhibited the soul's strenuous search after truth,

till the Soule by this meanes of over-bodying her selfe, given up justly to fleshly delights, bated her wing apace downward: and finding the ease she had from her visible, and sensuous colleague the body in performance of *Religious* duties, her pineons now broken, and flagging, shifted off from her selfe, the labour of high soaring any more, forgot her heavenly flight.⁶⁶

But no religion, principles, or law ever taught men to consult their own ease rather than oppose the public enemy,⁶⁷ and Milton himself gladly engaged in the strenuous

⁶⁰ *PR* i 263–5.

⁶¹ Ironically, it is Satan who acknowledges that 'Hard are the ways of truth, and rough to walk' (*PR* i 478).

⁶² *Areopagitica*: *Works* iv 311. *dust and heat*: cf. Horace's comment that Sybaris' infatuation with Lydia has led him to neglect the manly exercises of the training ground with its dust and heat (*pulveris atque solis*) (*Carmina* I viii 4).

⁶³ *SA* ll. 268–71: *Works* i 346.

⁶⁶ *Reformation*: *Works* iii 2.

⁶⁴ *Hirelings*: *Works* vi 76.

⁶⁵ *Reason*: *Works* iii 239.

⁶⁷ *Defensio*: *Works* vii 286–7; 'ease' here is *otium*.

defence of liberty when it seemed threatened, telling a friend that an idle ease had never held charms for him.⁶⁸ Nor was the composition of *Paradise Lost* an easy matter; Urania indeed 'inspires | Easie my unpremeditated Verse',⁶⁹ but that emphatically placed 'Easie' reverently accords this fluency to the heavenly Muse, not himself, and the path which she teaches him to follow is 'hard and rare'.⁷⁰

When composing his *History of Britain*⁷¹ Milton took the opportunity to set before his contemporaries several monitory examples of the consequences of preferring ease to strenuous liberty. When the Roman commander Petronius Turpilianus decided to placate the Britons by not provoking them, he 'was thought to have pretended the love of peace to what indeed was his love of ease and sloth' (like Belial again), but the policy proved the undoing of his successor, who 'follow'd his steps, usurping the name of gentle Government to any remissness or neglect of Discipline; which brought in first licence, next disobedience into his Camp'.⁷² The wiser—or more Machiavellian—Agricola brought Roman ways to the Britons, thereby instilling in them a love of ease which was in reality no less than a form of voluntary servitude:

Then were the *Roman* fashions imitated, and the Gown; after a while the incitements also and materials of Vice, and voluptuous life, proud Buildings, Baths, and the elegance of Banqueting; which the foolisher sort call'd civilitie, but was indeed a secret Art to prepare them for bondage.⁷³

Subsequently, Hengist decided that because the inhabitants were 'giv'n to vicious ease', they would be easy to conquer.⁷⁴ Ease lays men open to servitude and tyranny, but also leads to a thoroughly degenerate society, as happened when a new generation of Britons, 'unacquainted with past Evils, and only sensible of thir present ease and quiet, succeeded, strait follow'd the apparent subversion of all truth, and justice, in the minds of most men'.⁷⁵ The application of these precedents to the world of Restoration England is self-evident.



As well as 'ease', Milton also uses the idea of 'rest', which is not quite synonymous with 'ease'. 'Rest' has biblical associations: God rests from his work of creation,⁷⁶ and for mankind rest is 'A perfect ceasing, and full freedome from all sins, sorrows, and miseries . . . peace and quietnesse of a good conscience under sure hope of eternal rest . . . The quietnesse of the minde, being freed from all worldly cares and fears of enemies and dangers'.⁷⁷ Restlessness may lead man towards true rest,

⁶⁸ *neque enim iners otium unquam mihi placuit* (Letter to Henry Oldenburg, 6 July 1654: *Works* xii 64–5).

⁶⁹ *PL* ix 23–4. ⁷⁰ *PL* iii 21.

⁷¹ *The History of Britain* was published in 1670, but was probably begun c.1645 and written intermittently over the next two decades (*CPW* v xxxvii–xliii).

⁷² *History of Britain: Works* x 70–1.

⁷³ *History of Britain: Works* x 73–4.

⁷⁴ *History of Britain: Works* x 116.

⁷⁵ *History of Britain: Works* x 133.

⁷⁶ Genesis ii 2; cf. *PL* vii 90–3, 587–95.

⁷⁷ Wilson, p. 530.

as St Augustine said, *quia fecisti nos ad te et inquietum est cor nostrum, donec requiescat in te*.⁷⁸ According to George Herbert, God determined that man would enjoy the gifts of nature

with repining restlesnesse:
Let him be rich and wearie, that at least,
If goodnesse leade him not, yet wearinesse
May tosse him to my breast.⁷⁹

True rest is promised by Jesus himself in the invitation, ‘Come vnto me all yee that labour, and are heauy laden, and I will giue you rest’.⁸⁰ It is, of course, much more than bodily repose that is offered here, and at several points in *Paradise Lost* we find that the physical and the spiritual meanings of ‘rest’ come together. In his first glimpse of Hell Satan sees

Regions of sorrow, doleful shades, where peace
And rest can never dwell, hope never comes
That comes to all.⁸¹

because this Hell is a spiritual state in which he has refused divine peace and rest, as he half acknowledges when he says to Beelzebub,

Thither let us tend
From off the tossing of these fiery waves,
There rest, if any rest can harbour there.⁸²

The conditional clause betrays a realization that true rest will never again be available to him. When he makes his way through the fires, stench, and smoke of Hell, ‘Such resting found the sole | Of unblest feet’.⁸³ Likewise his companions

With shuddring horror pale, and eyes agast
View’d first thir lamentable lot, and found
No rest.⁸⁴

Here

each his several way
Pursues, as inclination or sad choice
Leads him perplext, where he may likeliest find
Truce to his restless thoughts.⁸⁵

But the ‘restless thoughts’ find no ‘Truce’, let alone true peace.

⁷⁸ St Augustine, *Confessiones* I i: ‘Because you have made us for yourself, and our heart is restless until it rests in you’.

⁷⁹ ‘The Pulley’ ll. 17–20, in *The English Poems of George Herbert*, edited by Helen Wilcox (Cambridge, 2007), p. 549.

⁸⁰ Matthew xi 28; cf. Psalm xcvi 11: ‘Vnto whom I sware in my wrath: that they should not enter into my rest’.

⁸¹ *PL* i 65–7.

⁸² *PL* i 183–5.

⁸³ *PL* i 237–8.

⁸⁴ *PL* ii 616–18; cf. vi 413–16.

⁸⁵ *PL* ii 523–6.

However, 'rest' is an appropriate word for the physical repose enjoyed by Adam and Eve before the Fall because for them it is part of the divine order of things, as Adam explains:

When *Adam* thus to *Eve*: Fair Consort, th' hour
Of night, and all things now retir'd to rest
Mind us of like repose, since God hath set
Labour and rest, as day and night to men
Successive, and the timely dew of sleep
Now falling with soft slumbrous weight inclines
Our eye-lids; other Creatures all day long
Rove idle unimploid, and less need rest;
Man hath his daily work of body or mind
Appointed, which declares his Dignitie.⁸⁶

All creation enjoys rest, and man besides has both work and rest appointed to him. Rest is ordained for man by nature,⁸⁷ and it is offered by the hospitable Adam to Raphael:

voutsafe with us
Two onely, who yet by sov'ran gift possess
This spacious ground, in yonder shade Bowre
To rest.⁸⁸

Such rest is a sharing of the Creator's gifts. Satan's proleptic seduction of Eve in her dream is an attempt to draw her away from God, and thus provokes in her 'unquiet rest',⁸⁹ and he is rebuked by Michael for attempting 'To trouble Holy Rest'.⁹⁰ After the Fall, Adam and Eve dress themselves with fig leaves, but they are not thereby made 'at rest or ease of Mind'.⁹¹ The only rest which the postlapsarian Adam can envisage is death,⁹² but Michael's explanation of the redemptive work of Christ promises that he will defeat

The adversarie Serpent, and bring back
Through the worlds wilderness long wanderd man
Safe to eternal Paradise of rest.⁹³

Once the concept of 'rest' has been thus purified by Michael, we can understand some of its richness when it is used finally in the last lines of the poem:

The World was all before them, where to choose
Thir place of rest, and Providence thir guide.⁹⁴

Now they seek physical repose from their wanderings, and a place where they can recuperate their strength after their labours—which will be hard, not like the easy gardening in Eden—but they also seek the place where they will receive the rest promised to all men in the gospels.

⁸⁶ *PL* iv 610–19. Cf. 'roseat Dews dispos'd | All but the unsleeping eyes of God to rest' (*PL* v 646–7).

⁸⁷ *PL* iv 633.

⁸⁸ *PL* v 365–8.

⁸⁹ *PL* v 11.

⁹⁰ *PL* vi 272.

⁹¹ *PL* ix 1120.

⁹² *PL* x 778, 1085.

⁹³ *PL* xii 312–14.

⁹⁴ *PL* xii 646–7.

9

Envy

Such wonder seis'd, though after Heaven seen,
The Spirit maligne, but much more envy seis'd
At sight of all this World beheld so faire.

Paradise Lost iii 552–4



Envy, *invidia*, is considered one of the seven deadly or capital sins, along with pride, avarice, gluttony, lust, sloth, and anger.¹ In the early-modern period the noun meant not only ‘the feeling of mortification and ill-will occasioned by the contemplation of superior advantages possessed by another’, but also ‘malignant or hostile feeling; ill-will, malice, enmity’.² Its etymological root lies in the Latin *invidia*, which is related to *invidere*, to look maliciously upon (*in*, upon, against + *videre*, to see). Envy is a malicious, resentful looking. The envious are appropriately punished in Dante’s *Purgatorio* by having their eyelids pierced and sewn up by an iron wire.³

Envy is one of Satan’s characteristics; along with pride it forms the basis for his revolt against God and brings death to man, for ‘through enuie of the deuill came death into the world’.⁴ Satan,

fraught

With envie against the Son of God, that day
Honour by his great Father, and proclaimed

¹ Aquinas, *ST I–II*, q. 84, art. 4, citing St Gregory. A capital vice is one from which other vices arise (*ST I–II*, q. 84, art. 3). For the theological and literary tradition of the seven deadly sins see Morton W. Bloomfield, *The Seven Deadly Sins: An Introduction to the History of a Religious Concept, with Special Reference to Medieval English Literature* (East Lansing, Mich., 1952). He notes the idea that Satan was motivated by envy (pp. 166, 382) and the representation of envy as a serpent (p. 197). For Milton’s thinking about envy in his prose works see Ruth Mohl, *John Milton and His commonplace Book* (New York, 1969), pp. 143–7. In *De Doctrina* he identifies several kinds of envy: not wanting others to share one’s own good fortune; begrudging to someone else that which one cannot have oneself; resenting that someone has the same good fortune as another person whom one loves (*OCW* viii 1118–19). For a discussion of ‘The Politics of Envy’ in *PL* see David Quint, *Inside ‘Paradise Lost’: Reading the Designs of Milton’s Epic* (Princeton, N.J., 2014), ch. 5.

² *OED s.v.* envy *n.* 3a, 1a.

³ Dante, *Purgatorio* xiii 70–2.

⁴ *Wisdom* ii 24.

Messiah King anointed, could not beare
Through pride that sight, & thought himself impaired.⁵

Satan's envy, his resentful looking, is directed against the Son and generated by his pride, for he cannot bear the thought of being subordinate; and the rebel angels similarly resent the sight of the Son and his glorification, and 'Grieving to see his Glorie, at the sight | Took envie'.⁶ As the Son says of the rebel angels, 'mee they have despis'd, | Yet envied'.⁷ The angels who rebel against God seek 'on his Throne | To set the envier of his State, the proud | Aspirer'.⁸ Mammon urges his companions to reject the prospect of a return to Heaven where they would have to praise God 'while he Lordly sits | Our envied Sovran'.⁹

Such envy seems to Satan to be an inevitable component of any hierarchy, so he acts to ward off the threat which would be posed to him by the envy of his own followers. First, he tells them that the kingdom of Hell has been 'Establisht in a safe unenvied Throne | Yielded with full consent'.¹⁰ They cannot envy that which they themselves have established. Moreover, who

Will envy whom the highest place exposes
Formost to stand against the Thunderers aim
Your bulwark, and condemns to greatest share
Of endless pain?¹¹

When Satan, described by God as 'our envious Foe',¹² looks out at the world which God has newly created he sees it with eyes tainted by envy:

Such wonder seis'd, though after Heaven seen,
The Spirit maligne, but much more envy seis'd
At sight of all this World beheld so faire.¹³

This is envy for a world which others will inhabit, and from which he is excluded. When Satan stands on the top of Mount Niphates to survey this new world, 'each passion dimm'd his face | Thrice chang'd with pale, ire, envie and despair'.¹⁴ As Milton observes in *De Doctrina Christiana*, envy tortures the envier himself.¹⁵ Assuming that man has been created by God in order to spite him, Satan says that man 'Provokes my envie',¹⁶ and here the word primarily seems to mean 'enmity'. Continuing to attribute to God his own way of thinking, Satan asks himself why God has forbidden the Tree of Knowledge, and asks,

⁵ *PL* v 661–5. Cf. *PR* i 36–9, where Satan

th' exalted man, to whom
Such high attest was giv'n, a while survey'd
With wonder, then with envy fraught and rage
Flies to his place.

⁶ *PL* vi 792–3.

⁷ *PL* vi 812–13.

⁸ *PL* vi 88–90.

⁹ *PL* ii 243–4.

¹⁰ *PL* ii 23–4.

¹¹ *PL* ii 27–30.

¹² *PL* vii 139.

¹³ *PL* iii 552–4.

¹⁴ *PL* iv 115–16. *pale*: a noun here: pallor (*OED*³ s.v. *pale* n.). Milton may have taken this idea from Ovid's classic description of Invidia, which includes the detail *Pallor in ore sedet* ('pallor resides in her face': *Metamorphoses* ii 775).

¹⁵ *De Doctrina*: *OCW* viii 1118–21: *invidia... ipsum invidum excruciat*.

¹⁶ *PL* ix 175.

Knowledge forbi'd'n?
Suspicious, reasonless. Why should thir Lord
Envie them that?¹⁷

Why, he wonders, should God envy them—that is, begrudge them¹⁸—knowledge? Satan is motivated to destroy the happiness of Adam and Eve out of ‘Envy and Revenge’,¹⁹ and more specifically what Satan looks upon with the eyes of envy is the mutual love of Adam and Eve. When Adam

press'd her Matron lip
With kisses pure: aside the Devil turn'd
For envie, yet with jealous leer maligne
Ey'd them askance.²⁰

Satan's envy has already been linked with pride, anger, and despair; now it is associated with lust.²¹

Raphael warns Adam against Satan ‘who envies now thy state, | Who now is plotting how he may seduce | Thee also from obedience’.²² Adam intuitively feels that their adversary may envy their happiness, and specifically their conjugal love, telling Eve that their

malicious Foe
Envying our happiness, and of his own
Despairing, seeks to work us woe and shame
...
Whether his first design be to withdraw
Our fealtie from God, or to disturb
Conjugal Love, then which perhaps no bliss
Enjoy'd by us excites his envie more.²³

Adam is right, for the only love which Satan experiences is that form of self-love which manifests itself in pride, and provokes his Fall.²⁴

Satan intends to instil resentment in Eve against what he will represent to her as being God's envious withholding of knowledge, and to

¹⁷ *PL* iv 515–17. By contrast, John Smith in ‘The Excellency and Nobleness of True Religion’ cites Plato to the effect that there is no envy in God (*The Cambridge Platonists*, edited by C. A. Patrides (London, 1969; reissued Cambridge, 1980), p. 169 and n. 89). Dryden's Lucifer acknowledges that God ‘bounteously bestow'd unenvy'd good | On me’, but resolves ‘vast destruction, be my envy's food’ (*The State of Innocence, and Fall of Man: An Opera* (London, 1677), p. 15).

¹⁸ *OED* s.v. *envy* v.¹ 3a: ‘To grudge, give reluctantly, refuse to give’.

¹⁹ *PL* i 35.

²⁰ *PL* iv 501–4.

²¹ Cf. the linking of envy with other vices here:

That space the Evil one abstracted stood
From his own evil, and for the time remain'd
Stupidly good, of enmitie disarm'd,
Of guile, of hate, of envie, of revenge.

(*PL* ix 463–6)

²² *PL* vi 900–2.

²³ *PL* ix 253–5, 261–4.

²⁴ Though Sin has been his sexual partner, and Death is his son, he feels no love for them, and his occasional affectionate language towards them is a ploy to enlist their help.

excite thir minds
 With more desire to know, and to reject
 Envious commands, invented with designe
 To keep them low whom knowledge might exalt
 Equal with Gods.²⁵

His corruption of Eve begins with him instilling into her by means of her dream the idea that God begrudges them knowledge: 'is Knowledge so despis'd? | Or envie, or what reserve forbids to taste?'²⁶ And when he accosts her in the guise of a serpent (taking on the visual form in which envy is traditionally represented iconographically²⁷) Satan again suggests to Eve that if God has forbidden them to take fruit from this tree it must be because he begrudges them knowledge:

What can your knowledge hurt him, or this Tree
 Impart against his will if all be his?
 Or is it envie, and can envie dwell
 In heav'nly breasts?²⁸

Part of his strategy is to arouse envy in Eve, to elicit from her a desire for what he apparently possesses and she does not, and he does this by attributing envy to the beasts which, he says, gazed longingly at the fruit which they were insufficiently agile to gather for themselves:

Round the Tree
 All other Beasts that saw, with like desire
 Longing and envying stood, but could not reach.²⁹

Listening to him, Eve attributes to the serpent a generosity and lack of envy in his eagerness to share the fruit with her, telling herself that

that one Beast which first
 Hath tasted, envies not, but brings with joy
 The good befall'n him.³⁰

—a generosity which contrasts with the attitude of God who, according to the serpent, begrudges mankind knowledge.³¹ After she has taken the forbidden fruit Eve begins to resemble Satan linguistically, in her use of *erotema* and *paradiastole*,

²⁵ *PL* iv 522–6.

²⁶ *PL* v 60–1.

²⁷ Envy is often represented in allegorical painting and in emblem books with a serpent in her mouth: cf. Geoffrey Whitney, *A Choice of Emblemes* (Leyden, 1586), p. 94. See also *The Spenser Encyclopedia*, edited by A. C. Hamilton (Toronto, 1990), *s.v.*, and *Encyclopedia of Comparative Iconography*, edited by Helene E. Roberts, 2 vols (Chicago, 1998), *s.v.* Milton writes in 'Ad Patrem' of the crooked leer of Envy and the snake-bearing jaws of Calumny (ll. 106–7: *Works* i 276–8).

²⁸ *PL* ix 727–30.

²⁹ *PL* ix 591–3.

³⁰ *PL* ix 769–71.

³¹ By contrast, Adam had acknowledged the generosity of God in creating Eve and not begrudging him that happiness:

thou hast fulfill'd
 Thy words, Creator bounteous and benigne,
 Giver of all things faire, but fairest this
 Of all thy gifts, nor enviest.

(*PL* viii 491–4)

and specifically in her attribution to God of envy, for 'She Now was Arriv'd to Think as the Enemy had Taught her', as Richardson observed.³² Addressing the tree, she promises that she will reverence it

Till dieted by thee I grow mature
In knowledge, as the Gods who all things know;
Though others envie what they cannot give;
For had the gift bin theirs, it had not here
Thus grown.³³

Eve now imagines herself to be in a world of pagan gods rather than the one God, and imagines them, or him, envying the knowledge which is apparently provided so freely by the tree. Envy is both a cause and a consequence of the Fall. Eve herself envies Adam his superior place in the hierarchy which God has created, and considers whether she should withhold her newly gained knowledge from him in order to be his equal or superior.³⁴ Among the other consequences of the Fall is the first death, which is motivated by envy, for, as Michael tells Adam, Cain kills his brother Abel 'For envie that his Brothers Offering found | From Heav'n acceptance'.³⁵ Yet when the couple turn in repentance towards God,

To Heav'n thir prayers
Flew up, nor missd the way, by envious windes
Blow'n vagabond or frustrate.³⁶

Like the 'envious darknes' which the Lady fears may have occluded the Brothers in *A Maske*,³⁷ such winds would attempt to thwart good intentions, but ultimately the power of envy fails before the power of virtue and prayer.

Such uses of the word point towards Milton's concept of envy being more than just resentment at the good fortune of others; rather it is often considered as an active hostility to truth and goodness. When Milton in his polemical prose writings accuses his opponents of envy, he does not just mean that they resent his public success or fame;³⁸ more than that, he implies that the envy (including calumny) which is directed against him is in effect a sign of the truth and rectitude of what he is saying. In *The Doctrine and Discipline of Divorce*, for example, he claims that

Error and Custome... with the numerous and vulgar train of their followers, make it their chiefe designe to envie and cry-down the industry of free reasoning... as if the womb of teeming Truth were to be clos'd up.³⁹

³² J. Richardson, father and son, *Explanatory Notes and Remarks on Milton's 'Paradise Lost'* (London, 1734), *ad PL* ix 805.

³³ *PL* ix 803–7. The passage is obscure. Fowler *ad loc.* glosses 'others' as 'God', which would create for line 805 the meaning 'though God begrudges us the knowledge which he cannot give us because it is freely provided by the tree'.

³⁴ *PL* ix 816–25.

³⁵ *PL* xi 456–7.

³⁶ *PL* xi 14–16.

³⁷ *Maske* l. 194: *Works* i 92.

³⁸ *Invidia* was often contrasted with *fama* in classical writers, and *invidia gloriae comes* ('envy is the companion of glory') became proverbial (from Cornelius Nepos, *Chabrias* iii 3).

³⁹ *Divorce: Works* iii 368.

To envy, then, is to attack free reasoning and Truth. In this age, he says, 'many are so opposite both to human and to Christian liberty, either while they understand not, or envy others that do'.⁴⁰ So those who disagree with him envy—that is, oppose and attempt to thwart—any who understand the true meaning of Christian liberty, and they

despise, or envy, or suspect
Whom God hath of his special Favour rais'd
As thir Deliverer.⁴¹

Amongst those enemies of truth and liberty was Charles I, for 'To be more just, religious, wise, or magnanimous then the common sort, stirrs up in a Tyrant both feare and envy'.⁴² In such contexts 'envy' has become a Satanic opposition to truth.

⁴⁰ *Tetrachordon*: *Works* iv 74.

⁴¹ *SA* ll. 271–3: *Works* i 346.

⁴² *Eikonoklastes*: *Works* v 217–18.

10

Equal

And render me more equal, and perhaps,
A thing not undesireable, sometime
Superior; for inferior who is free:¹

Paradise Lost ix 823–5



Eve's desire for equality with Adam is a result of, not a motive for, the Fall. Actually, when she wonders whether to withhold some knowledge from Adam in order to give her some power over him, she thinks that this might render her not 'equal' but 'more equal'. Logically, one cannot have degrees of equality, though one can have degrees of inequality. In saying 'more equal' she appears to mean that she would become more nearly equal to Adam in knowledge. She may even at some time in the future become his superior. For Milton, Eve's desire for equality with Adam, or superiority over him, is a sign of her Fall.²

Milton has prepared us to regard the desire for equality, or discontent with an unequal and inferior position, as being potentially a sin by making that desire a motive of Satan's Fall. 'He trusted to have equal'd the most High',³ says the narrator at the beginning of the poem. Moloc too was determined

with th' Eternal to be deem'd
Equal in strength, and rather then be less
Car'd not to be at all.⁴

Satan's appeal to his followers plays on what he supposes may be their resentment at inequality when he incites them to rebellion against their subordinate position in Heaven:

Will ye submit your necks, and chuse to bend
The supple knee? ye will not, if I trust
To know ye right, or if ye know your selves

¹ *undesireable*: Milton's coinage, according to the *OED*. *sometime*: this might mean 'sometimes, occasionally' (*OED* s.v. *sometime* *adv.* 1a) but more probably means 'at some time in the future' (*OED* 4a).

² C. S. Lewis has a brisk account of Milton's concept of hierarchy (*A Preface to 'Paradise Lost'* (Oxford, 1942), ch. 11).

³ *PL* i 40. John M. Steadman, *Milton's Epic Characters* (Chapel Hill, N.C., 1968), pp. 161–3, shows that Milton used the Junius–Tremellius translation of Isaiah xiv 14, which has Lucifer saying *me aequabo excelso* where the Vulgate reads *ero similis Altissimo* and the AV 'I wil bee like the most High'.

⁴ *PL* ii 46–8.

Natives and Sons of Heav'n possess before
 By none, and if not equal all, yet free,
 Equally free; for Orders and Degrees
 Jarr not with liberty, but well consist.
 Who can in reason then or right assume
 Monarchie over such as live by right
 His equals, if in power and splendor less,
 In freedome equal?⁵

Satan seems here to be playing with two applications of the idea of equality. Firstly, he is urging his followers to resent the elevation of the Son who, he says, is now assuming monarchy over those who 'live by right | His equals' (though what 'right' this might be is not specified). They may not be the Son's equals in 'power and splendor' but they are his equals in freedom, for they had previously been 'possess | By none'.⁶ But, says Satan, this freedom is not incompatible with them being unequal in rank, 'for Orders and Degrees | Jarr not with liberty, but well consist'. Just how differences of rank are consistent with liberty he does not explain, but the idea is important to him for the exercise of his own power as their leader. His claim is contested by Abdiel, who says:

But to grant it thee unjust,
 That equal over equals Monarch Reigne:
 Thy self though great and glorious dost thou count,
 Or all Angelic Nature joind in one,
 Equal to him begotten Son, by whom
 As by his Word the mighty Father made
 All things, ev'n thee, and all the Spirits of Heav'n
 By him created in thir bright degrees,
 Crownd them with Glory, and to thir Glory nam'd
 Thrones, Dominations, Princedoms, Vertues, Powers.⁷

Abdiel concedes that it may indeed, in the abstract, be unjust for someone to reign over his equals as a monarch, but, he maintains, Satan is not the Son's equal, nor would all the angels combined together be his equal: after all, it was the Son who as the divine *logos* created them, and created their 'bright degrees', that is, their unequal positions in the divine hierarchy.⁸ Abdiel sees the celestial 'degrees' not as forms of inequality and subordination but as diverse forms of glory.

This is not what Satan wishes to hear, and he replies that

Our puissance is our own, our own right hand
 Shall teach us highest deeds, by proof to try
 Who is our equal.⁹

⁵ *PL* v 787–97.

⁶ If they were 'possess | By none' they were not slaves. For the Roman idea that all those who are subjects to a monarchy are, in effect, slaves, see Chapter 14 *FREE*, pp. 167–8.

⁷ *PL* v 831–40.

⁸ *degrees*: steps; stages in the scale of dignity or rank (*OED s.v. degree n.* 1, 4; etymologically from Latin *de + gradus*, a step down).

⁹ *PL* v 864–6.

So the kind of equality which matters to Satan is that which can be demonstrated by force. After the rebels' initial defeat Satan maintains that

Weapons more violent, when next we meet,
May serve to better us, and worse our foes,
Or equal what between us made the odds,
In Nature none.¹⁰

But such confidence in military prowess and hardware as a way to level unequal power is futile, for as Nisroc eventually admits it is

hard
For Gods, and too unequal work we find
Against unequal arms to fight in paine.¹¹

As a result of their defeat, what the rebel angels share is equal misery, as Satan reflects when looking at Beelzebub:

he Whom mutual league,
United thoughts and counsels, equal hope
And hazard in the Glorious Enterprize,
Joynd with me once, now misery hath joynd
In equal ruin.¹²

There is an alternative meaning for the second instance of 'equal' here, which is the sense 'equitable':¹³ their ruin is 'equal' because it is shared alike, but also 'equal' because it is just. Indeed, running through Milton's meditations on his characters' desire for equality are the implicit questions, 'Is equality just?' and 'Does justice require equality?'

Even in Hell Satan tells himself that it is only greater force that has made God superior, for 'Whom reason hath equald, force hath made supream | Above his equals'.¹⁴ Satan's first claim here appears to be that he and God are equal in their rational powers, or perhaps he means that reason concludes that he and God are equal; either way, as Patrick Hume remarks, 'Satan makes very ill use of that reason the Sovereign Creator had in such Perfection endow'd him with, to argue an Equality with his Maker, and that by force of Arms he had obtain'd an Usurp'd Superiority over him and his Rebellious Crew, as his Equals, who are his Creatures.'¹⁵ But equality with God is indeed what Satan insists upon, in this respect seeing himself as God's equal opponent in a Manichaean struggle,¹⁶ and his followers accept this:

Towards him they bend
With awful reverence prone; and as a God
Extoll him equal to the highest in Heav'n.¹⁷

¹⁰ *PL* vi 439–42.

¹¹ *PL* vi 452–4.

¹² *PL* i 87–91.

¹³ *OED* *s.v.* *equal* *adj.* 5; cf. *OLD* *s.v.* *aequus* 6.

¹⁴ *PL* i 248–9.

¹⁵ Hume, *ad loc.*

¹⁶ See Chapter 11 *EVIL*, pp. 106–7, 112. God says to the Son that Satan 'intends to erect his Throne | Equal to ours, throughout the spacious North' (*PL* v 725–6). Cf. 'The Palace of great *Lucifer*' which Satan builds 'Affecting all equality with God' (v 760, 763).

¹⁷ *PL* ii 477–9.

The fallacy of the rebel angels' conception is indicated by the indefinite article which has slipped into that phrase 'a God'. God, in Christian theology, is not a being amongst other beings, still less is he a god amongst other gods.¹⁸

One might think that it is the Son not Satan who is equal to God, and yet there are traces in Milton's thinking of a theology which refuses to accept the orthodox Trinitarian teaching that the deity is to be thought of as three persons in one God, and instead places the Son in a lesser role.¹⁹ Milton's phrasing is ambiguous when he has God addressing the Son thus:

thou hast, though Thron'd in highest bliss
Equal to God, and equally enjoying
God-like fruition, quitted all to save
A World from utter loss.²⁰

God and the Son equally enjoy 'God-like fruition',²¹ but there is an indeterminacy in the phrasing of 'Thron'd in highest bliss | Equal to God': is it the Son who is 'Equal to God' or is it the bliss that he enjoys which is equal to the bliss of God? Yet when God says to Adam that he is

alone
From all Eternitie, for none I know
Second to mee or like, equal much less.²²

the statement that he has no equal or second presumably means that the Son is included here within the first person singular of the deity.

Satan imagines that God's prohibition on the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil is intended to avert the possibility of mankind attaining equality with God or the angels which would, he assumes, be the result of man eating the fruit; the prohibition must, thinks Satan, have been 'invented with designe | To keep them low whom knowledge might exalt | Equal with Gods'.²³ (Actually, God's plan for mankind, as explained by Raphael, is that they may one day attain a place on an equal footing with the angels.²⁴) Jealously guarding the status of angels even

¹⁸ See Chapter 15 GOD, p. 220.

¹⁹ See Chapter 15 GOD, pp. 220–5. Milton's argument in *De Doctrina* is that the Father is greater than the Son. He cites Philippians ii 6 ('Who being in the forme of God, thought it not robbery to be equall with God') and comments that *esse autem aequalem, si is sensus loci illius est, unitatem essentiae refellit potius quam probat. aequalitas enim non nisi duarum saltem potest essentiarum esse* ('But his being equal, if that is the meaning of that passage, refutes rather than proves unity of essence. For equality cannot exist except between at least two essences' (OCW viii 220–1)). The OCW editors note (p. 241) that Milton chose to translate the NT *τὸ εἶναι ἴσα* as *hoc aequalia esse* rather than using Beza's *parem esse*, but Milton could have found *aequalem* at this point in the Vulgate if he had consulted it.

²⁰ PL iii 305–8.

²¹ The word 'godlike' may be used in two distinct senses: (i) referring to some being who is not God but is like God; (ii) referring to the qualities which God is deemed to possess (see *OED*³ s.v. godlike *adj.* 1, 2, and n.b. the now obsolete meaning 'of or relating to God' cited under sense 2). In this example 'God-like' means 'divine' or 'of the kind enjoyed by God'.

²² PL viii 405–7.

²³ PL iv 524–6. 'Angels' is a possible meaning of the plural 'Gods': see pp. 230–1.

²⁴ PL v 493–500.

though he is no longer himself an angel of light, Satan resents the fact that angels are now expected to serve mankind: God has,

O indignitie!
 Subjected to his service Angel wings,
 And flaming Ministers to watch and tend
 Thir earthy Charge.²⁵

Satan still believes that rank has its privileges.



Miltonic marriage is a union of unequal partners. In certain respects inequality is undesirable in marriage, for the whole tenor of Milton's divorce tracts is that the partners should be able to sustain each other emotionally, intellectually, and spiritually. But what seems to matter most is incompatibility rather than inequality: Milton did not expect the partners to have the same gifts and dispositions, but rather compatible natures. When asking God for a suitable companion, Adam had explained that there can be no true companionship between unequals:

Among unequals what societie
 Can sort, what harmonie or true delight?
 Which must be mutual, in proportion due
 Giv'n and receiv'd; but in disparitie
 The one intense, the other still remiss
 Cannot well suite with either, but soon prove
 Tedious alike: Of fellowship I speak
 Such as I seek, fit to participate
 All rational delight, wherein the brute
 Cannot be human consort.²⁶

This is certainly Milton's view of marriage as a fellowship in which 'rational delight' is shared. And trouble, too: Adam shares Eve's anxiety at her dream, for, he says, 'The trouble of thy thoughts this night in sleep | Affects me equally'.²⁷ Although Eve does not share Adam's intellectual discussion with Raphael which explores theological and astronomical problems, this is not because they are beyond her intellectual capacity: she has left Adam and Raphael together 'not, as not with such discourse | Delighted, or not capable her eare | Of what was high'²⁸ but because she preferred to mingle intellectual discourse with marital endearments. In this respect the couple exemplify the Miltonic ideal of marriage. But this is not a marriage of equals, for the couple are

Not equal, as thir sex not equal seemd;
 For contemplation hee and valour formd,
 For softness shee and sweet attractive Grace,
 Hee for God only, shee for God in him.²⁹

²⁵ *PL* ix 154–7. *his*: man's.

²⁶ *PL* viii 383–92.

²⁷ *PL* v 96–7.

²⁸ *PL* viii 348–50.

²⁹ *PL* iv 296–9. *seemd*: was seen to be (not 'appeared to be, but was not'): the inequality is real and apparent, not illusory. For a discussion of these ideas in the light of the tradition of commentary on woman, and woman's place in marriage, see James Grantham Turner, *One Flesh: Paradisal Marriage and Sexual Relations in the Age of Milton* (Oxford, 1987), ch. 3.

Though this passage has occasioned objections from some readers, its essential idea is an impeccably Pauline doctrine:

I would haue you knowe, that the head of euery man is Christ: and the head of the woman is the man, and the head of Christ is God... a man... is the image and glory of God: but the woman is the glory of the man... Neither was the man created for the woman: but the woman for the man.³⁰

Their marriage is a union of complementary gifts held within a hierarchical order, as Adam explains to Raphael:

For well I understand in the prime end
Of Nature her th' inferiour, in the mind
And inward Faculties, which most excell,
In outward also her resembling less
His Image who made both, and less expressing
The character of that Dominion giv'n
O're other Creatures.³¹

Eve is inferior intellectually, and also in so far as her physical form is less godlike than Adam's, and less expressive of mastery. The Son himself reminds Adam of this hierarchy when he rebukes him after the Fall:

Was shee thy God, that her thou didst obey
Before his voice, or was shee made thy guide,
Superior, or but equal, that to her
Thou did'st resigne thy Manhood, and the Place
Wherein God set thee above her made of thee,
And for thee, whose perfection farr excell'd
Hers in all real dignitie.³²

Moreover, what attracts Adam to Eve is in part her submissiveness, for

he in delight
Both of her Beauty and submissive Charms
Smil'd with superior Love, as *Jupiter*
On *Juno* smiles, when he impregns the Clouds
That shed *May* Flowers.³³

But Eve is not always submissive. When she insists upon gardening alone Eve does not explicitly invoke the idea of equality, but her independence is in effect an assertion that her will at least is of equal force with Adam's. After the Fall she considers whether she might withhold the fruit from Adam to

keep the odds of Knowledge in my power

...

And render me more equal, and perhaps,

³⁰ 1 Corinthians xi 3–9, as noted by Hume *ad loc.* The Greek word translated here by 'man' is *ἀνήρ*, i.e. unambiguously 'male' rather than 'human'.

³¹ *PL* viii 540–6.

³² *PL* x 145–51.

³³ *PL* iv 497–501.

A thing not undesirable, sometime
Superior: for inferior who is free?³⁴

Eve's offer of the fruit to Adam is an offer of equality held out from what she thinks is a position of superiority, being in unique possession of this new knowledge, indeed, of 'Deitie', as she supposes:

Thou therefore also taste, that equal Lot
May joyne us, equal Joy, as equal Love;
Least thou not tasting, different degree
Disjoyne us, and I then too late renounce
Deitie for thee, when Fate will not permit.³⁵

There seems to be an ominous echo here of Satan's speech to Beelzebub quoted earlier.³⁶ In these respects, the Fall is the fall of proper hierarchy, which Milton analyses in allegorical terms of the deposing of Understanding and Reason by Appetite:

For Understanding rul'd not, and the Will
Heard not her lore, both in subjection now
To sensual Appetite, who from beneath
Usurping over sovran Reason claimd
Superior sway.³⁷

Eventually Adam uses the word 'equal' in the slightly different sense of 'equitable, just'³⁸ when he acknowledges that his punishment is 'equal' to his transgression:

as my Will
Concurd not to my being, it were but right
And equal to reduce me to my dust.³⁹

After the Fall, the narrative of human history is often one of depravity, but when Adam blames woman for the corruption of his descendants Michael corrects him, insisting that the moral degeneracy which he has observed comes rather from men being too subservient to women:

From Mans effeminate slackness it begins,
Said th' Angel, who should better hold his place
By wisdom, and superiour gifts receav'd.⁴⁰

Adam is also shown postlapsarian inequality and oppressive rule exemplified in Nimrod, a man

Of proud ambitious heart, who not content
With fair equalitie, fraternal state,

³⁴ *PL* ix 820–5.

³⁵ *PL* ix 881–5. When Adam accepts the fruit, Eve compliments him on his 'so true, | So faithful Love unequald' (*PL* ix 982–3), though one wonders what other examples of faithful love she knows to compare with his.

³⁶ *PL* i 87–91: see p. 95.

³⁷ *PL* ix 1127–31.

³⁸ *OED s.v. equal adj.* 5.

³⁹ *PL* x 746–8.

⁴⁰ *PL* xi 634–6. *effeminate*: showing undue susceptibility and subservience to women.

Will arrogate Dominion undeserv'd
Over his brethren.⁴¹

After 'the decay of man from original righteousness', says Milton in *Tetrachordon* (1645), God permitted among the consequences of the Fall various forms of inequality,

to be som maisters, som servants, som to be princes, others to be subjects...in his comon wealth some to bee undeserv'dly rich, others to bee undeservingly poore. All which till hardnesse of heart came in, was most unjust; whenas prime Nature made us all equall, made us equall coheirs by common right and dominion over all creatures.⁴²

So Nature originally made us equal, with equal rights over the earth. Forms of inequality result from the Fall, but that does not mean that postlapsarian political inequalities are to be condoned, and on the eve of the Restoration Milton maintained that no man 'who hath the true principles of justice and religion in him, can presume or take upon him to be a king and lord over his brethren, whom he cannot but know whether as men or Christians, to be for the most part every way equal or superior to himself.'⁴³ If this sounds like Satan's speech to his followers,⁴⁴ the crucial difference is that Milton is expounding for postlapsarian man the principles of a Christian polity in which no one should take it upon himself to lord it over his fellows; moreover, the phrase 'presume or take upon him' is important, for Milton is speaking of those who constitute themselves as rulers instead of being entrusted with rule by the people as his political theory required.

There is also in *Paradise Lost* just a glimpse of a different form of polity in the example of

The Parsimonious Emmet, provident
Of future, in small room large heart enclos'd,
Pattern of just equalitie perhaps
Hereafter, join'd in her popular Tribes
Of Commonaltie.⁴⁵

⁴¹ *PL* xii 25–8. For a discussion of the theme of 'Brotherhood versus Kingship' in Books XI–XII see David Quint, *Inside 'Paradise Lost': Reading the Designs of Milton's Epic* (Princeton, N.J., 2014), pp. 144–52.

⁴² *Tetrachordon: Works* iv 165. *prime*: fundamental, original (*OED*³ *s.v.* *prime adj.* 3a).

⁴³ *Readie Way: Works* vi 123–4. ⁴⁴ See p. 94.

⁴⁵ *PL* vii 485–9. *emmet*: ant. Milton had cited the example of the ant (here, 'pismire') in *Readie Way* (1660):

Go to the Ant, thou sluggard, saith Solomon; consider her waies, and be wise; which having no prince, ruler, or lord, provides her meat in the summer, and gathers her food in the harvest. Which evidently shews us, that they who think the nation undon without a king, though they look grave or haughtie, have not so much true spirit and understanding in them as a pismire: neither are these diligent creatures hence concluded to live in lawless anarchie, or that commended, but are set the examples to imprudent and ungovern'd men, of a frugal and self-governing democratie or Commonwealth; safer and more thriving in the joint providence and counsel of many industrious equals, then under the single domination of one imperious Lord. It may be well wonderd that any Nation styling themselves free, can suffer any man to pretend hereditarie right over them as thir lord; when as by acknowledging that right, they conclude themselves his servants and his vassals, and so renounce thir own freedom. (*Works* vi 122–3)

'Perhaps | Hereafter': the two words are emphasized by their position in the lines; perhaps, but perhaps not. Such a commonwealth was Milton's fragile hope in 1660 when he extolled 'a free Commonwealth, not only held by wisest men in all ages the noblest, the manliest, the equallest, the justest government, the most agreeable to all due libertie and proportiond equalitie, both human, civil, and Christian, most cherishing to vertue and true religion.'⁴⁶ This is not, however, the vision of an egalitarian Leveller⁴⁷ or a communist Digger; the phrase 'just equalitie' implies that for Milton not all forms of equality are just, for he believed in what Austin Woolrych has called an 'aristocracy of virtue'.⁴⁸ The word 'equallest' is juxtaposed with 'justest' of which it appears to be a synonym, for Milton is describing a republic as the most just and equitable form of government.⁴⁹ When he goes on to say that such a commonwealth is 'most agreeable'⁵⁰ to liberty and equality, both these resonant nouns are qualified: he prizes 'due libertie', that is, responsible freedom, rationally exercised, not licence,⁵¹ and 'proportiond equalitie', where the adjective, meaning 'proportionate',⁵² implies that equality must be relative, perhaps to the abilities of a person or a class; in which case it is not clear that any equality which is so restricted by a qualifying adjective is really equality. Milton did not believe in the undue equalizing of the unequal.⁵³



Sinful aspirations to equality conflict with that hierarchy which Milton sees as a divinely instituted order. Raphael offers Adam a glimpse of this great chain of being when he says:

O *Adam*, one Almighty is, from whom
All things proceed, and up to him return,
If not deprav'd from good, created all
Such to perfection, one first matter all,
Indu'd with various forms, various degrees
Of substance, and in things that live, of life;
But more refin'd, more spiritous, and pure,
As neerer to him plac't or neerer tending

⁴⁶ *Readie Way: Works* vi 119.

⁴⁷ Lilburne insisted that 'the poorest that lives, hath as true a right to give a vote, as well as the richest and greatest' (John Lilburne, *The Charters of London* (London, 1646), p. 4).

⁴⁸ *CPW* viii 210, 216.

⁴⁹ Again, 'equal' carries connotations of 'equitable'.

⁵⁰ *agreeable*: conducive (*OED*³ s.v. *agreeable* adj. 2b).

⁵¹ See my *Milton and the People* (Oxford, 2014), pp. 58–9 for Milton's habit of qualifying key terms, and p. 114 for his insistence on distinguishing liberty from licence.

⁵² *OED* s.v. *proportioned* adj. 2.

⁵³ In *De Doctrina* he discusses the Christian duty of almsgiving, saying that each person's contribution should be assessed proportionately (*proportio adhibenda est*) 'so that account is taken of each person's rank and status, [and] of his quality of life and upbringing, lest an absurd equalizing of unequals result' (*ut unius cuiusque ratio habeatur pro ordine et gradu dignitatis, pro conditione vitae educationisque, ne absurda aequatio inaequalium fiat*) (*De Doctrina*: OCW viii 1212–13). The absurdity which Milton wishes to avoid here is presumably a state in which people of unequal wealth are expected to give the same amount, rather than one in which the result of the almsgiving is equality of wealth between people who had previously been unequal. In classical Latin *aequatio* primarily means 'equal distribution' (*OLD* s.v. *aequatio*).

Each in thir several active Sphears assignd,
 Till body up to spirit work, in bounds
 Proportiond to each kind. So from the root
 Springs lighter the green stalk, from thence the leaves
 More aerie, last the bright consummate floure
 Spirits odorous breathes: flours and thir fruit
 Mans nourishment, by gradual scale sublim'd
 To vital Spirits aspire, to animal,
 To intellectual, give both life and sense,
 Fansie and understanding, whence the Soule
 Reason receives, and reason is her being,
 Discursive, or Intuitive; discourse
 Is ofttest yours, the latter most is ours,
 Differing but in degree, of kind the same.⁵⁴

Once again the concepts of degree and proportion are critical, for every living thing holds its proper place or degree on the scale of being, and both receives and contributes proportionately according to its place. In this hierarchy all things are created from 'one first matter', but differ in the degree to which they have substance and life: as the chain reaches up towards God the creatures become more refined, more pure, less bodily and earth-bound. Animals are superior to plants, and men to animals; men and angels both have reason, but in man knowledge is attained mainly through discursive reason, in angels mostly through intuitive reason.⁵⁵ Such is the divinely ordered hierarchy of unequals from which first Satan and then Adam and Eve have displaced themselves by their Fall.

As we have seen, what Satan resents, and incites his followers also to resent, in his quest for equality with God is not hierarchy per se, for he is himself a determined and manipulative hierarch, but the superior position granted to the Son whom Satan claims to be their equal 'by right', even though the angels have less power and splendour than he. In *Paradise Lost* hierarchy is a positively charged concept: both Raphael and Michael are called 'hierarch',⁵⁶ the angels who praise God are 'the Hierarchies',⁵⁷ and even the fallen angels behave as if they were preserving the hierarchy which they had in Heaven when they sit 'Each in his Hierarchie, the Orders bright',⁵⁸ although, as with the Satanic imitation of divine majesty, this false version of hierarchy invites us to see more clearly its true form. Angels respect their superiors, as Satan appears to do when, deceitfully observing the customary practices of Heaven, he bows before Uriel,

As to superior Spirits is wont in Heaven,
 Where honour due and reverence none neglects.⁵⁹

⁵⁴ PL v 469–90. For another eloquent evocation of universal order predicated upon degree see Dryden, 'Palamon and Arcite' iii 1024–83, a version of Chaucer's Boethian vision in 'The Knight's Tale' (*The Poems of John Dryden*, edited by Paul Hammond and David Hopkins, 5 vols (London, 1995–2005), v 182–5). For the idea of a great chain of being see Arthur O. Lovejoy, *The Great Chain of Being: A Study of the History of an Idea* (Cambridge, Mass., 1936), and C. A. Patrides, *Milton and the Christian Tradition* (Oxford, 1966), pp. 59ff, 154–5.

⁵⁵ On discursive and intuitive reason see the note on 'discourse of Reason' (*Hamlet* I ii 150) in *Hamlet*, edited by Harold Jenkins, The Arden Shakespeare (London, 1982), pp. 438–9.

⁵⁶ PL v 468, xi 220.

⁵⁷ PL vii 192.

⁵⁸ PL i 737.

⁵⁹ PL iii 737–8.

When the loyal angels are summoned for battle,

Forthwith from all the ends of Heav'n appeerd
Under thir Hierarchs in orders bright
Ten thousand thousand Ensignes high advanc'd,
Standards and Gonfalons twixt Van and Reare
Streame in the Aire, and for distinction serve
Of Hierarchies, of Orders, and Degrees.⁶⁰

Hierarchies, orders, and degrees are part of the divine order.⁶¹ Milton's use of the word 'hierarchy' respects its etymological origin in *ἱερός* (sacred, holy) and *ἀρχή* (rule). Hierarchy is holy rule.

There can be a polemical edge to these uses of 'hierarch' and 'hierarchy', however. The word 'hierarch' was normally applied to an ecclesiastical ruler, to a prelate or an archbishop;⁶² thus Milton refers scathingly to Laudian bishops serving 'their great Hierarch the Pope' in *The Reason of Church-governement Urg'd against Prelaty* (1641),⁶³ and in his sonnet 'On the new forcers of Conscience under the Long PARLIAMENT' (c.1646) he excoriates those who would seek 'To force our Consciences that Christ set free, | And ride us with a classic Hierarchy'.⁶⁴ The word 'hierarchy' recurs acerbically through the anti-prelatical tracts as Milton denounces the bishops' 'criminous Hierarchy',⁶⁵ their 'unholy hierarchy',⁶⁶ and their 'Antichristian Hierarchie'.⁶⁷ The episcopal establishment was 'an Antichristian Hierarchy which God had not planted, but ambition and corruption had brought in'.⁶⁸ According to the *Oxford English Dictionary* it is only Milton who applies the word 'hierarch' not to prelates but to the archangels, thus implicitly reminding his readers that it is not men who wield divine authority, but the angels of God.



Milton's thinking about equality and hierarchy reaches its fullest form in *Paradise Lost*, but it is visible intermittently (Milton not being a systematic thinker) in his ecclesiological and political tracts, where there is often a tension between a theoretical commitment to the equality of citizens and of Christians on the one hand and a practical recognition, on the other hand, of society's need for good order to curb the effects of human sinfulness, and the dependence of the Gospel upon the palpably unequal distribution of the gifts of the Spirit.

⁶⁰ *PL* v 586–91.

⁶¹ The foundational account of the celestial hierarchy of angels is by Pseudo-Dionysius in *De Caelesti Hierarchia* (Greek text in *Patrologia Graeca* iii; English translation in Pseudo-Dionysius, *The Complete Works*, translated by Colm Luibheid (New York, 1987)). See C. A. Patrides, 'Renaissance Thought on the Celestial Hierarchy: The Decline of a Tradition', *Journal of the History of Ideas* 20 (1959) 155–66.

⁶² *OED* s.v. hierarch n. 1.

⁶³ *Reason: Works* iii 203.

⁶⁴ 'On the new forcers of Conscience under the Long PARLIAMENT' ll. 6–7: *Works* i 71. *classic*: referring to the Presbyterian system of church government by a *classis* or group of elders (*OED* s.v. *classic* *adj.* 9). Milton wrote in 1649 that the Presbyterian church which had replaced government by bishops was 'aspiring to be a compulsive power upon all without exception in Parochiall, Classicall, and Provinciall Hierarchies' (*Articles of Peace: Works* vi 264).

⁶⁵ *Reason: Works* iii 215.

⁶⁶ *Apology: Works* iii 338.

⁶⁷ *Eikonoklastes: Works* v 250.

⁶⁸ *Eikonoklastes: Works* v 209.

When writing in *Eikonoklastes* (1649) to expose Charles I's self-image as a wise and patient ruler, and contesting his very right to rule over others, Milton says that it would be contrary to justice 'so farr to accept and exalt one mortal person above his equals, that he alone shall have the punishing of all other men transgressing, and not receive like punishment from men, when he himself shall be found the highest transgressor'.⁶⁹ Since the King and his subjects are equals, Milton asks 'why he whose office is to execute Law and Justice upon all others, should sit himself like a demigod in lawlesse and unbounded *anarchy*; refusing to be accountable for that authority over men naturally his equals'.⁷⁰ Kingship is an office occupied by a man who is, as an individual, the equal of those whom he rules.

But if all men are, in theory, equal, Milton was nevertheless not prepared to hold up political equality (that is to say, democracy in any of the ways in which it was currently understood) as a desideratum, so little did he trust the people at large to make wise decisions.⁷¹ When he praises the city of Geneva for its *prudentiam, æqualitatem, moderationem, constantiam*⁷² there is no conceptual precision to his use of *æqualitatem*, and the passage as a whole is more vigorously engaged in the praise of the Genevans' cultivation of a purer religion and their defence of liberty; these, rather than equality per se, were Milton's priorities for the proper conduct of the public sphere. In the *Defensio Secunda* (1654) he addresses the allegation that the reduction of the Lords and Commons to a single house of Parliament having established equality in the state (*æqualitate... in rempublicam invectâ*), England might now proceed to introduce the same into the church, which according to his opponents would be nothing less than pure Anabaptism (*purus... Anabaptismus*). Milton replies that 'if we would call things by their right names, equality in the state is not anabaptism, but democracy, a thing far more ancient; and as established in the church, is the discipline of the apostles'.⁷³ While Milton's claim that equality in the church would return it to its original apostolic state clearly implies that this would be highly desirable (and it is indeed consonant with his consistent dislike of ecclesiastical authority) the wording of his comment on equality in the state is more circumspect: he does not accept that the constitutional changes to the composition of Parliament have in fact introduced *æqualitas* into the state, nor does he suggest that if this did happen it would necessarily be a good thing, for the reference to the historical basis of *Democratia* (as found in ancient Greece) has none of the rhetorical persuasiveness of his invocation of the apostolic church, and 'democracy' in early-modern English is frequently pejorative.⁷⁴ Milton therefore appears to hold that equality in respect of the government of the church is a good (or, more accurately, he thinks that the exercise of each individual's judgement in ecclesiastical

⁶⁹ *Eikonoklastes*: Works v 293.

⁷⁰ *Articles of Peace*: Works vi 247.

⁷¹ Indeed, Milton might not have objected too strongly to the typing error in this sentence which originally spelt the word 'democracy' as 'demoncracy'.

⁷² *Pro Se Defensio*: Works ix 203.

⁷³ *si res propriis vocabulis appellare malimus, æqualitas in republica non est Anabaptismus, sed Democratia longè antiquior; in ecclesia præsertim constituta, est disciplina Apostolica* (*Defensio Secunda*: Works viii 146–7).

⁷⁴ See my *Milton and the People*, pp. 3–4.

and spiritual matters unimpeded by directive intervention from ecclesiastical authority is a good); clearly people are not equal in their abilities, or in their willingness to obey divine commandments, but they are all given by God sufficient capacity to make the right choice in religious matters.

However, in a striking passage in *The Reason of Church-governement* (1641) Milton extols what he calls 'discipline'—by which he appears to mean order and hierarchy—through which everything is held together as by 'musicall cords':

the flourishing and decaying of all civill societies, all the moments and turnings of humane occasions are mov'd to and fro as upon the axle of discipline. So that whatsoever power or sway in mortall things weaker men have attributed to fortune, I durst with more confidence (the honour of divine providence ever sav'd) ascribe either to the vigor, or the slacknesse of discipline. Nor is there any sociable perfection in this life civill or sacred that can be above discipline, but she is that which with her musicall cords preserves and holds all the parts thereof together.

Discipline is, he continues, the visible form which human societies give to a quasi-Platonic ideal of virtue, and is an earthly replication of the heavenly order of the angels:

And certainly discipline is not only the removall of disorder, but if any visible shape can be given to divine things, the very visible shape and image of vertue, whereby she is not only seene in the regular gestures and motions of her heavenly paces as she walkes, but also makes the harmony of her voice audible to mortall eares. Yea the Angels themselves, in whom no disorder is fear'd, as the Apostle that saw them in his rapture describes, are distinguisht and quaterniond into their celestiall Princedomes, and Satrapies, according as God himselfe hath writ his imperiall decrees through the great provinces of heav'n. The state also of the blessed in Paradise, though never so perfect, is not therefore left without discipline, whose golden surveying reed marks out and measures every quarter and circuit of new Jerusalem.⁷⁵

Much as he longed for the implementation of a New Jerusalem in England, it would not happen, and Milton became increasingly distrustful of the capacity and the will of the people to follow what he knew to be their vocation.⁷⁶ God may have given all men the opportunity of salvation, but, he says in *Paradise Lost*, 'Some I have chosen of peculiar grace | Elect above the rest',⁷⁷ and it is in these few individuals unequally endowed with grace that Milton's hopes reside.

⁷⁵ *Reason*: Works iii 184–5. *the Apostle*: St John in Revelation vii 1–2. *quaterniond*: arranged in groups of four (*OED*³'s only example).

⁷⁶ See my *Milton and the People*, chs 8–9.

⁷⁷ *PL* iii 183–4.

11

Evil

Evil be thou my Good.

Paradise Lost iv 110



The word ‘evil’ occurs more than sixty times in *Paradise Lost*, and becomes specially prominent in Book IX, where in the narrative of the Fall there are sixteen instances. How to understand evil—and, more specifically, how to understand the presence of evil and suffering in the world within the framework of a belief in a single, loving, and omnipotent Creator—is one of the poem’s principal concerns.¹ It is also one of the problems which has taxed Christian thinkers since the days of the early Church.²

The Manichaean heresy of the third century AD, a form of Gnosticism, taught that the universe was involved in a primaeva struggle between good and evil, light and darkness. But orthodox Catholic teaching, particularly as it was developed by St Augustine, rejected this dualism. Augustine, himself formerly a lay member of the Manichaean sect, reacted strongly against the Manichaean implication that God, in warring against Satan, was less than absolute and was involved in a struggle with a rival power.³ Instead he developed the doctrine that evil, though a powerful

¹ Many studies of *PL* address, directly or indirectly, the way in which the poem handles the question of evil; particularly useful accounts include Dennis Richard Danielson, *Milton’s Good God: A Study in Literary Theodicy* (Cambridge, 1982); John S. Tanner, “Say First What Cause”: Ricoeur and the Etiology of Evil in *Paradise Lost*, *PMLA* 103 (1988) 45–56, who argues that *PL* ‘subsumes contrasting modalities of evil—as inherited and imitative, as physical and moral, as ontological and existential, as necessary and free’ (p. 54); Neil Forsyth, *The Satanic Epic* (Princeton, N.J., 2003); and Christopher Tilmouth, ‘Milton on Knowing Good from Evil’, in *John Milton: Life, Writing, Reputation*, edited by Paul Hammond and Blair Worden (Oxford, 2010), pp. 43–65.

² The classic modern account of the Christian understanding of evil is John Hick, *Evil and the God of Love* (London, 1966); see esp. pp. 43–64. A comprehensive historical study of approaches to the topic of the Fall is provided by Norman Powell Williams, *The Ideas of the Fall and of Original Sin: A Historical and Critical Study* (London, 1927). There is also an important tetralogy by Jeffrey Burton Russell, *The Devil: Perceptions of Evil from Antiquity to Primitive Christianity* (Ithaca, N.Y., 1977), *Satan: The Early Christian Tradition* (Ithaca, N.Y., 1981), *Lucifer: The Devil in the Middle Ages* (Ithaca, N.Y., 1984), and *Mephistopheles: The Devil in the Modern World* (Ithaca, N.Y., 1986). Milton is discussed in the last volume on pp. 95–127, though the earlier volumes provide an invaluable account of the tradition which Milton inherited.

³ Augustine recounts his attempts to move away from the Manichaean notion of evil in *Confessiones* vii.

reality, is properly to be thought of as the privation of good.⁴ In this he drew on the Greek philosopher Plotinus, who wrote:

εἶδος δὲ τὸ κακὸν πῶς ἂν τις φαντάζοιτο ἐν ἀπουσίᾳ παντὸς ἀγαθοῦ ἰνδαλλόμενον;... οὐκ ἂν ἐν τοῖς οὖσι τὸ κακὸν ἐνείη, οὐδ' ἐν τῷ ἐπέκεινα τῶν ὄντων· ἀγαθὰ γὰρ ταῦτα. Λείπεται τοίνυν, εἴπερ ἔστιν, ἐν τοῖς μὴ οὖσιν εἶναι οἶον εἶδος τι τοῦ μὴ ὄντος ὃν καὶ περὶ τι τῶν μεμιγμένων τῷ μὴ ὄντι ἢ ὁπωσοῦν κοινωνούντων τῷ μὴ ὄντι. Μὴ ὃν δὲ οὐτι τὸ παντελῶς μὴ ὄν, ἀλλ' ἕτερον μόνον τοῦ ὄντος· οὐχ οὕτω δὲ μὴ ὄν ὡς κίνησις καὶ στάσις ἢ περὶ τὸ ὄν, ἀλλ' ὡς εἰκὼν τοῦ ὄντος ἢ καὶ ἔτι μάλλον μὴ ὄν...

Ἦδη γὰρ ἂν τις εἰς ἔννοιαν ἥκοι αὐτοῦ οἶον ἀμετρίαν εἶναι πρὸς μέτρον καὶ ἄπειρον πρὸς πέρασ καὶ ἀνείδρον πρὸς εἰδοποιητικὸν καὶ αἰεὶ ἐνδεές πρὸς αὐταρκες, αἰεὶ ἀόριστον, οὐδαμῇ ἔστώς, παμπαθές, ἀκόρητον, πενία παντελῆς.

(Who could imagine Evil to be an Ideal-Form, seeing that it manifests itself as the very absence of Good?...

Evil cannot have place among Beings or in the Beyond-Being; these are good.

There remains, only, if Evil exists at all, that it be situate in the realm of Non-Being, that it be some mode, as it were, of the Non-Being, that it have its seat in something in touch with Non-Being or to a certain degree communicate in Non-Being.

By this Non-Being, of course, we are not to understand something that simply does not exist, but only something of an utterly different order from Authentic-Being; there is no question here of movement or position with regard to Being; the Non-Being we are thinking of is, rather, an image of Being or perhaps something still further removed than even an image...

Some conception of it would be reached by thinking of measurelessness as opposed to measure, of the unbounded against bound, the unshaped against a principle of shape, the ever-needy against the self-sufficing; think of the ever-undefined, the never at rest, the all-accepting but never sated, utter dearth.)⁵

Several aspects of this account of evil by Plotinus resonate with Milton's thinking in *Paradise Lost*. First, Plotinus says that 'there is no question here of movement or position with regard to Being': Satan sometimes misjudges the significance of space, seeing his distance from Heaven in literal terms, as a purely physical space

⁴ In modern times the outstanding example of a thinker who refused to accept this traditional definition of evil as the privation of good is C. G. Jung, who considered the doctrine of the *privatio boni* as being 'responsible for a too optimistic conception of the evil in human nature' (*Aion* § 113 and ch. 5 ('Christ, A Symbol of the Self') generally: C. G. Jung, *The Collected Works, Volume Nine Part II: Aion: Researches into the Phenomenology of the Self*, translated by R. F. C. Hull (London, 1959), p. 61). Jung debated the idea of evil at length with the Dominican Fr Victor White, and their disagreement eventually caused the breakdown of their friendship: see *The Jung-White Letters*, edited by Ann Conrad Lammers and Adrian Cunningham (Hove, 2007).

⁵ Plotinus, *Enneads* I viii 1, 3; Loeb Greek text with translation from Plotinus, *The Enneads*, translated by Stephen MacKenna, third edition (London, 1962), pp. 66–8. For an analysis of Plotinus' account of evil see Hick, *Evil and the God of Love*, pp. 46–9 and B. A. G. Fuller, *The Problem of Evil in Plotinus* (Cambridge, 1912); also J. M. Rist, *Plotinus: The Road to Reality* (Cambridge, 1967) for a wider philosophical study. There is no evidence that Milton himself read Plotinus directly, but his influence would have been perceptible in the Augustinian and Neoplatonic traditions with which Milton was familiar: see Irene Samuel, *Plato and Milton* (Ithaca, N.Y., 1947).

which can be traversed, instead of this gulf being a sign or a manifestation of his spiritual alienation from God which no literal journey can bridge. Though the expedition of Satan through Hell and Chaos towards Earth is vividly depicted, this is in important respects an illusory movement, since for Satan no real movement is possible once he has rejected God:

which way shall I flie
Infinite wrauth, and infinite despaire?
Which way I flie is Hell; my self am Hell;
And in the lowest deep a lower deep
Still threatning to devour me opens wide,
To which the Hell I suffer seems a Heav'n.⁶

The linguistic paradoxes here exhibit the fallacy of assuming that, in respect of evil, place and movement have their usual meanings: in the lowest deep a lower deep opens up, and the way which the speaker pursues is the speaker himself. Evil seems to inhabit deformations of space whose illogicality signals defection from the good and from Being.

Secondly, evil, says Plotinus, is 'an image of Being or perhaps something still further removed than even an image': frequently Satanic power is presented by Milton as an image of divine power, or more properly as a parody of divine power; his majesty as he sits on his infernal throne is impressive but is only an imitation of God's true majesty, and ultimately insubstantial. Thirdly, Plotinus proposes that we imagine evil by means of a series of ideas relating to shape and form which characterize evil as shapeless and formless, unbounded, undefined, and never at rest: in *Paradise Lost* Chaos appears

a dark
Illimitable Ocean without bound,
Without dimension, where length, breadth, & highth,
And time and place are lost.⁷

while Death is imagined as a shape without shape, and a shadow without substance:

The other shape,
If shape it might be call'd that shape had none
Distinguishable in member, joynt, or limb,
Or substance might be call'd that shadow seem'd,
For each seem'd either.⁸

⁶ *PL* iv 73–8. 'The place where Satan sets up his throne and with his fallen comrades seeks to raise a new empire is precisely nowhere at all: a perfect metaphor for the absolute nonbeing of evil... the material world has not yet been created at the time of the angelic ruin, so how can Hell, despite its physical imagery, possibly be material?... Hell is deep inside a material universe that does not yet exist... it is a place where the fallen angels dwell, yet it is within their hearts and is with them wherever they go... it encompasses time and motion yet is eternal... it is nowhere and has no characteristics, the fit dwelling for those who have chosen nothingness over reality' (Russell, *Mephistopheles*, p. 109).

⁷ *PL* ii 891–4. Biblically the earth was initially 'without forme, and voyd' (Genesis i 2), and Milton's account of God's creative work imagines him setting bounds to Chaos (*PL* vii 166–7, 218–33).

⁸ *PL* ii 666–70.

While neither Chaos nor Death is precisely evil, Milton's imagination works to show how in Satan's allies there is neither true form nor genuine substance. This is graphically manifest when Satan, who has transformed himself into various shapes in his mission to seduce mankind, is compelled, along with his followers, into the shape of a serpent—compelled by divine power into a degraded form which appropriately signifies the perverted self which he has chosen.⁹

It was through Augustine's development of Plotinus' thinking that these ideas about evil as the privation of good entered the mainstream of Christian theology.¹⁰ For Augustine, evil 'is a defect of goodness, the absence of virtue, just as darkness is not a substantive thing-in-itself but merely the absence of light'.¹¹ John Hick explains Augustine's thought in these terms:

Augustine's most frequent phrase to define evil is *privatio boni*, 'privation of good'... Augustine never means by privation of good a simple lack of goodness, in the sense in which a tree, for example, lacks the spiritual qualities of an angel... Evil enters in only when some member of the universal Kingdom, whether high or low in the hierarchy, renounces its proper role in the divine scheme and ceases to be what it is meant to be.¹²

Evil is *privatio boni*: it is the absence-of-goodness that prevails when anything has defected from the mode of being that is proper to it in God's creative intention. Augustine accordingly stresses the secondary and dependent as well as the negative and privative character of evil: 'there can be no evil where there is no good... Nothing evil exists *in itself*, but only as an evil aspect of some actual entity'.¹³

Augustine attributes all evil, both moral and natural, directly or indirectly to the wrong choices of free rational beings. 'An evil will [*improba voluntas*], therefore, is the cause of all evils.' Again, 'The cause of evil is the defection of the will of a being who is mutably good from the Good which is immutable. This happened first in the case of angels and, afterwards, that of man.' For when Augustine forsook Manichaeism for Christianity he was taught, and came wholeheartedly to believe, 'that free will is the cause of our doing evil and that thy just judgment is the cause of our having to suffer from its consequences'.¹⁴

⁹ 'Evil is ontologically privative, and the devils neither have names nor, as Satan will learn, a recognizable "shape"' (David Quint, *Inside 'Paradise Lost': Reading the Designs of Milton's Epic* (Princeton, N.J., 2014), p. 28).

¹⁰ For Augustine on evil see G. R. Evans, *Augustine on Evil* (Cambridge, 1982).

¹¹ Williams, *The Ideas of the Fall and of Original Sin*, p. 371.

¹² Hick, *Evil and the God of Love*, p. 53.

¹³ Hick, *Evil and the God of Love*, p. 54, citing Augustine, *De Natura Boni Contra Manichaeos* iv. Cf. Ralph Cudworth: sin is 'a poore, impotent, and crazy thing, nothing but Straitnesse, Poverty, and Non-entity' ('A Sermon Preached before the House of Commons. March 31, 1647', in *The Cambridge Platonists*, edited by C. A. Patrides (London, 1969; reissued Cambridge, 1980), p. 113 and n.).

¹⁴ Hick, *Evil and the God of Love*, p. 65, citing Augustine, *De libero arbitrio* III xvii 48; *Enchiridion* viii 23; *Confessiones* vii 3, 5. The comparable ideas of Pseudo-Dionysius are summarized thus by Russell: 'the demons are not evil by nature but through their own will. The fallen angels were created good, like everything else in the cosmos, and as angels they received every good gift commensurate with their status. Evil is not inherent in matter... Evil proceeds from the evil will of fallen angels and fallen humans, who freely use their free will to desire that which is not good, that which is unreal... This evil is not a product of nature but a distortion of nature, a subtraction from the reality that is nature. One cannot even say that the privation struggles against the good through its own power, for it is literally nonexistent. And yet this nonexistence, like a vacuum, acts to suck creatures down into the void of nonbeing... The Devil freely turns his will towards the unreal' (*Lucifer*, pp. 35–6).

Milton broadly concurred, for in *De Doctrina Christiana* he explained that sin is properly considered not as an action but as a privation, *privatio*, 'for every action is in itself good: its irregularity or deviation from the rule of law is alone properly evil'.¹⁵ The Satan of *Paradise Lost* is evil, therefore, when, and in so far as, he chooses to defect from the mode of being which God has created him to fulfil, which is that of a heavenly angel. There is an Aristotelian aspect to this concept of a being which is created for a particular purpose, as Hick explains: 'Aristotle suggests that the happiness of any kind of creature consists in its fulfilment of its own *telos*, or the realization of its given nature and potentialities. Everything, according to Aristotle, is constituted for some end, to achieve which is to fulfil itself.'¹⁶ So, as Aquinas says, 'the privation of form or right order or due measure in anything, whether subject or act, has the nature of evil... we call sins acts lacking due order or form or measure'; and sin 'comes about because the will by tending toward an improper end fails to attain its proper end'.¹⁷ And Augustine says:

It is by this turning towards its Creator that it [the spirit] receives its form and perfection, and if it does not thus turn, it is unformed...

When it [the creature] is turned away from changeless Wisdom, its life is full of folly and wretchedness, and so it is in an unformed state. Its formation consists in its turning to the changeless light of Wisdom, the Word of God.¹⁸

Satan's revolt is a refusal of the *telos* of his creation, and the displacement of his God-given *telos* by his own attempted self-definition and self-realization.¹⁹ Being

¹⁵ *Actuale dicitur, non quo peccatum proprie sit actio, cum privatio re vera sit; sed propterea quod in actione ferè versatur. Actio enim omnis per se est bona, sola eius obliquitas sive anomalia a legis norma propriè mala est* (OCW viii 424–5, noting on p. 428 that *Actio enim omnis per se est bona* is a reference to the opening of Aristotle's *Nicomachean Ethics*). However, Milton differed from Plotinus in insisting that original matter was not evil but good (OCW viii 292).

¹⁶ Hick, *Evil and the God of Love*, p. 15, citing Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics* I. In Greek *telos* (τέλος) means 'end, completion, fulfilment'. In *PL* the word 'end' includes this sense, amongst others.

¹⁷ *Formae aut ordinis aut mensurae debita, mali rationem habet. Sed peccatum dicitur aliquis actus debito ordine aut forma sive mensura carens... Peccatum vero... habet rationem culpae, et provenit ex eo quod voluntas deficit debito fine, per hoc quod in finem indebitum tendit* (Aquinas, *De Malo* q. 2, a. 2, r., and q. 3, a. 1, r., from <<http://www.corpusthomicum.org>>; *On Evil*, translated by Richard Regan (Oxford, 2003), pp. 97 and 143). For Aquinas' engagement with the problem of evil see Brian Davies, *Thomas Aquinas on God and Evil* (Oxford, 2011).

¹⁸ *tali enim conversione formatur atque perficitur; si autem non convertatur, informis est... Aversa enim a Sapientia incommutabili, stultie ac misere vivit, quae informitas ejus est. Formatur autem conversa ad incommutabile lumen Sapientiae, Verbum Dei* (Augustine, *De Genesi ad Litteram Libri Duodecim* I i 2, I v 10; *Patrologia Latina* xxxiv 217, 220; *The Literal Meaning of Genesis*, translated by John Hammond Taylor (New York, 1982), pp. 20, 24).

¹⁹ Cf.

I would be at the worst; worst is my Port,
My harbour and my ultimate repose,
The end I would attain, my final good.

(*PR* iii 209–11)

John Smith says: 'It must be *one Last End and Supreme Good* that can fix Man's Mind, which otherwise will be tossed up and down in perpetual uncertainties, and become as many several things as those poor *Particularities* are which it meets with. A wicked man's life is so distracted by a *Multiplicity of Ends and Objects*, that it never is nor can be consistent to it self, nor continue in any composed, settled frame: it is the most intricate, irregular and confused thing in the world, no one part of it agreeing

mutable, he has the capacity and the will to defect, and Milton shows in detail just how Satan exercises that will, and after him how Eve and then Adam likewise defect from their own *telos*. As Augustine explains, the fallen angels, in turning away from God, turned wholly to themselves (*ad se ipsos conversi sunt*), as if they themselves were their own good (*velut bonum suum sibi ipsi essent*).²⁰

Milton does not use the word 'privation' in *Paradise Lost*, but in *Paradise Regain'd* the darkness which surrounds the Son at one point in his temptation by Satan is carefully described as being merely the privation of light, suggesting that evil, for which darkness is in part a metaphor, is itself insubstantial:

Darkness now rose,
As day-light sunk, and brought in lowering night
Her shadowy off-spring unsubstantial both,
Privation meer of light and absent day.²¹

Milton also explains in *De Doctrina Christiana* that sin is a privation (*privatio*), and 'every action is in itself good: its irregularity or deviation from the rule of law is alone properly evil'.²² Death, too, is a privation of life (*privatio vitae*),²³ and there is a form of spiritual death which consists in the privation of divine grace and engrafted righteousness (*privatio nimirum gratiae divinae et iustitiae insitae*) and the privation or dulling of right reason which aimed at perceiving the supreme good (*Posita est autem haec mors primum in privatione vel saltem magna obscuracione rectae rationis ad summum bonum percipiendum, quae vitae instar intellectui erat*).²⁴

But Milton, writing both as a poet and as a student of theology, faces the problem that the dramatic interest of his poem lies partly in the revolt of Satan against God, a conflict which would make most narrative impact in a Manichaean world where there would be a struggle of two well-matched forces. Evil, therefore, has to be given at least the appearance of power, substance, and energy: one cannot easily make an epic poem out of the privation of good. And yet Milton, not being a Manichaean, also weaves into his poem many signals that the evil which Satan represents is not, ultimately, powerful—that it is constituted by a denial and a refusal of the good. And so while the poem accords Satan energy and a certain degree of apparent power, energy is seen in the process of his defection from his true *telos*, while power is seen to be allowed and circumscribed by God: for, as Aquinas says, evil has no causal efficacy of its own, and can only act through that element of the good which is annexed to it,²⁵ and it is the good annexed to Satan's evil which has

with another, because the whole is not firmly knit together by the power of some *One Last End* running through all. Whereas the life of a Good man is under the sweet command of *one Supreme Goodness and Last End* ('The Excellency and Nobleness of True Religion' in *The Cambridge Platonists*, pp. 171–2 and n).

²⁰ Augustine, *De Civitate Dei* xii 6, 1. ²¹ *PR* iv 397–400.

²² *Actio enim omnis per se est bona, sola eius obliquitas sive anomalía à legis norma propriè mala est* (*De Doctrina*: OCW viii 424–5).

²³ *De Doctrina*: OCW viii 440–1.

²⁴ *De Doctrina*: OCW viii 432–3.

²⁵ *ST I*, q. 48, a. 1, ad. 4: *malum non agit aliquid per se; id est, secundum quod est privatio quaedam, sed secundum quod ei bonum adiungitur*.

sometimes led inattentive or perverse readers into unjustified admiration for Satan's apparently heroic exploits.²⁶ Moreover, the poem repeatedly reminds us, for example through a set of words beginning with the prefix 'un-', that the Satanic world is a mind-set comprising many forms of deprivation: 'undelighted', 'uneasie', 'unhappy', 'Unrespited, unpitied, unrepreevd'.²⁷



The first time the word 'evil' occurs in *Paradise Lost* is in the speech which Satan makes to Beelzebub in Book I:

To do ought good never will be our task,
But ever to do ill our sole delight,
As being the contrary to his high will
Whom we resist. If then his Providence
Out of our evil seek to bring forth good,
Our labour must be to pervert that end,
And out of good still to find means of evil;
Which oft times may succeed, so as perhaps
Shall grieve him, if I fail not, and disturb
His inmost counsels from thir destined aim.²⁸

This is a deliberate refusal of the good, with 'evil' (and its synonym 'ill') being defined by Satan as opposition to the will of God,²⁹ and it is a feature of Milton's presentation of evil in the poem that the word often occurs in a context which also evokes the divine will, in effect reminding the reader both that evil is a refusal of the divinely appointed *telos* (here called the 'destind aim' of God's counsels) and that it is always providentially subordinated to the divine will. In this respect, Satan's words are a classic instance of sin, which is defined by Augustine as an utterance, deed, or desire contrary to the eternal law which is the will of God.³⁰ But Satan himself realizes—albeit with the half-concealment provided by the slippery Satanic 'If'—that God's providence will work to bring good out of the evil which Satan does. And so we find the first occurrence of the word 'evil' in the poem contained within a sentence which implicitly reassures the reader that there is indeed a divine governance which will contain and transform that evil.

Here and throughout the poem Satan holds, or tries to hold, a Manichaeian view of the universe as a combat between good and evil in which he pits himself against God as a worthy antagonist. In Book IV he resolves,

So farwel Hope, and with Hope farwel Fear,
Farwel Remorse: all Good to me is lost;
Evil be thou my Good; by thee at least

²⁶ See John Leonard, *Faithful Labourers: A Reception History of Paradise Lost, 1667–1970*, 2 vols (Oxford, 2013), ii 393–476 for the tradition of sympathetic interpretations of Satan.

²⁷ *PL* iv 286; i 295, 268; ii 185. See further Chapter 25 *Not*. ²⁸ *PL* i 159–68.

²⁹ In Hebrew 'Satan' means 'antagonist' (Russell, *The Devil*, pp. 189–90; cf. Forsyth, *The Satanic Epic*, p. 37), so his name defines him entirely in terms of opposition to the will of God.

³⁰ Augustine, *Contra Faustum* xx 27; cf. Aquinas, *ST* II–I, q. 71, a. 6.

Divided Empire with Heav'ns King I hold
By thee, and more then half perhaps will reigne.³¹

'Evil be thou my Good': this apparent paradox recalls and perverts the Platonic idea that no one does evil willingly, knowing it to be evil, but always represents it to themselves as a form of the good.³² Before he embraces evil, Satan bids farewell to hope. This is his crucial step, because to abandon hope is to embrace despair, a conscious and deliberate rejection of God which one theologian glosses as 'a rebellion against our recognized duty of being dependent in our self-fulfilment'.³³ Satan now seeks self-fulfilment through a refusal of dependency, but this is to embrace the Hell within him. For 'Hell consists in man's being unwilling to receive anything, in his desire to be self-sufficient. It is the expression of enclosure in one's own being alone... Conversely, it is the nature of... heaven that it can only be received, just as one can only give hell to oneself.'³⁴ And Augustine says that 'striving for more diminishes a person, who by choosing to be sufficient unto himself suffers a deficiency in lapsing from the one who is truly sufficient for him'.³⁵ When Satan says, 'Evil be thou my Good' he addresses evil as a prosopopoeia, as if it were personified, trying to conjure it into existence as an active power which could inspire and protect him as if it had some substance or being or efficacy. But if evil is the privation of good, it is impossible to 'hold' anything by its means. Moreover, in claiming thereby to hold 'Divided Empire' with God, Satan's language implicitly confesses his weakness, for to describe God as 'Heav'ns King' acknowledges the Deity's supreme power, while at the same time misunderstanding the true nature of divine power by imagining it solely in terms of monarchical rule, a

³¹ *PL* iv 108–12. The striking verbal paradox in 'Evil be thou my Good' serves to evoke a text from Isaiah which proleptically judges Satan and invites us to return to the proper meaning of these misused words: 'Woe vnto them that call euil good, and good euil' (Isaiah v 20). Stephen M. Fallon suggests that 'Evil be thou my Good' is an example of Hobbesian nominalism, for Hobbes had argued that 'these words of Good, Evil, and Contemptible, are ever used with relation to the person that useth them: There being nothing simply and absolutely so; nor any common Rule of Good and Evil, to be taken from the nature of the objects themselves' (Thomas Hobbes, *Leviathan*, edited by Noel Malcolm, 3 vols (Oxford, 2012), ii 80–2; Stephen M. Fallon, *Milton among the Philosophers* (Ithaca, N.Y., 1991), p. 219; cf. Forsyth, *The Satanic Epic*, p. 27). This Hobbesian idea was challenged by Benjamin Whichcote, who insisted that 'Good and Evil are not by *positive* Institution; are not things *arbitrary*; or during any Pleasure whatsoever: but Just Right and Holy, Wicked Impious and Profane, are so by their own nature and quality. If we understand this, as we ought; we abide in the Truth: if not, we are Self-flatterers; and live in a Lye' ('Moral and Religious Aphorisms', no. 116, in *The Cambridge Platonists*, p. 328).

³² Plato, *Apology* 37a, *Gorgias* 488a, *Protagoras* 345d–e, *Laws* 731d. Milton refers to this idea in *Divorce: Works* iii 464.

³³ Waldemar Molinski in the *Encyclopedia of Theology: The Concise 'Sacramentum Mundi'*, edited by Karl Rahner (London, 1975), p. 340. Cf. George Sandys' commentary on Narcissus in Ovid's *Metamorphoses*: 'But a fearfull example we haue of the danger of selfe-loue in the fall of the Angells; who intermitting the beatificall vision, by reflecting vpon themselves, and admiration of their owne excellency, forgot their dependance vpon their creator' (G[eorge] S[andys], *Ovid's Metamorphosis Englished, Mythologiz'd, and Represented in Figures* (Oxford, 1632), p. 106. I owe this reference to William Poole, *Milton and the Idea of the Fall* (Cambridge, 2005), p. 169).

³⁴ Joseph Cardinal Ratzinger, *Introduction to Christianity*, translated by J. R. Foster (San Francisco, 2000), pp. 312–13.

³⁵ *De Civitate Dei* xiv 13: *Plus autem appetendo minus est qui, dum sibi sufficere deligit, ab illo qui ei vere sufficit deficit.*

characteristic Satanic limitation from a mind which has rejected the power of love.³⁶ Furthermore, the word 'perhaps' (like the doubtful sequence 'If...may...perhaps...if' in the previous passage) is also an inadvertent acknowledgement of the limits of his power and knowledge.³⁷ He is guessing. As he will eventually discover, Satan and God are not engaged in a Manichaean struggle, however much Satan pretends to himself and his followers that they are.

Evil is contained and mastered by God's providential design, as Milton explains more explicitly in the next passage to use the word 'evil':

So stretcht out huge in length the Arch-fiend lay
Chain'd on the burning Lake, nor ever thence
Had ris'n or heav'd his head, but that the will
And high permission of all-ruling Heaven
Left him at large to his own dark designs,
That with reiterated crimes he might
Heap on himself damnation, while he sought
Evil to others, and enrag'd might see
How all his malice serv'd but to bring forth
Infinite goodness, grace and mercy shewn
On Man by him seduc't, but on himself
Treble confusion, wrath and vengeance pour'd.³⁸

The 'will' of Heaven is again dominant, permitting evil,³⁹ but ensuring that in pursuing evil to others Satan only heaps damnation on himself, while eliciting God's 'Infinite goodness, grace and mercy' on man.⁴⁰ For, as Aquinas says, God allows evils to happen in order to bring a greater good therefrom.⁴¹ But evil is not only contained and made to generate good by the power of divine providence, it is also self-defeating, its supposed power turned back on itself to undermine its own work. Adam recognizes this self-defeating aspect to evil when he reflects upon Raphael's account of the war in Heaven and says that

³⁶ Cf. Ratzinger: "'hell" . . . denotes a loneliness that the word love can no longer penetrate' (*Introduction to Christianity*, p. 300).

³⁷ See further Chapter 20 *IF AND PERHAPS*.

³⁸ *PL* i 209–20; cf. xii 563–9.

³⁹ So too hypocrisy is said to be 'the onely evil that walks | Invisible, except to God alone, | By his permissive will, through Heav'n and Earth' (*PL* iii 683–5).

⁴⁰ Cf. *De Doctrina*: *Non enim hominis animum insontem et purum et nolentem in facinora et fraudem impellit, sed concepto peccato gravidum, iamque parturientem in hanc fortasse vel illam partem, in hoc vel illud obiectum, prout summus est rerum arbiter, flectit atque dirigit. . . . Nec voluntatem efficit malam ex bona, sed iam malam eò convertit, ubi possit ex ipsa malitia sua vel bonum aliquod aliis, vel poenam sibi insciens, longèque alius cogitans, producere* ('For he [God] does not incite a person's mind—innocent and pure and unwilling—into misdeeds and crime, but when it is pregnant with the sin it has conceived and is already giving birth to it, he, in his capacity of chief overseer of things, bends and steers it in this direction, perhaps, or in that, at this or that objective. . . . Nor does he bring about an evil will out of a good one, but he turns an already evil one towards where—unknowing, and intending something far different—it may be able to draw from its very evilness either some good for others, or punishment for itself' (*OCW* viii 326–7).

⁴¹ *ST* III, q. 1, art. 3. This is reiterated by Milton in *PL* vii 187–91, 613–16, xii 469–71, 565–6; and in *De Doctrina* (*OCW* viii 322, 330). Augustine also says that 'God judged it better to bring good out of evil, than to suffer no evil to exist' (Augustine, *Enchiridion* xxvii; quoted from Hick, *Evil and the God of Love*, p. 94).

the evil soon
 Driv'n back redounded as a flood on those
 From whom it sprung, impossible to mix
 With Blessedness.⁴²

The passage closely resembles lines in a speech by the Elder Brother in *A Maske*, who asserts:

evil on it self shall back recoyl,
 And mix no more with goodness, when at last
 Gather'd like scum, and setl'd to it self
 It shall be in eternal restless change
 Self-fed, and self-consum'd.⁴³

And we see this happening at the beginning of Book IV as Satan approaches Eden and

Begins his dire attempt, which nigh the birth
 Now rowling, boiles in his tumultuous brest,
 And like a devillish Engine back recoiles
 Upon himself; horror and doubt distract
 His troubl'd thoughts, and from the bottom stirr
 The Hell within him.⁴⁴

Satan confesses that he does not hope

to be my self less miserable
 By what I seek, but others to make such
 As I, though thereby worse to me redound.⁴⁵

And God says that Satan's 'desparate reveng... shall redound | Upon his own rebellious head'.⁴⁶ As the evil which Satan is plotting recoils upon himself it stirs up the Hell within him. The imagery in all these passages imagines that evil will flow or spring back upon itself, providing an illustration of Aquinas' idea that evil has no causal efficacy of its own, for its seeming energies are turned against its own purposes. We see the same idea allegorically in *The Faerie Queene* where Error is devoured by its own offspring.⁴⁷ Evil is as insubstantial and as lacking in its own force as 'scum', and any form of 'self' which it might attain is self-destructive. Evil cannot ultimately be mixed with good—the insubstantial mixed with the substantial, non-being with being—though the difficult task of discerning good from the evil with which it is mixed will be intrinsic to the postlapsarian world.⁴⁸

The rhetoric of Satan and his followers often defines 'evil' in ways which seek to palliate its effects or turn it into a principle of action (which, according to traditional theology, it cannot be). Though deception and self-deception are endemic

⁴² *PL* vii 56–9; cf. 'Revenge, at first though sweet, | Bitter ere long back on it self recoiles' (Satan speaking; ix 171–2).

⁴³ *Maske* ll. 592–6; *Works* i 107.

⁴⁴ *PL* iv 15–20.

⁴⁵ *PL* ix 126–8.

⁴⁶ *PL* iii 85–6. Adam also foresees that his descendants' curses 'Shall with a fierce reflux on mee redound' (*PL* x 739).

⁴⁷ *FQ* I i 25–6.

⁴⁸ See pp. 119–20.

among the fallen angels, they nevertheless recognize in Hell 'the evil plight | In which they were'.⁴⁹ Mammon proposes that they seek to thrive under evil by turning pain into comfort:

prosperous of adverse
We can create, and in what place so e're
Thrive under evil, and work ease out of pain.⁵⁰

but this is an unreal prospect, a diabolical parody of the divine capacity to bring good from evil. In such instances the devils are using the term 'evil' as a description of their current condition, and as an adjective it seems synonymous with 'painful, adverse'. But by using the word to mean no more than 'extremely uncomfortable', they fail to understand that their condition in Hell is evil (painful) because they have chosen evil (defiance of God), and that it is henceforth an inescapable condition of their existence. As Ralph Cudworth pointed out in a sermon to the House of Commons in 1647, 'we do but deceive our selves with names', for

Hell is nothing but the Orbe of Sinne and Wickednesse, or else that Hemisphear of Darknesse, in which all Evil moves: and Heaven, is the opposite Hemisphear of Light, or else, if you please, the Bright Orbe of Truth, Holinesse, and Goodnesse; and we do actually in this life, instate our selves in the possession of one or other of them.⁵¹

After their first encounter with the power of the Son in the war in Heaven, Satan tells his followers:

Some disadvantage we endur'd and paine,
...
and though peirc'd with wound,
Soon closing, and by native vigour heal'd.
Of evil then so small as easie think
The remedie; perhaps more valid Armes,
Weapons more violent, when next we meet,
May serve to better us, and worse our foes.⁵²

Here 'evil' refers to the minor pain which they have just experienced, an evil which may, says Satan, easily be remedied; except that the words 'think . . . perhaps . . . May' point to this being another act of wishful thinking, a form of self-deception which minimizes the true meaning of 'evil': evil is so much more than a 'small' 'disadvantage'. Satan's followers share his limited understanding and his self-deception, as we see in Book II when the fallen angels are said to have discussed philosophy,

And found no end, in wandring mazes lost.
Of good and evil much they argu'd then,
Of happiness and final misery,
Passion and Apathie, and glory and shame,
Vain wisdom all, and false Philosophie.⁵³

The rebel angels try to define evil as if it were simply one concept amongst other philosophical concepts, but their reasoning is vain because this is not a philosophical

⁴⁹ *PL* i 335–6.

⁵⁰ *PL* ii 259–61.

⁵¹ Cudworth, 'A Sermon Preached', p. 113.

⁵² *PL* vi 431–40.

⁵³ *PL* ii 561–5.

but a theological matter. 'Evil' is defined existentially and experientially by their revolt against God, not through argument.⁵⁴

The world into which Satan ventures when he journeys towards Earth is

A Universe of death, which God by curse
Created evil, for evil only good,
Where all life dies, death lives, and Nature breeds,
Perverse, all monstrous, all prodigious things.⁵⁵

Though Isaiah has God declare, 'I forme the light, and create darknesse: I make peace, and create euill',⁵⁶ Milton in *De Doctrina Christiana* was careful to gloss the use of the word 'evil' in this verse when he explained 'that is, what afterwards turned out, and now is, evil: for whatever God created was at first good'. God does not create evils, therefore, but permits them by not impeding natural causes and free agents; or he inflicts what men regard as evils by way of punishment.⁵⁷ In the lines from *Paradise Lost* Milton is not actually saying that God creates evil as an entity,⁵⁸ for his grammar is careful to avoid the noun and instead use an adjective: this region has been created as a horrible place which is suitable only for wicked things—'for evil only good', as we might say that a certain soil is good only for a particular kind of plant. Indeed, the paradoxical language here ('for evil only good, | Where all life dies, death lives') is one of the ways in which Milton shows the non-being of evil. Evil has no substance, but is manifest as a monstrous and perverse counter-form of life.

It is clearly Satan, not God, who is the author of evil,⁵⁹ as Michael stresses when they come face to face during the war in Heaven:

Author of evil, unknown till thy revolt,
Unnam'd in Heav'n, now plenteous,
...
 how hast thou disturb'd
Heav'n's blessed peace, and into Nature brought
Miserie, uncreated till the crime
Of thy Rebellion?
...
Hence then, and evil go with thee along
Thy offspring, to the place of evil, Hell,
Thou and thy wicked crew.⁶⁰

⁵⁴ The fallen angels were 'to such evil brought | By sin of disobedience' (*PL* vi 395–6).

⁵⁵ *PL* ii 622–5.

⁵⁶ Isaiah xlv 7.

⁵⁷ *i.e., quod postea evasit malum, et nunc est: quicquid enim Deus creavit, bonum erat primo... Verum Deus mala aut tantummodo permittit fieri, causas physicas et liberè agentes non impediendo... Aut efficit quidem puniendo, quod malum poenae vocant* (*De Doctrina: OCW* viii 322–3; original emphases). It may be significant that Milton uses the plural here, *mala*, rather than the singular, *malum*: God permits or inflicts what man perceives as bad things, but he cannot be regarded as the author of evil considered as an existential category.

⁵⁸ The Geneva Bible carefully warns that 'we ought not to make him the autor of euill' (marginal note on James i 17).

⁵⁹ But the question of whether God might in some sense be the author of evil troubled Reformation theologians: see Williams, *The Ideas of the Fall and of Original Sin*, pp. 435–7.

⁶⁰ *PL* vi 262–77.

Satan is the author of evil; evil is his offspring; Hell is the place of evil; and before his revolt evil was unknown, unnamed, and misery too was not created. The repeated negatives again suggest that evil is best understood as the negation of good and came about through Satan's opposition to the will of God. Satan's reply is to challenge Michael's terminology, to insist that what Michael calls 'evil' is simply what he and his followers call 'Glorie':

erre not that so shall end
The strife which thou call'st evil, but wee style
The strife of Glorie: which we mean to win,
Or turn this Heav'n it self into the Hell
Thou fablest, here however to dwell free,
If not to reign.⁶¹

Satan is once again misleading himself through his own specious use of rhetoric. Though he attempts to redescribe evil as glory—the rhetorical strategy of *paradiastole*—it is an empty gesture. He cannot alter the proper understanding of evil simply by contesting Michael's choice of terminology. Satan the nominalist may like the idea that his revolt is to attain 'Glorie', but that word is indelibly associated in English biblical language with the glory of God, and thus Satan's very vocabulary signals the promised failure of his ambition as well as the limitations of his imagination. Nor can he turn Heaven into Hell, or *vice versa*, since these are not places which can be transformed by battle but are spiritual conditions, as he will soon discover. Nor, indeed, does he even have a clear notion of what it is to dwell free, whereas the Christian reader knows that true freedom is, as St Paul says, 'the glorious libertie of the children of God'.⁶²

In a startling speculation, Origen once wondered whether the devil might ultimately be saved.⁶³ Without pressing that far, Milton does demonstrate that Satan's embrace of evil is his own free choice, and is not predetermined. He could have chosen the good. And at one point Satan actually returns momentarily to a form of the good as he contemplates the 'graceful Innocence' of Eve in Eden:

That space the Evil one abstracted stood
From his own evil, and for the time remaind
Stupidly good, of enmitie disarm'd,
Of guile, of hate, of envie, of revenge.⁶⁴

Though the poetry has evoked the sensuous attractiveness of Eve in the preceding lines, it is clear that Satan is also responding to the sight of an innocence which is replete with divine grace, for 'graceful' is more than a physical description. For a while Satan stands 'abstracted', that is, separated,⁶⁵ from his own evil; he remains 'Stupidly good', stupefied or stunned by this vision which temporarily recalls him to his original state of goodness, with all his enmity, guile, hatred, and revenge laid aside. Even the word 'stood' is important here, recalling for us God's assurance that Satan and all the angels were created 'Sufficient to have stood, though free to fall'.⁶⁶

⁶¹ *PL* vi 288–93.

⁶² Romans viii 21.

⁶³ Russell, *Satan*, pp. 144–8.

⁶⁴ *PL* ix 463–6.

⁶⁵ *OED*³ *s.v.* abstracted *adj.* 1b, citing this example.

⁶⁶ *PL* iii 99. Satan himself accepts that he had 'the same free Will and Power to stand' as those angels who did not fall (*PL* iv 66).

This separation from his own evil seems to suspend his Fall, even to be about to reverse it. But not for long, since 'the hot Hell that alwayes in him burnes' draws him back to his purposes: 'Fierce hate he recollects',⁶⁷ says Milton, the verb denoting not only the recovery of a memory but the active gathering together again of his enmity, his willed opposition to the good.⁶⁸ Once more he chooses evil.



In the postlapsarian world as it is experienced by mankind, good and evil are almost inextricably mixed, and the sifting of good from evil is one of the ways in which Milton envisages the moral life. In addition, the result of the Fall is not simply that man knows good and evil, but that he knows good *through* knowing evil.⁶⁹ As Milton says in *Areopagitica*:

Good and evill we know in the field of this World grow up together almost inseparably; and the knowledge of good is so involv'd and interwoven with the knowledge of evill, and in so many cunning resemblances hardly to be discern'd, that those confused seeds which were impos'd on *Psyche* as an incessant labour to cull out, and sort asunder, were not more intermixt. It was from out the rinde of one apple tasted, that the knowledge of good and evill as two twins cleaving together leapt forth into the World. And perhaps this is that doom which *Adam* fell into of knowing good and evill, that is to say of knowing good by evill.⁷⁰

To know good 'by evill' is a strong and even a difficult idea, suggesting not simply that one understands good by contrasting it with evil, but rather that it is actually by means of an encounter or even an embrace with evil that one really knows good. Milton's strong preposition recurs in *De Doctrina Christiana* where he says that we do not know good except through evil, *per malum*.⁷¹ The idea that good is intricately mixed with evil was a view which Milton already held in the later

⁶⁷ *PL* ix 467, 471.

⁶⁸ Aquinas says that the truly evil man is one who sorrows over goodness: *nequam est proprie qui de bonitate dolet* (*Super Evangelium S. Matthaei Lectura* Caput 20, Lectio 1; from <<http://www.corpusthomicum.org>>).

⁶⁹ Satan says to Gabriel that his journey has 'To thee no reason; who knowst only good, | But evil hast not tri'd: and wilt object | His will who bound us?' (*PL* iv 895–7). Again a definition of evil is associated with God's will.

⁷⁰ *Areopagitica*: *Works* iv 310–11. Irenaeus has much the same emphasis on knowledge of good and evil as the grounds for moral choice: 'Since God, therefore, gave [to man] such mental power man knew both the good of obedience and the evil of disobedience, that the eye of the mind, receiving experience of both, may with judgment make choice of the better things . . . Wherefore he has also had a twofold experience, possessing knowledge of both kinds, that with discipline he may make choice of the better things. But how, if he had no knowledge of the contrary, could he have had instruction in that which is good? But if any one do shun the knowledge of both these kinds of things, and the twofold perception of knowledge, he unawares divests himself of the character of a human being' (Irenaeus, *Adversus Haereticos* IV xxxix 1; quoted from *The Ante-Nicene Fathers: Volume I: The Apostolic Fathers with Justin Martyr and Irenaeus*, edited by Rev. Alexander Roberts, Sir James Donaldson, and Arthur Cleveland Coxe (New York, 2007; first published 1885), p. 522). For the importance of freedom and choice in the writings of Clement and Origen on evil see Russell, *Satan*, ch. 5, esp. p. 125.

⁷¹ *post eam enim degustatam, non malum tantummodo scimus, sed ne bonum quidem nisi per malum* ('for ever since its tasting not merely do we know evil, but we do not even know good except through evil' (*De Doctrina*: *OCW* viii 360–1)). Perhaps Milton drew this idea from Lactantius, who says that we know the nature of good through evil (*qualitatem boni ex malo sciamus*: *Divine Institutes* v 7, quoted from Russell, *Satan*, p. 151 n. 10).

1630s when he made this note in his Commonplace Book from his reading of Tertullian:

in malo morali potest multum esse admistum boni idque arte singulari, nemo venenum temperat felle, et helleboro, sed conditis pulmentis et bene saporatis ita diabolus letale quod conficit, rebus dei gratissimis imbuat &c.⁷²

Milton's note then continues by asking why God permits evil.

Cur permittit deus malum? ut ratio virtuti constare possit. virtus enim malo arguitur, illustratur, exercetur. quemadmodum disserit Lactantius l.5.c.7. ut haberet ratio et prudentia in quo se exerceret, eligendo bona, fugiendo mala.⁷³

But while this perception that true virtue is the choice of good over evil exercised by reason continued to be fundamental to Milton's moral thought, he was evidently not entirely satisfied that Lactantius' formula was an altogether sufficient account of why God permits evil, for he added at the end of this entry *quamvis et hæc non satisfaciunt* ('although even these things are not satisfactory').⁷⁴ He knew that the problem of evil is deeper and more complex.

Milton's emphasis on choice is perhaps a way of countering any impression that the traditional Augustinian conception of evil as privation makes evil merely the absence of good in some negative or passive way. The good is a choice, and so is evil, most blatantly in the moment when Satan avers, 'Evil be thou my good'. It is therefore the absence of any active embracing of evil by the will which makes Adam and Eve's first encounter with evil an innocent occurrence. Eve recognizes that her dream—she dreams that she has taken the fruit from the forbidden Tree—has dramatized an evil act, and Adam wonders how evil can have gained entrance to her mind, albeit only in a dream. Adam says:

nor can I like
This uncouth dream, of evil sprung I fear;
Yet evil whence? in thee can harbour none,
Created pure.⁷⁵

The word 'uncouth' is an important clue here. It means 'of an unknown or unfamiliar character; unusual, uncommon, strange', but also 'alien or foreign', and 'of a

⁷² 'In moral evil there can be mixed much of good and that with cunning skill; no one mixes poison with gall and hellibore, but with spice and savory dainties; so the Devil flavors his fatal concoction with the most pleasing gifts of God' (*Commonplace Book: Works* xviii 128). The first part of the passage (*in malo... singulari*) is Milton's reflection; the remainder is an abbreviated quotation from Tertullian's *De Spectaculis* (see *CPW* i 362, which dates the entry c.1637–8).

⁷³ 'Why does God permit evil? That the account of Reason with Virtue may be correct. For virtue is attested by evil, is illuminated and trained. As Lactantius says: that Reason and Judgment may have a field in which they may exercise themselves by choosing the things that are good and shunning the things that are evil' (*Commonplace Book: Works* xviii 128–9). *CPW* i 363 dates this entry c.1639–41. For Lactantius see *CPW* i 363 n. 2; Kathleen Ellen Hartwell, *Lactantius and Milton* (Cambridge, Mass., 1929); and Russell, *Satan*, pp. 148–59, esp. pp. 150–2, which are particularly germane to Milton's views. The imagery of virtue training and being exercised may have influenced the passage in *Areopagitica* in which Milton writes, 'I cannot praise a fugitive and cloister'd virtue, unexercis'd & unbreath'd, 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' (*Areopagitica: Works* iv 311).

⁷⁴ *Commonplace Book: Works* xviii 128–9.

⁷⁵ *PL* v 97–100.

strange and unpleasant or distasteful character'.⁷⁶ The dream is strange in the sense that neither Adam nor Eve has had such a dream before, but it is also an alien phenomenon, implicitly not something owned or harboured by Eve.⁷⁷ The evil character of the act which it represents is clearly recognized as such by the conscious, rational mind. Adam attributes the dream not to reason but to the work of fancy;⁷⁸ we might see it as an expression of Eve's unconscious desires. He continues with an important reflection:

Evil into the mind of God or Man
May come and go, so unapprov'd, and leave
No spot or blame behind.⁷⁹

There is something insubstantial about evil thus conceived: the verbs 'come' and 'go' lack force, as if evil were merely drifting in and out of the mind, and evil leaves 'No spot or blame behind', so that its passage leaves no physical or moral trace. The crucial word here is 'unapprov'd':⁸⁰ evil has no real substance or agency or effect unless actually approved of by the individual.⁸¹ (God, says Aquinas, must know evil things because he could not know good things perfectly without knowing evil things;⁸² but that knowledge does not taint him.) Adam's response is prayer, prayer that God, who is the giver of good, will give them only good, and will disperse any evil which the darkness has brought:

Hail universal Lord, be bounteous still
To give us onely good; and if the night
Have gathered aught of evil or conceald,
Disperse it, as now light dispels the dark.
So pray'd they innocent.⁸³

Adam and Eve gather their response to their possible brush with evil into a prayer for good, although Adam's 'if' shows that he is not quite sure about how evil might be manifest or hidden. They remain innocent, uncorrupted by this encounter—though warned.

When Satan approaches Eve in order to inveigle her into tasting the fruit of the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil, he attempts to muddle her understanding of evil. God's command had been clear: Adam and Eve may eat of any fruit, but

of the Tree
Which tasted works knowledge of Good and Evil,
Thou mai'st not; in the day thou eat'st, thou di'st.⁸⁴

⁷⁶ *OED s.v.* uncouth *adj.* 3, 3b, 4.

⁷⁷ On the complex status of this dream see Stephen Hequembourg, 'Milton's "Unoriginal" Voice: Quotation Marks in *Paradise Lost*', *Modern Philology* 112 (2014) 154–78.

⁷⁸ For FANCY AND REASON see Chapter 13.

⁷⁹ *PL* v 117–19. Cf. 'whatsoever thing from without entreth into the man, it cannot defile him. Because it entreth not into his heart' (Mark vii 18–19; echoed by Milton in *Areopagitica: Works* iv 308).

⁸⁰ This is the *OED*'s first example of the word in its sense 3, 'not approved or sanctioned'.

⁸¹ Cp. Augustine's account of how sexual fantasies manifest themselves in dreams when, he says, reason is perhaps itself asleep; and yet we nevertheless often resist such temptations even in our sleep (*Confessiones* x 30).

⁸² *STI*, q. 14, a. 10.

⁸³ *PL* v 205–9.

⁸⁴ *PL* vii 542–4.

So Satan seeks to cast doubt upon this clarity when he invites Eve to imagine that evil might not be real, and urges her not to be deterred

from atchieving what might leade
To happier life, knowledge of Good and Evil;
Of good, how just? of evil, if what is evil
Be real, why not known, since easier shunn'd?⁸⁵

Those slippery conditionals which earlier were markers of Satan's self-deception are now deployed to deceive Eve: 'might . . . if'. Satan is in a sense right in saying that evil is easier shunned if it is known, but this is true only in man's postlapsarian condition which Satan proleptically imports here into the prelapsarian world: after the Fall there will indeed be no alternative to knowing evil experientially, but before the Fall man can simply adhere to the divine prohibition, and know evil at one remove through Raphael's account of Satan's disobedience. Eve's fundamental mistake is to debate, first with Satan and then with herself, about what 'evil' might mean, instead of following the word of God, and she seems to think that the knowledge of good and evil will be a purely abstract, theoretical knowledge, whereas it turns out to be a painfully physical and emotional experience. When she says,

What fear I then, rather what know to feare
Under this ignorance of good and Evil,
Of God or Death, of Law or Penaltie?⁸⁶

her rhetorical question incorporates six major terms—Good, Evil, God, Death, Law, and Penalty—which are bundled together so quickly that none of them is given any true attention. She is speaking like the fallen angels who entangled themselves in philosophical reasoning about evil instead of recognizing it as their willed condition. Eve asks rhetorically what she should fear, thus implying that there is nothing to fear, and then complains that in her ignorance of good and evil she does not know what to fear. But the repetition of 'fear' signals to the reader the appropriate response to Eve's hasty and unexamined question, as the poem prompts us to reply: 'The feare of the LORD *is* the beginning of knowledge . . . Trust in the LORD with all thine heart; and leane not vnto thine owne vnderstanding . . . Be not wise in thine owne eyes: feare the LORD, and depart from euill.'⁸⁷ In leaning unto her own understanding she neglects to fear (in the more profound sense of 'reverence') God and his will for her, that is, her *telos*.

When Eve does decide to take the fruit, 'her rash hand in evil hour | Forth reaching to the Fruit, she pluck'd, she eat'.⁸⁸ Evil hour: the phrase is repeated by Adam when he exclaims, 'O *Eve*, in evil hour thou didst give eare | To that false Worm'.⁸⁹ There is an inescapable pun here which associates Eve with evil without actually describing her as evil: rather, it is the moment itself which is evil, an ominous turning point which is the origin for human sin, and the beginning of a temporal

⁸⁵ *PL* ix 696–9.

⁸⁸ *PL* ix 780–1.

⁸⁶ *PL* ix 773–5.

⁸⁹ *PL* ix 1067–8. For the phrase 'evil hour' see *OED* s.v. hour n. 4b.

⁸⁷ Proverbs i 7, iii 5, 7.

change into a world where time brings mutability and death. Adam's recognition of what has happened is expressed in brutally simple words:

since our Eyes
Op'nd we find indeed, and find we know
Both Good and Evil, Good lost, and Evil got.⁹⁰

What this means is made clear in a number of instances in which evil now becomes manifest as the loss of good—loss in the strong sense of *privatio*, which we might translate now as 'deprivation'. There is a linguistic loss when Eve praises the Tree in terms which belong properly to the Deity,⁹¹ for the Fall is in part a Fall of language, prompted by Satan's lies and his perversion of rhetoric, continued in Eve's solipsistic meditations which lead up to her act, and fully revealed in her encomium of the Tree, a speech in which language is wrenched away from its own *telos* as a way of orienting man towards God and his creation. The same speech exhibits a loss of reverence towards God, now thought of—in Satanic *paradiastole*—as 'Our great Forbidder',⁹² and a loss too of openness towards Adam, as she calculates how to manage their relationship to her best advantage. This is a Fall into falsehood. It can also be seen as a distortion of proper hierarchy, for if Satan's true *telos* had been to serve God as one of the luminous angels of Heaven,⁹³ his turn away from that entailed a Fall from his position in the heavenly order into a new hierarchy in Hell which he designed for his own glorification. Similarly, Eve, in contemplating a state of affairs in which she might henceforward be Adam's equal or superior,⁹⁴ is also devising a hierarchy which is a distortion of her own divinely shaped *telos* which Milton defines succinctly in the formula, 'shee for God in him'.⁹⁵

It is Adam who more properly understands the evil consequences of the Fall, and who recognizes the good of which they have deprived themselves. The roses in the garland which he has woven for Eve fall from his hand and fade, prefiguring a wider decay of nature, and as he contemplates Eve his words resound with a recognition that she is herself lost:

How art thou lost, how on a sudden lost,
Defac't, deflour'd, and now to Death devote?⁹⁶

The prefix *de-* which appears three times in this last line is used in Latin to signal both privation and a movement down from a previously elevated state.⁹⁷ When Adam,

⁹⁰ *PL* ix 1070–2. This is echoed by God later:

O Sons, like one of us Man is become
To know both Good and Evil, since his taste
Of that defended Fruit; but let him boast
His knowledge of Good lost, and Evil got,
Happier, had it suffic'd him to have known
Good by it self, and Evil not at all.

(*PL* xi 84–9)

⁹¹ *PL* ix 795–810, 835–8.

⁹² *PL* ix 815.

⁹³ 'Lucifer' in Latin means 'light-bearer'.

⁹⁴ *PL* ix 816–25, 881–5.

⁹⁵ *PL* iv 299.

⁹⁶ *PL* ix 900–1.

⁹⁷ '*Dē*...marque souvent...un mouvement de haut en bas. Il peut indiquer aussi...un changement d'état; il peut aussi, marquant l'éloignement, avoir une valeur privative ou diminutive' (Alfred

deciding to eat the fruit also, exclaims that 'to loose thee were to loose my self'⁹⁸ he is expressing a self-sacrificial love for Eve which we might admire, but this is also, from another perspective, a turn towards evil in that he is now predicating his selfhood upon her and following the path which her own egoism has charted, rather than holding to his own *telos* of dependence upon God. Afterwards, the couple appear 'destitute and bare | Of all thir vertue',⁹⁹ and passions shake 'Thir inward State of Mind, calm Region once | And full of Peace, now tost and turbulent',¹⁰⁰ an interior version of Chaos. We begin to understand some of the meanings of the privation of good.

Adam too begins to understand what 'evil' means, both in his quarrel with Eve and in the vision of human history which Michael unfolds to him. When he exclaims, 'O Heav'n! in evil strait this day I stand | Before my Judge',¹⁰¹ he uses 'evil' both to mean 'dire'—as he acknowledges his awful circumstances—and to signal his dawning understanding that evil is an opposition to God; thus his acknowledgement of God as his judge is actually a step away from evil. Night, which before the Fall had been a time when the couple wondered at the beauty of nature, praised the Creator, and celebrated their love in guiltless sex,¹⁰² has now become for Adam a sign of the evil which he has wrought, and a source of unknown terrors:

Thus *Adam* to himself lamented loud
Through the still Night, not now, as ere man fell,
Wholsom and cool, and mild, but with black Air
Accompanied, with damps and dreadful gloom,
Which to his evil Conscience represented
All things with double terror.¹⁰³

Adam's evil conscience is a guilty conscience, that is, a faculty which recognizes his transgression; but it is also limited in that it sees things only with terror, and has not yet come to see the possibility of forgiveness and grace. He soon realizes that the evil brought about by the Fall will not be limited to himself and Eve, but will be experienced by subsequent generations of men as original sin; each of his descendants 'feeling | The evil on him brought by me, will curse | My Head'.¹⁰⁴ The couple will themselves suffer 'a slow-pac't evill, | A long days dying to augment our pain'.¹⁰⁵ Eventually, when Adam is shown by Michael the redemption of mankind through the Son, he understands that God brings good out of evil, exclaiming:

O goodness infinite, goodness immense!
That all this good of evil shall produce,
And evil turn to good.¹⁰⁶

and says that he has learnt

Ernout et Antoine Meillet, *Dictionnaire étymologique de la langue latine: Histoire des mots* (Paris, 2001), p. 165).

⁹⁸ *PL* ix 959.

¹⁰¹ *PL* x 125–6.

¹⁰⁴ *PL* x 733–5.

⁹⁹ *PL* ix 1062–3.

¹⁰² *PL* iv 633–775.

¹⁰⁵ *PL* x 962–4.

¹⁰⁰ *PL* ix 1125–6.

¹⁰³ *PL* x 845–50.

¹⁰⁶ *PL* xii 469–71.

that to obey is best,
 And love with feare the onely God, to walk
 As in his presence, ever to observe
 His providence, and on him sole depend,
 Mercifull over all his works, with good
 Still overcoming evil.¹⁰⁷

This is, in effect, the voice of man renouncing evil, discovering true fear, and acknowledging his duty of being dependent in his self-fulfilment. It is man's recognition of his true *telos*. It is also Milton's own consolation to himself as one who maintains his faith 'though fall'n on evil dayes, | On evil dayes though fall'n, and evil tongues'.¹⁰⁸ This autobiographical reflection says more than simply that times are hard and men malicious; Milton's understanding of evil as a deliberate choice, a turn away from one's vocation, reminds the reader at this point that the people of England 'in chusing them a captain back for *Egypt*'—as he put it in *The Readie & Easie Way*¹⁰⁹—have defected from their calling, depriving themselves of that glorious form of the good which would have made them a godly nation, and instead embracing perverted forms of civil government and religious worship. However, as Adam says, divine providence works

by small
 Accomplishing great things, by things deemd weak
 Subverting worldly strong, and worldly wise
 By simply meek.¹¹⁰

So *Paradise Lost* may find its own true *telos* in redeeming the evils of Restoration England.

¹⁰⁷ *PL* xii 561–6. *observe*: obey, adhere to; treat with respect, worship, honour (*OED*³ *s.v.* *observe* v. 2, 4).

¹⁰⁸ *PL* vii 25–6.

¹⁰⁹ *Readie Way. Works* vi 149.

¹¹⁰ *PL* xii 566–9.

12

Fall¹

the deep fall
Of those too high aspiring, who rebelld
With *Satan*.

Paradise Lost vi 898–900



Whereas *The Faerie Queene* is imagined horizontally, as befits a quest narrative, *Paradise Lost* is visualized along a vertical axis, from high to low, with many of its characters, including its narrator, moving up and down: Satan and the rebel angels fall from Heaven to Hell; the Son and the holy angels move up and down between Heaven and Earth; Satan travels from Hell to Earth through Chaos; and the poet himself takes the reader with him on these journeys, while envisaging the whole poem as a form of aspiration,

Taught by the heav'nly Muse to venture down
The dark descent, and up to reascend.²

¹ I use 'Fall', capitalized, for the revolt against God by Satan and his followers, and for the transgression by Adam and Eve of the divine prohibition on eating the fruit of the Tree of Knowledge; 'fall', in lower case, for various physical descents which occur in the poem. For a full and insightful study of the development of Jewish and Christian ideas of the Fall see Norman Powell Williams, *The Ideas of the Fall and of Original Sin* (London, 1927); for a discussion of the theodicy of Milton's presentation of God and the Fall see Dennis Richard Danielson, *Milton's Good God: A Study in Literary Theodicy* (Cambridge, 1982); and for accounts of *PL* in relation to seventeenth-century thinking about the Fall see C. A. Patrides, *Milton and the Christian Tradition* (Oxford, 1966), ch. 4, and William Poole, *Milton and the Idea of the Fall* (Cambridge, 2005). Williams points out that the use of the term 'Fall' (πτῶμα) for the sin of Adam is a Patristic not a scriptural term, introduced by Methodius, 'the word used by St. Paul being παράβασις, a "stepping aside" from the path marked out for man by God; and it was destined later to have momentous consequences in the way of fostering a belief in "original righteousness", inasmuch as the conception of a "Fall" implies an exalted condition previously enjoyed by the being who "fell", an implication from which the Biblical and early Patristic word παράβασις is entirely free' (*The Ideas of the Fall*, p. 253; and cf. p. 302). For discussions of the imagery of fall, height, and depth in *PL* see Isabel Gamble MacCaffrey, '*Paradise Lost* as "Myth"' (Cambridge, Mass., 1959), ch. 3; Thomas M. Greene, *The Descent from Heaven: A Study in Epic Continuity* (New Haven, Conn., 1963), pp. 387–95; Stanley Eugene Fish, *Surprised by Sin: The Reader in 'Paradise Lost'* (Berkeley, Calif., 1967), pp. 94–6; Anna Baldwin, 'Platonic Ascents and Descents in Milton', in *Platonism and the English Imagination*, edited by Anna Baldwin and Sarah Hutton (Cambridge, 1994), pp. 151–62; David Quint, *Inside 'Paradise Lost': Reading the Designs of Milton's Epic* (Princeton, N.J., 2014), pp. 63–92; and Sarah Ellenzeig, '*Paradise Lost* and the Secret of Lucretian Sufficiency', *Modern Language Quarterly* 75 (2014) 385–409.

² *PL* iii 19–20.

In the *Divina Commedia* the pilgrim works his way step by step through the circles of the Inferno, Purgatory, and Paradise, until he approaches the Beatific Vision.³ *Paradise Lost*, by contrast, ends with a downward movement into the postlapsarian world. But some of this movement is metaphorical, some illusory; in no sense is the topography of the poem literal, though the characteristics of places—whether the ‘darkness visible’ of Hell, or the pristine and voluptuous vegetation of Eden—may often be depicted with inventive poetic detail.⁴ Places are primarily spiritual states, sites of disclosure, testing grounds; indeed, the universe of *Paradise Lost* is, as Keats called the world, ‘The vale of Soul-making’.⁵ The Fall may be depicted in physical form, but the physical is always a mode of the spiritual.⁶ Words such as ‘high’, ‘low’, ‘up’, ‘down’, and, of course, ‘fall’ itself, frequently act as invitations to the reader first to imagine and then to rethink the elevated and the object.⁷

We are made repeatedly aware of height and depth, whether this is the ‘deep’ which characterizes Hell,⁸ or the Tree of Life which is placed highest in the Garden of Eden,⁹ or Adam and Eve, as yet unfallen, who are ‘Godlike erect’,¹⁰ or Adam’s acknowledgement to God that

³ A. Bartlett Giamatti observes of Dante that ‘In his progress upward through the poem, the pilgrim has been moving backward, in a sense, toward that state of radical purity and innocence which Adam and Eve possessed before the Fall’ (*The Earthly Paradise and the Renaissance Epic* (Princeton, N.J., 1966) p. 109). Jeffrey Burton Russell remarks that the frozen immobility of Dante’s Satan contrasts with ‘God’s voluntary serenity, which moves without moving’ and is ‘the opposite of the mobility of the angels and the blessed spirits, his frozen hatred the opposite of God’s love, which moves the world’ (*Lucifer: The Devil in the Middle Ages* (Ithaca, N.Y., 1984), p. 230).

⁴ For comments on the way Milton’s language for the quasi-geography of *PL* combines words denoting the substantial and the insubstantial see Thomas N. Corns, *Milton’s Language* (Oxford, 1990), pp. 100–5.

⁵ Keats to George and Georgiana Keats, 14 February–3 May 1819 (*The Letters of John Keats*, edited by Maurice Buxton Forman, second edition (Oxford, 1935), p. 336).

⁶ Poole observes that ‘spatial difficulty... also implies ontological difficulty’ (*Milton and the Idea of the Fall*, p. 164).

⁷ Cf. the fall of Mulciber, which evokes a humanly conceived geography only to dismiss it:

Men call’d him *Mulciber*; and how he fell
From Heav’n, they fabl’d, thrown by angry *Jove*
Sheer o’re the Chrystal Battlements: from Morn
To Noon he fell, from Noon to dewy Eve,
A Summers day; and with the setting Sun
Dropt from the Zenith like a falling Star,
On *Lemnos* th’ *Aegean* Ile: **thus they relate,**
Erring; for he with this rebellious rout
Fell long before; nor aught avail’d him now
To have built in Heav’n high Towers; nor did he scape
By all his Engins, but was headlong sent
With his industrious crew to build in hell.

(*PL* i 740–51; emphasis added)

The passage also reminds us that it avails nothing to have built high towers in Heaven, whether these be thought of as part of the fabric of the imagined celestial city, or as images for spiritual pride.

⁸ *PL* i 28, and *passim*; similarly Satan’s despair is ‘deep’ (*PL* i 126), which in other contexts might be merely a commonplace, but here acquires a resonance from the surrounding uses of the word.

⁹ *PL* iv 194–5. C. S. Lewis notes the emphasis on the height of the trees in paradise in Milton’s account of Satan’s approach to Eden in Book IV (*A Preface to Paradise Lost* (Oxford, 1942), pp. 49–50).

¹⁰ *PL* iv 289.

To attaine
The highth and depth of thy Eternal wayes
All human thoughts come short, Supream of things.¹¹

or Milton's own prayer at the opening of Book I:

What in me is dark
Illumin, what is low raise and support;
That to the highth of this great Argument
I may assert Eternal Providence.¹²

The ambition of Milton's argument is placed reverently within the framework of a humble prayer. Height and depth symbolize godlikeness and depravity respectively,¹³ but we also come to see how certain kinds of height or aspiration or raising are ungodlike because they are generated by the will rather than by obedience, by desire rather than love. Through this repeated imagery the poetry asks us to read height and depth allegorically, aware all the time that these terms are fundamentally defined for the Christian reader by their theological significance, for the aspirations of will or desire in Eve or Satan are implicitly contained and judged by the evocation of biblical texts such as St Paul's theological elaboration of the significance of height and depth in his letter to the Ephesians:

That Christ may dwell in your hearts by faith, that yee, being rooted and grounded in loue, May be able to comprehend with all Saints, what is the breadth, and length, and depth, and height: And to know the loue of Christ, which passeth knowledge.¹⁴

Elsewhere we are told that God 'hath raised vp an horne of saluation for vs',¹⁵ for 'this Iesus hath God raised vp'.¹⁶ Raphael says that after completing the work of creation on the sixth day 'the Creator... | ... up returnd | Up to the Heav'n of Heav'ns his high abode, | ... Up he rode'.¹⁷ Such divine elevations stand in implicit contrast to the attempts first by Satan and then by Eve to raise themselves in defiance of the divine order. If divine love creates and sustains all height and all depth, then any movement, whether human or angelic, is good in so far as it moves within the ambit of this order, and is a falling away from good when it pursues its own direction, its self-determined *telos*.

The Fall of man and of the angels is the result—or perhaps it is rather a form—of misconceived aspiration: a form rather than a result, because the Fall of Satan and the Fall of Eve are both enactments of ambition.¹⁸ The prophet Isaiah exclaims:

¹¹ *PL* viii 412–14. ¹² *PL* i 22–5.

¹³ In *Maske* the Attendant Spirit tells us of Circe's 'charmed Cup | Whoever tasted, lost his upright shape, | And downward fell into a groveling Swine' (ll. 51–3: *Works* i 87).

¹⁴ Ephesians iii 17–19.

¹⁵ Luke i 69.

¹⁶ Acts ii 32.

¹⁷ *PL* vii 551–7.

¹⁸ Augustine says that both the devil and man fell through pride (*De Genesi ad Litteram Libri Duodecim* XI v 7, XI xvi 21; translated by John Hammond Taylor as *The Literal Meaning of Genesis*, 2 vols (New York, 1982), ii 138, 148). Augustine's text is found in *Patrologia Latina* xxxiv. See further J. M. Evans, *'Paradise Lost' and the Genesis Tradition* (Oxford, 1968), pp. 223ff. 'To reign is worth ambition though in Hell', says Satan (*PL* i 262). Many in the postlapsarian world are motivated by 'close ambition varnisht o're with zeal' (*PL* ii 485).

How art thou fallen from heauen, O Lucifer, sonne of the morning? *how* art thou cut downe to the ground, which didst weaken the nations?

For thou hast said in thine heart: I wil ascend into heauen, I wil exalt my throne aboute the starres of God: I wil sit also vpon the mount of the congregation, in the sides of the North.

I wil ascend aboute the heights of the cloudes, I wil bee like the most High.

Yet thou shalt be brought downe to hel, to the sides of the pit.¹⁹

And St Augustine comments that 'It is indeed a good thing to have an aspiring mind, yet aspiring not to oneself, which belongs to pride, but to God, which belongs to obedience, and obedience can belong only to the humble.'²⁰ In Milton's poem Raphael calls Satan 'the proud | Aspirer',²¹ and Satan himself speaks of the 'high disdain' which 'rais'd me to contend' with God.²² At the beginning of Book II we see Satan in a position in which his Fall from Heaven has, it seems, resulted in his elevation to a new kind of eminence:

HIGH on a Throne of Royal State, which far
Outshon the wealth of *Ormus* and of *Ind*,
Or where the gorgeous East with richest hand
Showrs on her Kings *Barbaric* Pearl and Gold,
Satan exalted sat, by merit rais'd
To that bad eminence; and from despair
Thus high uplifted beyond hope, aspires
Beyond thus high.²³

The poetry makes it clear that this elevation is a form of Fall: not only is this a 'bad eminence' and a more than barbaric monarchy, it signals an aspiration 'beyond hope': this is more than he could have hoped for, but it is also an eminence which is achieved by leaving hope behind. What is his aspiration 'Beyond thus high'—greater honour in Hell, or a renewed assault upon Heaven? In either case such aspiration can only be a deeper Fall. Satan himself acknowledges this paradox when he admits that it was ambition which resulted in his Fall:

lifted up so high
I sdeind subjection, and thought one step higher
Would set me highest.

...

¹⁹ Isaiah xiv 12–15. Evans (p. 34) suggests that this passage may not have originally referred to Satan. Milton uses the passage in *Reason* (1641) as the basis for a jibe against the bishops who, he says, need not 'run questing up as high as *Adam* to fetch their originall, as tis said one of them lately did in publick... For *Lucifer* before *Adam* was the first prelat Angel, and both he, as is commonly thought, and our forefather *Adam*, as we all know, for aspiring above their orders, were miserably degraded' (*Works* iii 196). The anti-prelatical tracts frequently criticize the ambition of bishops.

²⁰ Augustine, *De Civitate Dei* xiv 13: *Bonum est enim sursum habere cor, non tamen ad se ipsum, quod est superbiae, sed ad Dominum, quod est oboedientiae, quae nisi humilium non potest esse.*

²¹ *PL* vi 89–90.

²² *PL* i 98–9. *disdain*: indignation, anger, or vexation arising from offended dignity (*OED* s.v. *disdain* n. 2a).

²³ *PL* ii 1–8. The word 'merit' here is, of course, deeply ironic, and invites comparison with a contrasting use in Book VII: see p. 140.

While they adore me on the Throne of Hell,
 With Diadem and Scepter high advanc'd
 The lower still I fall, onely Supream
 In miserie; such joy Ambition findes.
 But say I could repent and could obtaine
 By Act of Grace my former state; how soon
 Would high recall high thoughts, how soon unsay
 What feign'd submission swore: ease would recant
 Vows made in pain, as violent and void.
 For never can true reconciliation grow
 Where wounds of deadly hate have peirc'd so deep:
 Which would but lead me to a worse relapse
 And heavier fall.²⁴

Satan says that he disdained 'subjection', and this word with its cognate 'subject' echoes through the poem. Etymologically it derives ultimately from the Latin *sub* + *iacere*, to throw under. Satan regards the condition of being God's subject as a humiliating servitude, 'submission' as he calls it later in the speech. He cannot imagine returning to God if his Maker should 'relent | And publish Grace to all, on promise made | Of new Subjection',²⁵ and just before his seduction of Eve he exclaims against the injustice of angels being 'subjected' to the service of man.²⁶ It seems that the only way in which Satan can imagine service is as servitude, and a place in a hierarchy as a humiliating form of subjection.

But for Milton subjection is part of the divine order, and therefore to be embraced. In the case of Eve, her hair

in wanton ringlets wav'd
 As the Vine curls her tendrils, which impli'd
 Subjection, but requir'd with gentle sway.²⁷

Such subjection entails an answering 'gentle sway' from Adam. But Raphael warns him against becoming subject himself to Eve because of her attractions, for she is

fair no doubt, and worthy well
 Thy cherishing, thy honouring, and thy love,
 Not thy subjection.²⁸

and after the Fall the Son rebukes Adam for precisely this failure: Eve was 'lovely to attract | Thy Love, not thy Subjection'.²⁹ In effect, the Fall has brought the pair to a state of being

both in subjection now
 To sensual Appetite, who from beneath
 Usurping over sovran Reason claim'd
 Superior sway.³⁰

²⁴ *PL* iv 49–51, 89–101.

²⁵ *PL* ii 237–9.

²⁶ *PL* ix 155.

²⁷ *PL* iv 306–8.

²⁸ *PL* viii 568–70.

²⁹ *PL* x 152–3.

³⁰ *PL* ix 1128–31.

Moreover, Milton sees an intimate connection between the inward servitude to appetite and the external subjection to political tyranny:

Reason in man obscur'd, or not obeyd,
Immediately inordinate desires
And upstart Passions catch the Government
From Reason, and to servitude reduce
Man till then free. Therefore since hee permits
Within himself unworthie Powers to reign
Over free Reason, God in Judgement just
Subjects him from without to violent Lords;
Who oft as undeservedly enthrall
His outward freedom.³¹

In disdaining subjection to the divine order, Satan, Eve, and Adam dethrone reason and subject themselves to their passions.

In aspiring to greater height in Heaven Satan was thinking in worldly, even literal terms; but now his self-knowledge (which is often entwined with self-deception) leads him to recognize that every act of worship which seems to elevate him on the throne of Hell sinks him lower: *ipsum quippe extolli iam deiici est*.³² He understands that for him the Fall is both event, process, and condition, his Fall continuing and, as he sees, deepening with each acceptance of homage. The paradoxes 'high advanc'd | The lower still' and 'onely Supream | In Misery' reveal the illusory nature of the height to which Satan is elevated. Even were he to repent and regain Heaven, such recovered 'highth' would only 'recall high thoughts', a phrasing which appears to acknowledge his own responsibility for a hypothetical 'worse relapse', and yet all the agency here is assigned to abstract nouns: 'highth' recalls and unsays, 'feign'd submission' swears, 'ease' recants, 'reconcilement' cannot grow, 'wounds of deadly hate' pierce, all of which 'would but lead me': nowhere does Satan grammatically confess his own agency.³³ But he does recognize that the 'deep' wounds of hate would lead to 'relapse | And heavier fall'.

Satan's aspiration to be higher in Heaven, and then his elevation to the throne of Hell, are but forms of Fall, and those physical movements upwards which he makes may seem to be powerful assertions of individuality and purpose but are ultimately ineffectual. He assures his followers that their resolution 'from the lowest deep | Will once more lift us up',³⁴ seeks himself to travel 'up to light',³⁵ and on leaving Chaos 'With fresh alacritie and force renew'd | Springs upward like a Pyramid of fire'.³⁶ But because he conceives of upward movement and of the light which he seeks to attain only in physical terms, any such movement is fruitless. When the narrator tells us that Satan lies chained on the burning lake, he adds

³¹ PL xii 86–95.

³² Augustine: 'For the very act of being exalted [in opposition to God] is already an act of being cast down' (*De Civitate Dei* xiv 13).

³³ Cf. the responsibility diverted onto abstract nouns when Satan says that 'Pride and worse Ambition threw me down' (PL iv 40). Poole makes a similar observation about Satan's abstract nouns (*Milton and the Idea of the Fall*, p. 148).

³⁴ PL ii 392–3.

³⁵ PL ii 974.

³⁶ PL ii 1012–13.

nor ever thence
 Had ris'n or heav'd his head, but that the will
 And high permission of all-ruling Heaven
 Left him at large to his own dark designs.³⁷

so that when 'Forthwith upright he rears from off the Pool'³⁸ we know that this movement is providentially contained, and the energy of such movement is ultimately fruitless. Later Satan's own apparently physical progress through Chaos serves to reveal his inability to move under his own power:

At last his Sail-broad Vannes
 He spreads for flight, and in the surging smoak
 Uplifted spurns the ground, thence many a League
 As in a cloudy Chair ascending rides
 Audacious, but that seat soon failing, meets
 A vast vacuities: all unawares
 Fluttring his pennons vain plumb down he drops
 Ten thousand fathom deep, and to this hour
 Down had been falling, had not by ill chance
 The strong rebuff of som tumultuous cloud
 Instinct with Fire and Nitre hurried him
 As many miles aloft.³⁹

'Uplifted...ascending...failing...down...drops...deep...Down...falling': such is Satan's uncertain progress through Chaos, powerless to resist the elements or the 'ill chance' which alone hurries him 'aloft'. Ultimately it is divine providence which will determine whether or not Satan is able to attempt any movement. The Fall of Satan is both symbolized and continued when he takes on the form of the serpent and exclaims:

O foul descent! that I who erst contended
 With Gods to sit the highest, am now constrained
 Into a Beast, and mixt with bestial slime,
 This essence to incarnate and imbrute,
 That to the hight of Deities aspir'd;
 But what will not Ambition and Revenge
 Descend to? who aspires must down as low
 As high he soard, obnoxious first or last
 To basest things.⁴⁰

The passive voice in 'am...constrained' is another instance of Satan misrepresenting responsibility: no one has constrained him into this form but himself; meanwhile, the act is made indicative of a continuing Fall through the repetition 'Into...incarnate...imbrute', where the 'in-' prefixes imply descent.⁴¹

³⁷ *PL* i 210–13. ³⁸ *PL* i 221.

³⁹ *PL* ii 927–38. There is also a descent from Chaos to Earth ('right down to Paradise descend' says Satan to Sin and Death (*PL* x 398)).

⁴⁰ *PL* ix 163–71. *obnoxious*: vulnerable.

⁴¹ The rare word 'imbrute' is apparently Milton's coinage: *OED s.v.* imbrute *v.* cites *Maske* ll. 466–7 (*Works* i 102), 'The soul grows clotted by contagion, | Imbodies, and imbrutes', as the first example of the word used intransitively, and this instance in *PL* as only the second usage transitively.

There is another form of descent, a descent into the inner world of Satan, in the remarkable soliloquy at the beginning of Book IV after he has alighted on the top of Mount Niphates:

Me miserable! which way shall I flie
 Infinite wrauth, and infinite despaire?
 Which way I flie is Hell; my self am Hell;
 And in the lowest deep a lower deep
 Still threatning to devour me opens wide,
 To which the Hell I suffer seems a Heav'n.
 O then at last relent: is there no place
 Left for Repentance, none for Pardon left?
 None left but by submission; and that word
Disdain forbids me, and my dread of shame
 Among the spirits beneath, whom I seduc'd.⁴²

The Satan whose masterly use of rhetoric in Books I and II had manipulated the fallen angels into obeying his will now uses rhetoric to explore his own condition. The passage begins with a two-word phrase which with devastating economy encapsulates his condition: 'Me miserable'! It is a Latinate construction, the accusative of exclamation (*O me miserum!*), but it is important that as we hear a Latin hinterland to the phrase we hear more specifically the opening of Psalm 50, traditionally interpreted as the repentance of King David after his adultery with Bathsheba:⁴³

Miserere mei Deus secundum magnam misericordiam tuam:
 iuxta multitudinem miserationum tuarum dele iniquitates meas.

Haue mercie vpon mee, O God, according to thy louing kindnesse: according
 vnto the multitude of thy tender mercies blot out my transgressions.⁴⁴

This is the path not taken, the alternative speech of repentance which the verbal echo opens out before the reader, and which we hear as a silent commentary running under the spoken words of Satan's speech. But Satan rests in this state of self-pity, unable to seek forgiveness, unable to move from exclaiming 'Me miserable' to begging *Miserere me*. The sharp intelligence of Satan knows that the physical geography which he inhabits is primarily a representation of his spiritual state, and that his physical flight from Hell is no escape from the spiritual condition which Hell signifies: 'Which way I flie is Hell; my self am Hell'. The simple redefinition of his self as Hell is an extraordinary moment of self-knowledge; for once the father of lies will not lie to himself. The lines

And in the lowest deep a lower deep
 Still threatning to devour me opens wide,

⁴² *PL* iv 73–83.

⁴³ Fowler *ad loc.* notes the Latin idiom and the echo of the Psalm.

⁴⁴ Psalm 50 in the Vulgate is numbered 51 in the Hebrew Masoretic text followed by Protestant bibles and the Book of Common Prayer. The English version quoted here is from the AV, Psalm li 1.

return to this troubled geography with the paradox that there may be some depth lower than the lowest; this 'deep' is all the more disturbing for being undefined, and the logical and linguistic difficulty in imagining this deep stretches our imagination.

Yet Satan's acknowledgement of his true condition is only intermittent. When he addresses his followers he assures them that their Fall is but temporary, and in so doing manifests a travesty of the concepts of height and depth:

Awake, arise, or be for ever fall'n.
They heard, and were abasht, and up they sprung.⁴⁵

But they *are* for ever fallen; there is no 'or'—no alternative future—available to them, and while they may have sprung up in response to his voice, this is only a temporary physical response, and in no way a step towards a reascent to recover their lost condition. He rallies them by recalling their quondam titles:

Powers and Dominions, Deities of Heav'n,
For since no deep within her gulf can hold
Immortal vigor, though opprest and fall'n,
I give not Heav'n for lost. From this descent
Celestial virtues rising, will appear
More glorious and more dread then from no fall.⁴⁶

As so often in this poem, Satan misunderstands (or understands but misrepresents) divine power and his own relation to God: when he claims that 'no deep within her gulf can hold' him and his associates, that unexpected possessive pronoun 'her' briefly personifies this 'deep' as if she were some agent who is insufficiently strong to constrain Satan's vigour; instead, this 'deep' is a manifestation of divine power which will forever hold Satan, and it is also the spiritual depth of alienation into which Satan has thrown himself by his revolt. It cannot, therefore, be the kind of deep from which there might be some form of physical 'rising'. Moreover, the claim that 'From this descent | Celestial virtues rising, will appear | More glorious and more dread then from no fall' is a mere assertion without foundation. Perhaps the clue here is in the word 'virtues': 'Virtues' were one of the orders of angels identified by Pseudo-Dionysius⁴⁷—along with the 'Powers and Dominions' invoked by Satan at the opening of this speech—but two other meanings come into play here, 'virtue' in the original Latin sense of 'manly strength', and 'virtue' meaning a moral quality.⁴⁸ But Satan's followers are no longer part of the celestial hierarchy, and have neither the moral virtue nor the physical strength with which to rise, either literally or metaphorically. The whole scenario is fallacious.

⁴⁵ *PL* i 330–1. Greene (*The Descent from Heaven*, p. 391) notes the prominence of words denoting height in the passage describing Satan rallying his troops (*PL* i 527–53): 'high...rais'd...upward...tall', etc.

⁴⁶ *PL* ii 11–16.

⁴⁷ Pseudo-Dionysius calls the fifth of the nine orders of angels δύνανταις (in Latin *virtutes*) (*De Coelesti Hierarchia* viii (*Patrologia Graeca* iii 237)).

⁴⁸ Respectively *OED*³ 3c, 5, and 1. Cf. the Satanic misuse of 'virtue' when he urges Eve to exercise her 'dauntless virtue' and take the fruit (*PL* ix 694).

It is nevertheless propounded once more by Moloc:

in our proper motion we ascend
Up to our native seat: descent and fall
To us is adverse. Who but felt of late
When the fierce Foe hung on our brok'n Rear
Insulting, and pursu'd us through the Deep,
With what compulsion and laborious flight
We sunk thus low? Th' ascent is easie then.⁴⁹

Moloc shares Satan's misapprehension about the nature of their power, and fundamentally misunderstands who they now are: ascent might once have been the motion which was 'proper' to them as angels, but the pronouns 'our' and 'us' no longer refer to such beings. Moloc's fellow demon Mulciber designs Pandaemonium which 'Rose like an Exhalation'⁵⁰ (a structure, then, which is a kind of mirage) until 'Th' ascending pile | Stood fixt her stately highth',⁵¹ but by now we know that such elevation and fixity are illusory. Moreover, when Beelzebub says that the rebels have 'fall'n such a pernicious highth'⁵² he uses 'highth' where we would expect 'depth'. Neither word now applies in any literal sense in the non-place that is Hell.⁵³

Their powerlessness is vividly revealed in Book X when the rebel angels, 'Sublime with expectation'⁵⁴ as they wait for Satan to arrive,

felt themselvs now changing; down thir arms,
Down fell both Spear and Shield, down they as fast,⁵⁵

compelled down into the form of serpents. Repeatedly devouring the apparently nourishing fruit which hangs close by, they repeatedly find it merely ashes,

so oft they fell
Into the same illusion, not as Man
Whom they triumph'd once lapst.⁵⁶

This is, of course, a bitterly ironic, compelled re-enactment of Satan's appropriation of the form of the serpent, and of Eve's manducation of the forbidden fruit; it is different, however, from the Fall of man, because man 'once lapst' fell only once, whereas the devils fall repeatedly⁵⁷ into the same illusion that this fruit is good to

⁴⁹ *PL* ii 75–81.

⁵⁰ *PL* i 711.

⁵¹ *PL* i 722–3.

⁵² *PL* i 282.

⁵³ Cf. the quotation from Russell in Chapter 11 *EVIL*, p. 108.

⁵⁴ *PL* x 536. *sublime*: raised aloft (*OED*³ *s.v.* *sublime adj.* 1).

⁵⁵ *PL* x 541–2.

⁵⁶ *PL* x 570–2.

⁵⁷ That the Fall of the rebel angels is a repeated Fall is exemplified again when Milton says that one of them was worshipped under the name of Dagon,

In his own Temple, on the grunsel edge,
Where he fell flat, and sham'd his Worshipers:
Dagon his Name, Sea Monster, upward Man
And downward Fish: yet had his Temple high
Rear'd in *Azotus*.

(*PL* i 460–4)

It signifies nothing if the temple of a false god is 'high | Rear'd'.

eat. We may also observe, in passing, that the fallen angels devour this fruit 'Hunger and thirst constraining':⁵⁸ it is appetite which drives them, whereas Milton does not follow some previous exegetes in making appetite the motive for the Fall of man,⁵⁹ even though Adam and Eve gorge themselves on the fruit afterwards.



God himself defines the Fall quite emphatically in relation to the freedom with which he has endowed both the angels and man; heavy alliteration ties the ideas of fall and freedom together:

So will fall,
Hee and his faithless Progenie: whose fault?
Whose but his own? ingrate, he had of mee
All he could have; I made him just and right,
Sufficient to have stood, though free to fall.
Such I created all th' Ethereal Powers
And Spirits, both them who stood and them who faild;
Freely they stood who stood, and fell who fell.⁶⁰

God's use of 'will fall' here shows that he foresees what will happen, though he does not decree it: 'shall fall' would have been a divine decree, 'will fall' is an observation.⁶¹ Readers have sometimes experienced difficulties with this and other speeches attributed to God in Book III: God may sound petulant or defensive or cold; he may appear to blame man for a Fall which he foresees and could have prevented, though only, it seems, at the cost of curtailing human freedom.⁶² The crucial line

⁵⁸ *PL* x 568.

⁵⁹ Several interpreters saw sexual passion as the driving force leading to the Fall (Williams, *The Ideas of the Fall*, esp. pp. 204–5, 244, 272–3, 304); Augustine, however, attributed the Fall not to concupiscence but to wilful transgression which included the sins of pride (in claiming to be independent of God) and infidelity (in refusing to believe his word) (Williams, *The Ideas of the Fall*, p. 364). Augustine also maintained that Adam and Eve did not have sexual intercourse in Eden before the Fall, and that if they had persisted in their unfallen state intercourse would not have been motivated by passion but subject to rational direction (*De Genesi ad Litteram* IX iii 6, IX x 16–18; tr. Taylor ii 73–4, 80–2). Milton carefully explains that there was appropriate, marital sexual desire in Eden before the Fall, and only afterwards did this become gross lust. In *De Doctrina* Milton says that our first parents allowed evil concupiscence into themselves (*Concupiscentia mala est, Quam primi parentes et in se primum admiserunt*), and that this came to dwell in Adam after the Fall (*Nam illa mala concupiscentia, illa lex peccati, non solum in nobis ingenita est, sed in Adamo etiam post lapsum inhabitavit*) (*OCW* viii 420; original emphasis). Unbridled sexual passion is therefore a consequence of the Fall, not a cause (as Augustine had said: *De Genesi ad Litteram* XI xxxii 42; tr. Taylor 164–5). Cf. Chapter 7 *DESIRE*, p. 68 n. 33.

⁶⁰ *PL* iii 95–102.

⁶¹ Cf.

the high Decree
Unchangeable, Eternal, which ordain'd
Thir freedom, they themselves ordain'd thir fall.
The first sort by thir own suggestion fell,
Self-tempted, self-deprav'd: Man falls deceiv'd
By the other first.

(*PL* iii 126–31)

suggestion: incitement to evil (*OED s.v. suggestion* n. 1a).

⁶² See Fowler's notes *ad loc.* and Danielson, *Milton's Good God*, pp. 104ff.

is 'Sufficient to have stood, though free to fall'. God has endowed Adam and Eve with sufficient intellectual and moral resources to understand the prohibition on the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil and the consequences of disobedience. They do, indeed, not understand the full consequences, including the meaning of 'death',⁶³ until they experience in their flesh and spirit the fruits of the Fall in the sour and savage recriminations which occupy Book X, and until Adam sees with Michael's help the course of human history in Books XI and XII. But what they do have, and what they do know, is 'sufficient'. 'Sufficient' is in part a technical term: St Paul says that the Lord told him, 'My grace is sufficient for thee: for my strength is made perfect in weaknes'.⁶⁴ Subsequently theologians have developed the idea of 'sufficient grace'⁶⁵ (*gratia mere sufficiens*) which is a divinely bestowed capacity to carry out a good act, but which the free will of the individual may nevertheless resist.

Another important word here, easily overlooked, is 'stood'. The poem asks us to think about what it means to 'stand'. Milton's use of 'stand' takes some strength from the many instances in the English Bible in which 'to stand' denotes the assured position of the faithful follower of the Lord:

Our feete shall stand within thy gates, O Ierusalem.⁶⁶

The wicked are overthrown, and *are* not: but the house of the righteous shall stand.⁶⁷

Wherefore take vnto you the whole armour of God, that yee may be able to withstand in the euill day, and hauing done all, to stand. Stand therefore, hauing your loynes girt about with trueth, and hauing on the breast-plate of righteousness.⁶⁸

To stand, then, is to serve God faithfully, in harmony like

the fair musick that all creatures made
To their great Lord, whose love their motion sway'd
In perfet Diapason, whilst they stood
In first obedience, and their state of good.⁶⁹

At creation, 'The Heav'ns and all the Constellations rung, | The Planets in thir stations list'ning stood'.⁷⁰ As for the angels, Raphael explains to Adam that

freely we serve,
Because wee freely love, as in our will
To love or not; in this we stand or fall.⁷¹

To stand is freely to serve and freely to love. ('They also serve who only stand and waite.'⁷²) Raphael then urges Adam:

⁶³ Adam says: 'So neer grows Death to Life, what ere Death is, | Som dreadful thing no doubtr' (*PL* iv 425–6).

⁶⁴ 2 Corinthians xii 7–9.

⁶⁵ *OED* s.v. sufficient *adj.* 2b; see also Williams, *The Ideas of the Fall*, pp. 404–5; Danielson, *Milton's Good God*, pp. 82–3.

⁶⁶ Psalm cxxii 2.

⁶⁷ Proverbs xii 7.

⁶⁸ Ephesians vi 13–14.

⁶⁹ 'At a solemn Musick' ll. 21–4: *Works* i 28.

⁷⁰ *PL* vii 562–3.

⁷¹ *PL* v 538–40.

⁷² Sonnet XIX l. 14: *Works* i 67.

stand fast; to stand or fall
Free in thine own Arbitrement it lies.⁷³

To stand is to obey:

That thou art happie, owe to God;
That thou continu'st such, owe to thy self,
That is, to thy obedience; therein stand.⁷⁴

And to obey is to stand, for obedience maintains man in his God-given place. Satan asks himself whether Adam and Eve 'onely stand | By Ignorance?',⁷⁵ as if they would decline to serve God if they had full knowledge. Satan himself cannot any longer stand: 'with what eyes could we | Stand in his presence humble', he asks;⁷⁶ rather, he is 'th' Apostate Angel'.⁷⁷ The word 'apostate' derives (via ecclesiastical Latin) from the late Greek ἀποστασία, 'rebellion, revolt, especially against God', the two roots of the word being ἀπό (away from) and στάσις (standing).⁷⁸ Satan the apostate stands away from God; but away from God there is no place to stand: he can only fall. The final demonstration of how to 'stand' is reserved to *Paradise Regain'd*, where Satan sets the Son of God on the pinnacle of the temple, saying:

There stand, if thou wilt stand; to stand upright
Will ask thee skill; I to thy Fathers house
Have brought thee, and highest plac't, highest is best,
Now shew thy Progeny; if not to stand,
Cast thy self down; safely if Son of God:
For it is written, He will give command
Concerning thee to his Angels, in thir hands
They shall up lift thee, lest at any time
Thou chance to dash thy foot against a stone.
To whom thus Jesus: also it is written,
Tempt not the Lord thy God; he said and stood.
But Satan smitten with amazement fell.⁷⁹

Satan is wrong: to 'stand' asks not skill, but faith.

After the Fall, man will be enabled to stand through the divine gift of grace,⁸⁰ for God promises that

⁷³ PL viii 640–1.

⁷⁴ PL v 520–2. Cf. Augustine: *Oportebat autem ut homo sub Domino Deo positus alicunde prohiberetur, ut ei promerendi Dominum suum virtus esset ipsa obedientia, quam possum verissime dicere solam esse virtutem omni creaturae rationali agenti sub Dei potestate; primumque esse et maximum vitium tumoris ad ruinam sua potestate velle uti, cuius vitii nomen est inobedientia* ('It was proper that man, placed in a state of dependence upon the Lord God, should be given some prohibition, so that obedience would be the virtue by which he would please his Lord. I can truthfully say that this is the only virtue of every rational creature who lives his life under God's rule, and that the fundamental and greatest vice is the overweening pride by which one wishes to have independence to his own ruin, and the name of this vice is disobedience' (*De Genesi ad Litteram* VIII vi 12; tr. Taylor ii 42)).

⁷⁵ PL iv 518–19.

⁷⁶ PL ii 239–40.

⁷⁷ PL i 125.

⁷⁸ LSJ, Chantraine, s.vv.

⁷⁹ PR iv 551–62.

⁸⁰ Cf. 'Therefore being iustified by faith, wee haue peace with God, through our Lord Iesus Christ. By whom also wee haue accesse by faith, into this grace wherein wee stand, and reioyce in hope of the glory of God' (Romans v 1–2).

once more I will renew
 His lapsed powers, though forfeit and enthrall'd
 By sin to foul exorbitant desires;
 Upheld by me, yet once more he shall stand
 On even ground against his mortal foe,
 By me upheld, that he may know how frail
 His fall'n condition is.⁸¹

God promises here almost a reversal of the Fall, for he will 'renew | His lapsed powers': 'lapsed' is inescapably a reference to the *lapsus* or Fall which has enslaved ('enthrall'd') mankind to sin. Man will be 'Upheld by me... By me upheld' and so 'once more he shall stand'. Into this fallen world the Son will descend through his Incarnation, but this descent is in no way a fall, for, as God says,

Nor shalt thou by descending to assume
 Mans Nature, less'n or degrade thine owne.⁸²

This descent is, indeed, a reversal of the Fall, and effects a glorious rising:

Jesus son of Mary second Eve,
 Saw *Satan* fall like Lightning down from Heav'n,
 Prince of the Aire; then rising from his Grave
 Spoild Principalities and Powers, triumpht
 In open shew, and with ascension bright
 Captivity led captive through the Aire.⁸³

And so in *Paradise Regain'd* Jesus asks Satan, 'Know'st thou not that my rising is thy fall, | And my promotion will be thy destruction?'⁸⁴



In the unfallen world of Eden there was a proper elevation and a proper submission. Eve shows 'lowliness Majestic',⁸⁵ a near oxymoron which momentarily links Eve to Mary, who in her Magnificat acknowledged 'the lowliness of his hand-maiden'.⁸⁶ Moreover, both the barbarous majesty of Satan and Eve's lowly majesty rebuke the pride of the Stuart kings. Adam and Eve are originally 'Two of far nobler shape erect and tall, | Godlike erect',⁸⁷ for man was created as

a Creature who not prone
 And Brute as other Creatures, but endu'd
 With Sanctitie of Reason, might erect
 His Stature, and upright with Front serene
 Govern the rest, self-knowing.⁸⁸

⁸¹ PL iii 175–81.

⁸² PL iii 303–4.

⁸³ PL x 183–8.

⁸⁴ PR iii 201–2.

⁸⁵ PL viii 42.

⁸⁶ Luke i 48, as translated in the 1662 Book of Common Prayer (*The Book of Common Prayer: The Texts of 1549, 1559, and 1662*, edited by Brian Cummings (Oxford, 2011), p. 252).

⁸⁷ PL iv 288–9.

⁸⁸ PL vii 506–10.

—‘erect’ denoting both the physical posture which distinguishes man from the animals, and his elevated, aspiring mind: it is specifically reason which makes mankind ‘erect’.⁸⁹ According to some of the Church Fathers, in his original state man’s ‘purity of heart endowed him with the vision of God, a vision so far-reaching that he could contemplate the eternity of God’s essence and the cosmic operations of His Word. His mental sight was turned away from “bodies”, and directed upwards’.⁹⁰ Milton’s unfallen Adam is more limited in his understanding than this suggests, but is nevertheless enlightened by the arrival of Raphael ‘descending from the Thrones above’⁹¹ whom Adam greets ‘with submiss approach and reverence meek, | As to a superior Nature, bowing low’.⁹² After Raphael has spoken of heavenly things, Adam asks him to

Deign to descend now lower, and relate
What may no less perhaps avail us known,
How first began this Heav’n which we behold
Distant so high.⁹³

Raphael explains that man is part of a hierarchy in which there is upward movement within the natural world,⁹⁴ and the protoplasts are themselves created with the capacity to become more elevated in the chain of being,

till by degrees of merit rais’d
They open to themselves at length the way
Up hither, under long obedience tri’d.⁹⁵

—a prospect which contrasts ironically with Satan ‘by merit rais’d’ to the throne of Hell.⁹⁶ This ascent is part of the divine plan, and also something which man has the capacity to achieve by his own acts, for ‘they open to themselves . . . the way’; but the way is, crucially, the way of obedience. Satan, however, plans a different kind of aspiration for the couple, saying:

Hence I will excite thir minds
With more desire to know, and to reject

⁸⁹ Cf. *OED s.v. erect adj.* 3: of the mind: uplifted, directed upwards; alert, attentive. By contrast Mammon was ‘the least erected Spirit that fell | From heav’n’ (*PL* i 679–80). Satan incites his followers to rebel by saying that they should ‘erect’ their minds: ‘But what if better counsels might erect | Our minds and teach us to cast off this Yoke?’ (*PL* v 785–6). Adam tells God that he cannot find companions in the beasts who lack reason and are not ‘erect’: God may

raise thy Creature to what highth thou wilt
Of Union or Communion, deifi’d;
I by conversing cannot these erect
From prone.

(*PL* viii 430–3)

⁹⁰ Williams, *The Ideas of the Fall*, p. 258; cf. pp. 301, 409; and Philip C. Almond, *Adam and Eve in Seventeenth-Century Thought* (Cambridge, 1999), pp. 30–1.

⁹¹ *PL* v 363.

⁹² *PL* v 359–60.

⁹³ *PL* vii 84–7.

⁹⁴ *PL* v 479–85. See Chapter 10 EQUAL, pp. 101–2.

⁹⁵ *PL* vii 157–9; God, as reported by Raphael. Some theologians considered that man was originally in a state of infancy, from which he would have progressed to higher knowledge: see Williams, *The Ideas of the Fall*, pp. 176, 193–4, 400–1, 409–10.

⁹⁶ *PL* ii 5.

Envious commands, invented with designe
 To keep them low whom knowledge might exalt
 Equal with Gods; aspiring to be such,
 They taste and die.⁹⁷

When we place these two passages in conjunction it is striking that Satan regards the divine plan as one in which Adam and Eve are to be kept low, whereas knowledge might 'exalt' them; God, however, wishes that they might rise to union with him, raised by the merit which comes from long obedience. Adam warns Eve that if she goes off on her own she must be wary that her reason stays 'erect':

God left free the Will, for what obeyes
 Reason, is free, and Reason he made right,
 But bid her well beware, and still erect,
 Least by some faire appeering good surpris'd
 She dictate false, and misinforme the Will.⁹⁸

Here 'erect' when applied to 'reason' seems to mean 'vigilant' as well as 'elevated'.



Amongst the theological puzzles which cluster around the tradition of interpreting the Fall is the problem of how man came to fall if there were not already in him a disposition to do so: can he fall if he is not, in a sense, already fallen? Augustine thought that the taking of the forbidden fruit must have been done by those who were already evil:

In occulto autem mali esse coeperunt ut in apertam inobedientiam laberentur. Non enim ad malum opus perveniretur nisi praecessisset voluntas mala. Porro, malae voluntatis initium quae potuit esse nisi superbia? *Initium enim omnis peccati superbia est.* Quid est autem superbia nisi perversae celsitudinis appetitus? Perversa enim est celsitudo, deserto eo cui debet animus inhaerere principio, sibi quodam modo fieri atque esse principium... Non ergo malum opus factum est, id est illa transgressio ut cibo prohibito vrescerentur, nisi ab eis qui iam mali erant. Neque enim fieret ille fructus malus nisi ab arbore mala... Bonum est enim sursum habere cor, non tamen ad se ipsum, quod est superbiae, sed ad Dominum, quod est oboedientiae, quae nisi humilium non potest esse.⁹⁹

⁹⁷ PL iv 522–7.

⁹⁸ PL ix 351–5.

⁹⁹ Augustine, *De Civitate Dei* xiv 13: 'When the first human beings began to be evil, they did so in secret, and this enabled them to fall into open disobedience. For the evil act could not have been arrived at if an evil will had not gone before. Further, what but pride can have been the start of an evil will? For "pride is the start of all sin" [Ecclesiasticus x 13]. Moreover, what is pride but a craving for perverse elevation? For it is perverse elevation to forsake the ground in which the mind ought to be rooted, and to become and be, in a sense, grounded in oneself... Accordingly, the evil act, that is, the transgression that involved their eating of forbidden food, was committed only by those who were already evil. For only a bad tree could have produced that evil fruit [cf. Matthew vii 18]... It is indeed a good thing to have an aspiring mind, yet aspiring not to oneself, which belongs to pride, but to God, which belongs to obedience, and obedience can belong only to the humble.'

Milton does not go so far as Augustine in saying that the open Fall is preceded by secret evil, but he does address this question in several ways. Raphael warns Adam:

God made thee perfect, not immutable;
And good he made thee, but to persevere
He left it in thy power.¹⁰⁰

Adam is perfect: he has all the attributes which make a human being perfect, including the capacity to obey and the freedom not to; implicitly, not to be free would entail not being perfect. He is indeed 'not immutable',¹⁰¹ but this capacity to fall is not in itself a proleptic Fall, for 'to persevere | He left it in thy power'.

Eve's dream is another way of addressing the question of a predisposition or a capacity to fall, and where Augustine says that *ruina quae fit in occulto praecedit ruinam quae fit in manifesto*,¹⁰² Milton presents us with a Fall *in occulto* in the form of a dream narrative which makes this Fall only a potential not an actual event. When Eve describes her imagined approach to the Tree and says 'I, methought, | Could not but taste',¹⁰³ the phrasing backs away from actually describing Eve eating the fruit: the question of agency, of Eve's will, is occluded. It is not a precise prolepsis of what happens in Book IX, for in the dream the seeming angel holds the already plucked fruit to Eve's lips, and

Forthwith up to the Clouds
With him I flew, and underneath beheld
The Earth outstretcht immense, a prospect wide
And various: wondring at my flight and change
To this high exaltation; suddenly
My Guide was gon, and I, me thought, sunk down,
And fell asleep.¹⁰⁴

This ascent and fall prefigure, but do not predetermine, the Fall which follows. Eve's dream allows the couple to envisage disobedience while recoiling from it; it is, therefore, a Fall before the Fall, but only in imagination: if the will does not assent to it, there is no transgression, as Adam reassures her:

¹⁰⁰ PL v 524–6. Adam was traditionally said to have had the capacity not to sin: *posse non peccare* (Williams, *The Ideas of the Fall*, p. 362).

¹⁰¹ Milton says in *De Doctrina* that the first sin emanated from man's very nature, which was not immutable (*non immutabili*) (OCW viii 412). Cf. Augustine: *homo autem quantum ad ejus naturam, in qua eum Deus condidit, pertinet, bonum est quidem, sed non incommutabile ut Deus. Mutabile autem bonum, quod est post incommutabile bonum, melius bonum fit, cum bono incommutabili adhaeserit, amando atque serviendo rationali et propria voluntate* ('man, in what belongs to the nature in which God created him, is indeed a good, but not unchangeable Good as God is. A changeable good, which is inferior to the unchangeable Good, becomes a greater good when it adheres to the unchangeable Good, loving and serving Him with a rational and free response of the will' (*De Genesi ad Litteram* VIII xiv 31; tr. Taylor ii 54).

¹⁰² 'The fall that takes place in secret precedes the fall that takes place in full view': Augustine, *De Civitate Dei* xiv 13.

¹⁰³ PL v 85–6.

¹⁰⁴ PL v 86–92.

Evil into the mind of God or Man
 May come and go, so unapprov'd, and leave
 No spot or blame behind.¹⁰⁵

So there is no Augustinian evil will here; the evil will is gradually formed as Eve approaches the Tree in Book IX, but evil remains 'unapprov'd' until the last moment. Both Adam and Eve remain unfallen at this point in Book V—though they are the more clearly warned by this dream about how a Fall might happen.

Another kind of proleptic Fall is signalled when Adam tells Raphael of his passion for Eve, saying that 'All higher knowledge in her presence falls | Degraded',¹⁰⁶ to which Raphael replies, 'In loving thou dost well, in passion not'.¹⁰⁷ It is no accident that the verb used here is 'falls', or that it is placed at the end of the line for us to notice. 'Degraded' is also a key word: higher knowledge loses its place of honour and esteem, loses its place in the hierarchy of degree.¹⁰⁸ By contrast, when Raphael reminds Adam of the difference between love and passion, he tells him that true love of Eve 'is the scale | By which to heav'nly Love thou maist ascend'.¹⁰⁹ There is a clear choice laid here before Adam between Platonically ascending the ladder of being by means of love, and descending it through passion. Adam perhaps hardly understands the full implications of what he is saying when he admits that the elevation of his passion for Eve results in the fall of higher knowledge, but that is exactly what happens in Book IX when, knowing—or at least knowing enough about—the consequences of his act, Adam decides to take the fruit from Eve and to choose passion for her over obedience to God.¹¹⁰ Finally, there is Eve's disengagement from Adam. Augustine asks how the serpent's words could 'persuade the woman that it was a good and useful thing that had been forbidden by God if there was not already in her heart a love of her own independence and a proud presumption on self'.¹¹¹ Milton shows this love of independence first when she insists on gardening alone (removing herself from Adam's companionship and support, and also, implicitly, from her subordinate position in the Edenic hierarchy), and then again when she exercises her own limited reasoning to persuade herself that the fruit is a good and that God's command is of no merit. Thus the Fall in *Paradise Lost* is a process, but one which is not a definitive Fall until that actual act of disobedience.

Satan's temptation of Eve, when it eventually comes, is a temptation to false and unwarranted aspiration, with the idea of height braided through his speeches.

¹⁰⁵ PL v 116–18.

¹⁰⁶ PL viii 551–2.

¹⁰⁷ PL v 588.

¹⁰⁸ Etymologically 'degrade' derives from Latin *gradus*, a step, degree; cf. 'gradual' and 'degrees' in the quotations on pp. 101–2 which mark out steps in the divinely created hierarchy. Cf. also the quotation from *Reason* in n. 19.

¹⁰⁹ PL v 591–2. *scale*: ladder, staircase.

¹¹⁰ Duns Scotus thought that 'the root of Adam's sin... was the very natural, and, as it were, pardonable defect of "immoderate desire for the affection of his wife"... and the wish not to be separated from her even after her sin, a wish that under the circumstances almost inevitably transformed itself into the will to do that which was not lawful' (Williams, *The Ideas of the Fall*, p. 410).

¹¹¹ *Quando his verbis crederet mulier a bona atque utili re divinitus se fuisse prohibitos, nisi jam inesset menti amor ille propriae potestatis, et quaedam de se superba praesumptio* (Augustine, *De Genesi ad Litteram* XI xxx 39; tr. Taylor ii 162).

When Satan approaches Eve in the form of the serpent, the creature is 'to highth upgrown',¹¹² not 'Prone on the ground, as since' but 'erect | Amidst his circling Spires',¹¹³ a detail which warns us of the false aspiration which he will incite. He speaks in the form of an 'erect' serpent. Eve should, he says,

be seen
A Goddess among Gods, ador'd and serv'd
By Angels numberless, thy daily Train.¹¹⁴

Once, says the serpent, he was 'of abject thoughts and low...and apprehended nothing high',¹¹⁵ until taking the fruit from the tree whose 'high...branches would require | Thy utmost reach or *Adams*',¹¹⁶ he was able to engage in 'Speculations high or deep', and 'to trace the wayes | Of highest Agents'.¹¹⁷ He tells Eve that he himself 'a life more perfer have attaind then Fate | Mean mee, by ventring higher then my Lot'.¹¹⁸ God, he exclaims, seems to wish to keep her 'low and ignorant'.¹¹⁹ Eve convinces herself to 'reach' for this knowledge, and so 'reaching to the Fruit, she pluck'd, she eat'.¹²⁰ Her first postlapsarian speech envisages that she will 'grow mature | In knowledge, as the Gods who all things know',¹²¹ where the plural 'Gods' shows that Eve has moved conceptually into a pagan world of deities, away from the one God. This is an early indication that her Fall entails a Fall *from* knowledge—in this case an abandonment of what she had previously known of God—as well as a Fall *into* the experiential knowledge of 'Good lost, and Evil got'.¹²² This darkened reason is evident again when she displays a literal understanding of height similar to that which we saw in the speeches of the fallen angels, as she imagines naïvely that

Heav'n is high,
High and remote to see from thence distinct
Each thing on Earth.¹²³

She has, unfortunately, not heeded the words of the Psalmist:

Thou knowest my downe sitting, and mine vprising: thou vnderstandest my thought afarre off... Whither shall I goe from thy spirit? or whither shall I flie from thy presence? If I ascend vp into heauen, thou art there: if I make my bed in Hell, behold thou *art there*.¹²⁴

Eve's rejection of the divinely ordained hierarchical order¹²⁵ is evident again when she imagines keeping her new-found knowledge to herself, so as to be Adam's

¹¹² PL ix 501, 677. On seventeenth-century interpretations of the erect serpent see Almond, *Adam and Eve in Seventeenth-Century Thought*, pp. 180–7.

¹¹³ PL ix 497, 501–2.

¹¹⁴ PL ix 546–8.

¹¹⁵ PL ix 572–4.

¹¹⁶ PL ix 590–1.

¹¹⁷ PL ix 602, 682–3.

¹¹⁸ PL ix 689–90.

¹¹⁹ PL ix 704.

¹²⁰ PL ix 779, 781.

¹²¹ PL ix 803–4.

¹²² PL ix 1072.

¹²³ PL ix 811–13.

¹²⁴ Psalm cxxxix 2, 7–8.

¹²⁵ Cf. Augustine: *Denique a peccante nihil aliud appetitum est, nisi non esse sub dominatione Dei, quando illud admissum est, in quo ne admitteretur, sola deberet iussio dominantis attendi* ('nothing else is sought by the sinner except to be free of the sovereignty of God when he does a deed that is sinful only in so far as God forbids it' (*De Genesi ad Litteram* VIII xiii 30; tr. Taylor ii 53)).

superior.¹²⁶ It is a fitting end to this episode that Eve leaves the Tree after 'low Reverence don, as to the power | That dwelt within':¹²⁷ in aspiring to forbidden knowledge and to superior status, she has lowered herself into an abject posture to a new deity.

Later, after the Fall, the Son 'Down...descended strait'¹²⁸ to bring judgement clothed with mercy. Following the recriminations exchanged between the pair, it is Eve who rejects the specious elevation which she had sought, and initiates the movement back to God by falling at the feet of Adam like the repentant woman of the Gospels, her disordered tresses symbolizing an existential disorder:

Eve

Not so repulst, with Tears that ceas'd not flowing,
And tresses all disorderd, at his feet
Fell humble, and imbracing them, besaught
His peace.¹²⁹

Adam follows her gesture, and proposes that they both fall to their knees in penitence:

What better can we do, then to the place
Repairing where he judg'd us, prostrate fall
Before him reverent, and there confess
Humbly our faults.¹³⁰

This is, for once, the right kind of falling; it is, indeed, a form of ascent, for, as Augustine says, 'exaltation abases and humility uplifts... humility elevates the mind in making it submissive to God'.¹³¹ This is the prelude to the only form of ascent which will henceforth be available to them, the ascent of their prayer up to God in return for all the blessings which have descended upon them, as Adam confesses:

Eve, easily may Faith admit, that all
The good which we enjoy, from Heav'n descends;
But that from us ought should ascend to Heav'n
So prevalent as to concerne the mind
Of God high-blest, or to incline his will,
Hard to belief may seem; yet this will Prayer,
Or one short sigh of humane breath, up-borne
Ev'n to the Seat of God.¹³²

This ascent of prayer follows from, and is made possible by, the descent of grace, for

from the Mercie-seat above
Prevenient Grace descending had remov'd
The stonie from thir hearts.¹³³

¹²⁶ PL ix 825. See the discussion of EQUAL, Chapter 10.

¹²⁷ PL ix 835–6.

¹²⁸ PL x 90.

¹²⁹ PL x 909–13; cf. Luke vii 37–8.

¹³⁰ PL x 1086–9.

¹³¹ Augustine, *De Civitate Dei* xiv 13: *ut elatio sit deorsum et humilitas sursum... exaltat humilitas quae facit subditum Deo.*

¹³² PL xi 141–8.

¹³³ PL xi 2–4.

While the Fall is a once-for-all descent of human nature into a lesser form, into reduced capacities, self-deprived of the possibility of ascent through the divine hierarchy, the vision of human history which Michael unfolds to Adam is in effect a series of repeated re-enactments of the original Fall. In a precise echo of his earlier admission that in the presence of Eve 'higher knowledge . . . falls | Degraded' Adam now exclaims

O miserable Mankind, to what fall
Degraded.

...

Can thus
Th' Image of God in man created once
So goodly and erect, though faultie since,
To such unsightly sufferings be debas't
Under inhuman pains?¹³⁴

The word 'degraded' now returns to mark out the full Fall of mankind. The image of God in man, says Adam, was once 'erect', but is now debased; yet he tucks away the Fall into a subordinate clause, 'though faultie since', which hardly seems to acknowledge the depth of his transgression.¹³⁵ Adam's descendants repeat his Fall through their own false aspirations: they 'forsake the living God, and fall | To worship thir own work in Wood and Stone',¹³⁶ and even Solomon 'Beguil'd by fair Idolatresses, fell | To Idols foul'.¹³⁷ Nimrod is denounced because he built the Tower of Babel and sought 'to aspire | Above his Brethren'.¹³⁸ After viewing the descent of mankind into internecine war, Michael and Adam descend from the hill into the valley,¹³⁹ once Adam has acknowledged that he now knows all that is needful, 'Beyond which was my folly to aspire'.¹⁴⁰

Into this repeatedly fallen world of specious aspiration which Adam sees with the aid of Michael, God descends to thwart the wicked and protect the righteous. At Babel

God who oft descends to visit men
Unseen, and through thir habitations walks
To mark thir doings, them beholding soon,
Comes down to see thir Citie, ere the Tower
Obstruct Heav'n Towers.¹⁴¹

¹³⁴ *PL* xi 500–1, 507–11.

¹³⁵ *faulty*: in modern usage this word seems to have diminished in force (usually applied only to some object which, perhaps through a mechanical defect, fails to work), but in Milton's day meant 'that has committed a fault, error, or offence; guilty of wrong-doing' (*OED s.v. faulty adj.* 3).

¹³⁶ *PL* xii 118–19. *fall*: partly in the sense of 'began' (*OED s.v. fall to v.* 4).

¹³⁷ *PL* i 445–6. ¹³⁸ *PL* xii 64–5.

¹³⁹ 'Let us descend now therefore from this top | Of Speculation' (*PL* xii 588–9; Michael to Adam); 'He ended, and they both descend the Hill; | Descended' (*PL* xii 606–7).

¹⁴⁰ *PL* xii 560.

¹⁴¹ *PL* xii 48–52.

Enoch would have been

seiz'd with violent hands,
Had not a Cloud descending snatch'd him thence
Unseen amid the throng.¹⁴²

and the fleeing Jacob saw in his dream 'Angels ascending and descending, bands | Of Guardians bright'.¹⁴³ Human laws will in due course be 'resign[ed]... Up to a better Cov'nant' as man is raised 'from Flesh to Spirit'.¹⁴⁴ Finally, when shown by Michael the incarnational descent and triumphant rising of Christ, Adam wonders

Whether I should repent me now of sin
By mee done and occasiond, or rejoyce
Much more, that much more good thereof shall spring.¹⁴⁵

This is not quite an assertion of a Fortunate Fall,¹⁴⁶ for Adam is doubtful as to whether his rejoicing should outweigh repentance, but it does promise that good will be the ultimate result. The angels praise the Son as the

Destin'd restorer of Mankind, by whom
New Heav'n and Earth shall to the Ages rise,
Or down from Heav'n descend.¹⁴⁷

In Revelation the New Jerusalem descends from Heaven,¹⁴⁸ but in the apocalyptic hymn of Milton's angels it seems hardly to signify whether this new world rises or descends, as Earth and Heaven are joined. Grace descends upon the postlapsarian world, but grace is, for Milton, resistible, and there are some whose scornful refusal of divine aid merely leads them into a still deeper Fall, for God says:

my day of grace
They who neglect and scorn, shall never taste;
But hard be hard'nd, blind be blinded more,
That they may stumble on, and deeper fall.¹⁴⁹

It is for each individual to choose whether to stand or to fall.



The poet himself risks a fall by aspiring so high as to write of such great matters, but each gesture of aspiration and self-assertion is also a gesture of humility and obedience, as St Augustine would have wished. Before venturing in Book III to relate the words of God, Milton addresses heavenly light, and says:

Thee I re-visit now with bolder wing,
Escap't the *Stygian* Pool, though long detain'd

¹⁴² *PL* xi 669–71.

¹⁴³ *PL* iii 511–12.

¹⁴⁴ *PL* xii 301–3.

¹⁴⁵ *PL* xii 474–6.

¹⁴⁶ When Aquinas says that God allows evils to happen in order to bring a greater good therefrom, he quotes the *Exsultet* (the hymn sung before the Paschal candle in the Easter Vigil Mass): *o felix culpa, quae talem ac tantum meruit habere redemptorem* ('O happy fault, that merited such and so great a Redeemer!') (*ST* III, q. 1, a. 3, ad 3). For the tradition of the 'Fortunate Fall' see Arthur O. Lovejoy, 'Milton and the Paradox of the Fortunate Fall', *ELH* 4 (1937) 161–79.

¹⁴⁷ *PL* x 646–8.

¹⁴⁸ Revelation xxi 10.

¹⁴⁹ *PL* iii 198–201.

In that obscure sojourn, while in my flight
 Through utter and through middle darkness borne
 With other notes then to th' *Orphean* Lyre
 I sung of *Chaos* and *Eternal Night*,
 Taught by the heav'nly Muse to venture down
 The dark descent, and up to reascend.¹⁵⁰

The poet has accompanied Satan on his flight through utter and middle darkness, but, unlike Satan's journey, this has been a downward and upward journey taught and sustained by the heavenly Muse. Book VII begins with the invocation to Urania who has raised the poet:

Up led by thee
 Into the Heav'n of Heav'ns I have presum'd,
 An Earthlie Guest, and drawn Empyrean Aire,
 Thy tempring; with like safetie guided down
 Return me to my Native Element:
 Least from this flying Steed unrein'd, (as once
Bellerophon, though from a lower Clime)
 Dismounted, on th' *Aleian* Field I fall
 Erroneous there to wander and forlorne.¹⁵¹

Milton has been led upwards by the heavenly Muse, and the passage is a prayer that he may avoid a fall. In purely worldly terms he has indeed fallen:

fall'n on evil dayes,
 On evil dayes though fall'n, and evil tongues.¹⁵²

But the poem holds out the promise of salvation for the fallen.

¹⁵⁰ *PL* iii 13–20.

¹⁵¹ *PL* vii 12–20.

¹⁵² *PL* vii 25–6.

13

Fancy *and* Reason

But know that in the Soule
 Are many lesser Faculties that serve
 Reason as chief; among these Fansie next
 Her office holds; of all external things,
 Which the five watchful Senses represent,
 She forms Imaginations, Aerie shapes,
 Which Reason joyning or disjoyning, frames
 All what we affirm or what deny, and call
 Our knowledge or opinion; then retires
 Into her private Cell when Nature rests.
 Oft in her absence mimic Fansie wakes
 To imitate her; but misjoyning shapes,
 Wilde work produces oft, and most in dreams,
 Ill matching words and deeds long past or late.

Paradise Lost v 100–13



The term ‘fancy’ (or ‘fantasy’ or ‘phantasy’) is at this date ‘synonymous with “imagination” . . . the process, and the faculty, of forming mental representations of things not present to the senses’.¹ The psychology which Milton maps here is close to the understanding of his contemporaries as exemplified by Robert Burton:

Phantasie, or Imagination . . . is an inner sense which doth more fully examine the species perceived by *Common sense*, of things present or absent, and keeps them longer, recalling them to minde again, or making new of his own. In time of sleep this faculty is free, and many times conceives strange, stupend, absurd shapes, as in sick men we commonly observe. His *Organ* is the middle cell of the Brain; his *Objects* all the Species communicated to him by the *Common sense*, by comparison of which he faines infinite other unto himself . . . In Poets and Painters *Imagination* forcibly workes, as appears by their several Fictions, Anticks, Images . . . In men it is subject and governed by *Reason*, or at least should be; but in brutes it hath no superiour, and is *ratio brutorum*, all the reason they have.²

¹ *OED* s.v. fancy n. 4a.

² Democritus Junior [Robert Burton], *The Anatomy of Melancholy: What It Is, with All the Kinds, Causes, Symptomes, Prognostickes, & Seuerall Cures of It* . . . The sixth edition, corrected and augmented by the author (Oxford, 1651), pp. 23–4 [1. 1. 2. 7]. *shapes*: sharpes 1651. *Anticks*: grotesque or fantastic figures (*OED* s.v. antic n. 1). This passage is cited by Fowler *ad loc*.

In Milton's view, fancy is often a dangerous, irresponsibly creative force if not subjected to reason. According to his anti-prelatical tracts the bishops play on the 'weak, and superstitious fancies' of the common people rather than appealing to their reason,³ while in *The Tenure of Kings and Magistrates* Milton derides those who 'may please thir fancy with a ridiculous and painted freedom, fit to coz'n babies; but are indeed under tyranny and servitude'.⁴ Elsewhere he contrasts fancy with 'understanding'.⁵ Fancy—according to this passage from Book V—forms images from the sense impressions which are received from the outside world; reason then either joins or separates these images, and the result is what we call knowledge or opinion. When reason rests from her work, notably in sleep, fancy is free to act on her own; she imitates the activity of reason, but is a mere 'mimic'. A mimic is an actor, one who imitates others, and in particular 'a person or thing that provides or constitutes a (typically) inadequate or weak representation or resemblance'.⁶ Shades of the sense 'sham, empty' from the semantic field of the Latin *mimicus* still cling to the word.⁷ Whereas reason joins or disjoins images, fancy misjoins them, producing not knowledge or opinion but the 'Wilde work' which we encounter in dreams.

In Book IV, as he crouches beside Eve while she sleeps, Satan tries

by his Devilish art to reach
The Organs of her Fancie, and with them forge
Illusions as he list, Phantasms and Dreams.⁸

In attempting to gain access to Eve's fancy, Satan is trying to take over and pervert the creative faculty which, in the absence of reason, is liable to produce 'Wilde work'. When she recounts her dream to Adam, Eve observes of the Tree of Knowledge that 'fair it seem'd, | Much fairer to my Fancie then by day',⁹ for it is the fancy (animating or animated by desire) which exaggerates the lure of the Tree as it shapes these images and fashions the narrative in which she sees an angelic creature by the Tree, eats the fruit, and flies up into the clouds. When Eve does actually take the fruit, it is apparently her fancy rather than her rational judgement that makes it seem particularly delicious: 'such delight till then, as seemd, | In Fruit she never tasted, whether true | Or fansied so'.¹⁰

Such, at any rate, is Eve's fancy. Adam seems to have a different relationship to, or a clearer understanding of, the fancy. When Raphael has warned him to avoid idle speculation, to concentrate on the forms of knowledge which lead to wisdom, Adam replies:

³ *Animadversions: Works* iii 171. Milton would no doubt have agreed with the author of the prospectus for *Mercurius Politicus* in 1650 that 'the Phantsie . . . ever swayes the Scepter in Vulgar Judgemt; much more then Reason' (*The Life Records of John Milton*, edited by J. Milton French (New Brunswick, N.J., 1949–58), ii 311).

⁴ *Tenure: Works* v 40.

⁵ *PL* v 486.

⁶ *OED*³ s.v. *mimic* n. 1b. The *OED* cites Sir Henry Wootton (1624): 'What are the most iudicious Artisans but the Mimiques of Nature?'

⁷ *OLD* s.v. *mimicus* 2.

⁸ *PL* iv 801–3.

⁹ *PL* v 52–3.

¹⁰ *PL* ix 787–9.

God hath bid dwell farr off all anxious cares,
 And not molest us, unless we our selves
 Seek them with wandring thoughts, and notions vain.
 But apt the Mind or Fancie is to roave
 Uncheckt, and of her roaving is no end;
 Till warn'd, or by experience taught, she learne,
 That not to know at large of things remote
 From use, obscure and suttel, but to know
 That which before us lies in daily life,
 Is the prime Wisdom, what is more, is fume,
 Or emptiness, or fond impertinence,
 And renders us in things that most concerne
 Unpractis'd, unprepar'd, and still to seek.¹¹

The distinction which Adam draws between the mind and the fancy is not explained, but it might be a contrast between what we would now call the conscious and the unconscious mind, since fancy is a faculty which in *Paradise Lost* seems to operate when the subject is asleep. In this passage Adam makes it clear that the danger which besets the conscious or unconscious mind is that it is liable to rove unchecked, to err into territory where no true knowledge is to be found; and such erring is a defection from wisdom.

It is notable that whereas in Eve's dream her fancy is prompted by Satan, in Adam's dream his fancy is aware (aware truly, not deceitfully) of the action of God. He recalls that after he first became aware of himself and his surroundings, and had asked how he might worship his unknown Creator, he fell asleep,

When suddenly stood at my Head a dream,
 Whose inward apparition gently mov'd
 My fancy to believe I yet had being,
 And livd: One came, methought, of shape Divine.¹²

So in Adam's case his sleep is given by God in answer to the ignorant but well-intentioned prayer of the natural man, and in this sleep the appearance of God (an 'inward apparition'¹³) moves his fancy to reassure him (correctly) that he is still alive and is not returning to his previous state. Fancy, then, is a faculty which in the right circumstances, or with a person's right disposition, may be touched by God and be the recipient of true understanding. The trance continues:

Mine eyes he clos'd, but op'n left the Cell
 Of Fancie my internal sight, by which
 Abstract as in a transe methought I saw,
 Though sleeping, where I lay, and saw the shape
 Still glorious before whom awake I stood;
 Who stooping op'nd my left side, and took
 From thence a Rib.¹⁴

¹¹ *PL* viii 185–97. *fond*: foolish; valued only by fools, trivial (*OED s.v. fond adj.* 2, 4). *impertinence*: irrelevance; triviality, folly (*OED s.v. impertinence n.* 1a, 2).

¹² *PL* viii 292–5.

¹³ 'appearance, semblance' (*OED s.v. apparition* 6, citing this example).

¹⁴ *PL* viii 460–6.

Adam's fancy is a faculty of inner sight which in this case sees God creating Eve from one of his ribs, and contrasts strikingly with Eve's delusive faculty.¹⁵ Yet after the Fall the couple share a grossly misleading fancy, for

As with new Wine intoxicated both
They swim in mirth, and fansie that they feel
Divinitie within them breeding wings
Wherewith to scorne the Earth.¹⁶

Eve's fancy, in her dream, that she eats the fruit and flies above the earth is now repeated as the shared delusion of the fallen couple, for postlapsarian fancy misleads them into feeling that they are gods, whereas prelapsarian reason had aligned them with God himself.

Such is Milton's understanding of fancy in *Paradise Lost*. Earlier, in *A Masque* (1637), Comus had offered the Lady

all the pleasures
That fancy can beget on youthfull thoughts,
When the fresh blood grows lively,¹⁷

appealing to youth's sensual imagination which is so apt to multiply desires.¹⁸ And yet 'fancy' has a different moral hue elsewhere in the masque, when the Attendant Spirit recalls how he had begun

Wrapt in a pleasing fit of melancholy
To meditate my rural minstrelsie,
Till fancy had her fill.¹⁹

Thus fancy may be the faculty which inspires poets and musicians to creativity,²⁰ and the plural 'fancies' may be their ideas or works themselves, as in Milton's famous image of 'a Poet soaring in the high region of his fancies with his garland and singing robes about him'.²¹ In Milton's lines on Shakespeare (1630) the playwright's creative achievement is said to be so impressive that it is liable to rob other poets of their ability to create, 'thou our fancy of it self bereaving'.²² Then in 'L'Allegro' (1645) Milton celebrates 'sweetest *Shakespear* fancies childe' warbling 'his native Wood-notes wilde',²³ where 'fancy' is the poetic faculty of imaginative invention with which several writers of the period credited Shakespeare, praising his natural abilities as Milton does here.²⁴ But this approbatory, admiring image

¹⁵ In Eve's case 'fancy' is closer to *OED* 3: 'delusive imagination, hallucination'.

¹⁶ *PL* ix 1008–11. ¹⁷ *Masque* ll. 667–9: *Works* i 110.

¹⁸ For the role of fancy in creating sensual or sexual images cf. 'the lascivious promptnesse of his own fancy' (*Apology*: *Works* iii 327–8).

¹⁹ *Masque* ll. 545–7: *Works* i 105.

²⁰ Cf. 'And what if the author shall be one so copious of fancie, as to have many things well worth the adding, come into his mind after licencing' (*Areopagitica*: *Works* iv 325).

²¹ *Reason*: *Works* iii 235.

²² 'On *Shakespear*. 1630' l.13: *Works* i 32.

²³ 'L'Allegro' ll. 133–4: *Works* i 39.

²⁴ For the seventeenth-century myths about Shakespeare's mode of composition see Paul Hammond, 'The Janus Poet: Dryden's Critique of Shakespeare', in *John Dryden (1631–1700): His Politics, His Plays, and His Poets* (Newark, N.J., 2004), pp. 158–79.

needs to be set alongside different connotations for 'fancy' in the companion poem, 'Il Penseroso', where Milton writes:

HENCE vain deluding joyes,
 The brood of folly without father bred,
 How little you bested,
 Or fill the fixed mind with all your toyes;
 Dwell in some idle brain,
 And fancies fond with gaudy shapes possess,
 As thick and numberless
 As the gay motes that people the Sun beams,
 Or likest hovering dreams
 The fickle Pensioners of *Morpheus* train.²⁵

Here the fancies which possess the idle brain are whims, caprices,²⁶ as unreliable as the images which come in sleep. These twin poems are examples of Milton's scholastic ability to argue *in utramque partem*, and neither can be taken to represent him speaking *in propria persona*. Fancy may be a creative faculty in the poet, but in the idle dreamer it produces mere folly. In Adam, fancy perceives the actions of God; in Eve, unchecked by reason, it proves to be the gateway to the articulation of dangerous desires, a prelude to, and an agent in, the Fall.



So from the root
 Springs lighter the green stalk, from thence the leaves
 More aerie, last the bright consummate floure
 Spirits odorous breathes: flours and thir fruit
 Mans nourishment, by gradual scale sublim'd
 To vital Spirits aspire, to animal,
 To intellectual, give both life and sense,
 Fansie and understanding, whence the Soule
 Reason receives, and reason is her being,
 Discursive, or Intuitive; discourse
 Is ofttest yours, the latter most is ours,
 Differing but in degree, of kind the same.²⁷

In this great chain of being, all things have their place in a hierarchy of degrees of increasing refinement and purity as they approach nearer to God himself. Some beings are more bodily, others more endued with spirit. In man, body and spirit are joined, and his body is nourished by the fruits of the earth, which are transformed into the spirits which animate the body and the mind.²⁸ As there is a hierarchy of

²⁵ 'Il Penseroso' ll. 1–10: *Works* i 40. *bested*: help.

²⁶ *OED* s.v. *fancy* n. 7a.

²⁷ *PL* v 479–90. Cf. Chapter 10 *EQUAL*, pp. 101–3.

²⁸ Fowler has a useful note on this passage: '*vital spirits*: Fine pure fluids derived from the blood of the heart and sustaining life. *animal spirits*: Produced from vital spirits, they controlled sensation and voluntary motion . . . Simple, undifferentiated *intuitive* operation of the contemplating intellect (*mens*) was contrasted with its discursive, ratiocinative, piecemeal operation together with the reason (*ratio*). Angels could reason intuitively, i.e. nondiscursively.'

beings within creation, so too there is a hierarchy within the human mind, for whereas fancy receives sense impressions, it is reason (the faculty which puts these impressions in order, and through which man controls his passions²⁹) that distinguishes the human from the animal. (Donne called reason God's 'viceroy' in man.³⁰) Reason is the 'being' of the soul,³¹ and God's gift to man.³² Reason in man and his works is 'the Image of God',³³ and 'that intellectual ray which God hath planted in us'.³⁴ It is a guide whose effects are best seen in men's lives, for 'they expresse nature best, who in their lives least wander from her safe leading, which may be call'd regenerate reason'.³⁵ For there are two forms of reason, 'either naturall or rectifi'd',³⁶ the former being that reason which is common to all men as part of their human nature, and the latter, 'rectifi'd' or 'right reason', which is the reason which is illuminated by God, is in tune with divine reason, and seeks to obey God's will.³⁷ 'Conscience—or right reason, assuming this to be the same' is not lacking even in the worst of men, and testifies to God's existence, thus providing the basis for a perception of right and wrong.³⁸ As Nathaniel Culverwel said,

Right Reason . . . is that fixt and unshaken Law, not writ in perishing paper by the hand or pen of a creature, nor graven like a dead letter upon livelesse and decaying Pillars, but written with the point of a Diamond, nay with the finger of God himself in the heart of man.³⁹

²⁹ For the relationship between reason and passion in Milton's thinking, see Christopher Tilmouth's magisterial book *Passion's Triumph over Reason* (Oxford, 2007), pp. 190–209, and his essay 'Milton on Knowing Good from Evil' in *John Milton: Life, Writing, Reputation*, edited by Paul Hammond and Blair Worden (Oxford, 2010), pp. 43–66. Stanley Eugene Fish has a full discussion of the role of reason in the Fall in *Surprised by Sin: The Reader in 'Paradise Lost'* (Berkeley, Calif., 1967), ch. 6. See also the discussion of reason by Marshall Grossman, 'Poetry and Belief in *Paradise Regained*, to Which Is Added, *Samson Agonistes*', *Studies in Philology* 110 (2013) 382–401. For the contemporary philosophical context see Robert Hoopes, *Right Reason in the English Renaissance* (Cambridge, Mass., 1962), and Susan James, 'Reason, the Passions, and the Good Life', in *The Cambridge History of Seventeenth-Century Philosophy*, edited by Daniel Garber and Michael Ayres, 2 vols (Cambridge, 1998), ii 1358–96.

³⁰ 'Reason your viceroy in mee, mee should defend, | But is captiv'd, and proves weake or untrue' ('Holy Sonnets' XIV ll. 7–8: *The Poems of John Donne*, edited by Herbert J. C. Grierson (Oxford, 1912), i 328). Cf. Benjamin Whichcote: 'To go against Reason, is to go against God . . . Reason is the Divine Governor of Man's Life; it is the very Voice of God' ('Moral and Religious Aphorisms', in *The Cambridge Platonists*, edited by C. A. Patrides (London, 1969; reissued Cambridge, 1980), p. 327).

³¹ Fowler glosses 'reason is her being' as 'Reason is the characteristic function of the soul'.

³² *ratio, quo utimur Dei munere* (*Defensio: Works* vii 10).

³³ *Areopagitica: Works* iv 298.

³⁴ *Reformation: Works* iii 33.

³⁵ *Apology: Works* iii 287.

³⁶ *Articles of Peace: Works* vi 268.

³⁷ Cf. the gloss for 'right reason' in *OED*³ s.v. reason P1a: 'rational thought directed towards ends regarded as correct'. Milton also distinguishes between natural and trained reason: *Ratio autem sive Logica, primum illa naturalis, deinde artificiosa* (*Artis Logicae: Works* xi 10).

³⁸ *Quin & Conscientia, sive eadem recta ratio est, quarum vel haec vel illa ne in pessimis quibusque semper sopita est, esse Deum testificatur* (*De Doctrina: OCW* viii 24–5).

³⁹ Nathaniel Culverwel, *An Elegant and Learned Discourse of the Light of Nature* (London, 1652), p. 44. He is quoting Philo.

But reason must be joined to faith, he says:

Reason and *Faith* may kisse each other. There is a twin-light springing from both, and they both spring from the same fountain of light, and they both sweetly conspire in the same end, the glory of that being from which they shine, & the welfare & happiness of that being upon which they shine.⁴⁰

No one, says Milton, can have right ideas of God by relying upon nature or reason alone without the guidance of the word of God in scripture.⁴¹ He insists that the revealed law of God ‘measures and is commensurat to right reason’.⁴² The combination of the two terms is important, for divine law is comprehensible to human reason, but that law itself measures our reason, guides and rectifies it.⁴³ As for human law, ‘no law can be *fundamental*, but that which is grounded on the light of nature or right reason, commonly call’d *moral law*’.⁴⁴ Consequently one manifestation of what Milton calls spiritual death (the loss of divine grace and that innate righteousness by which man originally lived for God) is ‘the privation, or at least the serious dulling, of right reason—aimed at perceiving the supreme good—which was the equivalent of life to the understanding’.⁴⁵ In *The Doctrine and Discipline of Divorce* ‘Error and Custome’ are said to ‘cry-down the industry of free reasoning, under the terms of humor, and innovation’, though it is this free reasoning that leads man to truth.⁴⁶

When, in Book III of *Paradise Lost*, God explains why both man and the angels have been created free, he says that if they had no free will it would have been impossible for them to manifest either faith or love: their obedience to him would have been merely compelled:

What pleasure I from such obedience paid,
When Will and Reason (Reason also is choice)
Useless and vain, of freedom both despoild,
Made passive both, had servd necessitie,
Not mee.⁴⁷

⁴⁰ Culverwel, *An Elegant and Learned Discourse*, pp. 1–2.

⁴¹ *Rectè autem de Deo sentire, natura vel ratione sola duce sine verbo aut nuntio Dei, potest nemo* (*De Doctrina*: OCW viii 26).

⁴² *Divorce*: Works iii 440. Dryden’s Raphael tells Adam: ‘Right Reason’s Law to every humane heart | Th’ Eternal, as his Image, will impart’ (*The State of Innocence, and Fall of Man: An Opera* (London, 1677), p. 9).

⁴³ In *De Doctrina* Milton says of the doctrine that the Father and the Son are one in essence: *in re tam sublimi supràque rationem posita . . . solo Dei verbo, eoque clarissimo ac disertissimo, non sola ratione, fides niti potest. Verum hic ratio voce maxima reclamatur. Quid enim obsecro evincere hic potest ratio? an sententiam rationi contrariam? certè ratio rationem parit, non notiones absurdas et ab omni humano intellectu remotissimas* (‘in a matter so sublime and superior to reason . . . faith can rely on the word of God alone, and that most clear and distinct, not on reason alone. Here, though, reason protests with a very loud voice. So what, pray, can reason persuade one of here? Of an opinion contrary to reason? Surely reason produces reason, not ridiculous ideas which are far removed from all human intelligence’) (*De Doctrina*: OCW viii 148–9).

⁴⁴ *Brief Notes*: Works vi 158.

⁴⁵ *Posita est autem hæc mors primum in privatione vel saltem magna obscuracione rectæ rationis ad summum bonum percipiendum, quæ vitæ instar intellectui erat* (*De Doctrina*: OCW viii 432–3).

⁴⁶ *Divorce*: Works iii 368. ⁴⁷ *PL* iii 107–11.

'Reason also is choice': it is the function of reason to choose and to range into order those sense impressions which fancy receives from the outside world;⁴⁸ it is also the function of reason to make moral choices between those competing desires which the will wishes to pursue: to discriminate the path of virtue from the path of vice. Milton had already explained this in *Areopagitica*, saying of Adam:

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... Wherefore did he creat passions within us, pleasures round about us, but that these rightly temper'd are the very ingredients of vertu?⁴⁹

The right tempering of the passions is the work of reason.

Much of the poem is devoted to showing the reader the difference between the true and the false operation of reason. We learn this from following with due critical attention Satan's rhetoric when he addresses his followers in Books I and II, and when seducing Eve in Book IX; we hear Belial, who 'could make the worse appear | The better reason' propounding a specious argument through 'words cloath'd in reasons garb';⁵⁰ and we follow Eve's self-deluding reasoning in her response to the wily serpent when she fails to challenge his assumptions and through a series of unanswered rhetorical questions argues herself into transgression.⁵¹ But Satanic rhetoric is not irresistible: Abdiel, in his exemplary stand against Satan, recognizes that the arguments which Satan addresses to his followers are specious, and reflects that though the contest between reason and brute force is unpalatable, reason must win. Abdiel says:

His puissance, trusting in th' Almighty's aide,
I mean to try, whose Reason I have tri'd
Unsound and false; nor is it aught but just,
That he who in debate of Truth hath won,
Should win in Arms, in both disputes alike
Victor; though brutish that contest and foule,
When Reason hath to deal with force, yet so
Most reason is that Reason overcome.⁵²

It is, then, only reasonable (i.e., natural, just) that the rational principle which springs from God and orders all things in the universe should triumph over mere force. When Abdiel is welcomed back by God, he is told that he is to return to defeat his foes 'to subdue | By force, who reason for thir Law refuse, | Right reason for their Law'.⁵³ Lest any argue that the divine law is oppressive, this formulation emphasizes that right reason is the true law of creation. Satan is also subject to self-deception in the matter of that reason which rules the universe, for after his Fall into Hell he says, 'fardest from him is best | Whom reason hath equald, force hath made supream | Above his equals'.⁵⁴ Though the syntax is compressed here, Satan appears to mean that God is equal to him in reason, and superior only in force.

⁴⁸ See the epigraph to this chapter.

⁴⁹ *Areopagitica: Works* iv 319. *motions*: puppet shows.

⁵⁰ *PL* ii 113–14, 226.

⁵¹ See Chapter 30 ?, pp. 446–50.

⁵² *PL* vi 119–26.

⁵³ *PL* vi 40–2.

⁵⁴ *PL* i 247–9.

If so, then he is mistaken in thinking that the divine reason is of the same kind or quality as the reason with which he has endued his creatures.⁵⁵ His companions are no more successful in their uses of reason, for in Hell some of the fallen angels discuss philosophy, and 'reason'd high | Of Providence, Foreknowledge, Will, and Fate' but 'found no end, in wandring mazes lost'.⁵⁶

The use and misuse of reason by Adam and Eve is an important element in Milton's presentation of the Fall. Man has been created specifically to fill a gap in creation, to be a creature

who not prone
And Brute as other Creatures, but endu'd
With Sanctitie of Reason, might erect
His Stature, and upright with front serene
Govern the rest, self-knowing, and from thence
Magnanimous to correspond with Heav'n.⁵⁷

It is reason that enables man to be erect, to govern the animals, to know himself, and to correspond with Heaven. 'Sanctitie' is a remarkable word here: it is precisely the *sacredness* of reason that man is given; as Patrick Hume says, '*Reason* has *Sanctity* applied to it, as a Ray of the Divinity shining in the Soul, the Immortal part of Man, whereby he was enabled to discover and worship his Creator'.⁵⁸ And it is because of the self-knowledge which sacred reason gives him that 'magnanimous'⁵⁹ man is able to correspond (both 'be in harmony' and 'hold communication'⁶⁰) with Heaven.

The relationship between reason and love—and also, differently, between reason and desire—is seen in Milton's depiction of Adam and Eve. Adam tells Raphael of the passion, the 'Commotion strange',⁶¹ which he feels when in the presence of Eve's beauty; he admits that although rationally he may know that she is inferior to him intellectually, and that her beauty is less like the beauteous form of their Maker than is his own, and less appropriate than his own to express their God-given dominion over the beasts,⁶² yet, perhaps because nature is at fault in him,

when I approach
Her loveliness, so absolute she seems
And in her self compleat, so well to know
Her own, that what she wills to do or say,
Seems wisest, vertuosest, discreetest, best;
All higher knowledge in her presence falls
Degraded, Wisdom in discourse with her
Looses discount'nanc't, and like folly shewes;
Authority and Reason on her waite.⁶³

⁵⁵ Cp. Hume: 'Satan makes very ill use of that Reason the Sovereign Creator had in such Perfection endow'd him with, to argue an Equality with his Maker' (p. 16).

⁵⁶ *PL* ii 558–61.

⁵⁷ *PL* vii 506–11.

⁵⁸ Hume, p. 226.

⁵⁹ *magnanimous*: great or noble in spirit (*OED*³ s.v. *magnanimous* *adj.* 1).

⁶⁰ *OED* s.v. *correspond* v. 1, 4.

⁶¹ *PL* viii 531.

⁶² *PL* viii 540–6.

⁶³ *PL* viii 546–54. For the philosophical tradition informing this speech (relating to the submission of reason to sense-perception) see J. M. Evans, *'Paradise Lost' and the Genesis Tradition* (Oxford, 1968), pp. 266ff.

This is a dangerous aberration on Adam's part, for he knows that Eve is created inferior to him, and yet much of this language would be more fitting when used by man contemplating the perfection and self-sufficiency of the Deity. Let us repeat the passage, changing only the gender of the pronouns, and hear it as if it were Adam's praise of God:

when I approach
His loveliness, so absolute he seems
And in him self compleat, so well to know
His own, that what he wills to do or say,
Seems wisest, vertuosest, discreetest, best;
All higher knowledge in his presence falls
Degraded, Wisdom in discourse with him
Looses discount'nanc't, and like folly shewes;
Authority and Reason on him waite.

In saying 'Authority and Reason on her waite', Adam is making Eve the transcendent source of truth for him. Adam half-understands what he is doing: *aliudque cupido, | mens aliud suadet: video meliora proboque, | deteriora sequor*.⁶⁴ We see the mind divided against itself; it is not simply that the rational mind is unable to control the passions: more seriously, it is the passions which control the reason, and beyond that institute the object of their desire as something superior to reason and to authority. But that reason which Adam makes subservient to Eve is God-given—is, indeed, the divine spark in the human soul—and in the context of life in Eden the 'Authority' which also waits on her can only be either Adam's patriarchal authority or God's divine authority. Perhaps it is ominous that Adam fails to pause and reflect on what precisely he means by this.

Raphael's reply to Adam advises him not to blame nature for his attitude to Eve, but to cultivate wisdom:

Accuse not Nature, she hath don her part;
Do thou but thine, and be not diffident
Of Wisdom, she deserts thee not, if thou
Dismiss not her, when most thou needst her nigh,
By attributing overmuch to things
Less excellent, as thou thy self perceav'st.
...
What higher in her societie thou findst
Attractive, human, rational, love still;
In loving thou dost well, in passion not,
Wherein true Love consists not; love refines
The thoughts, and heart enlarges, hath his seat
In Reason, and is judicious, is the scale
By which to heav'nly Love thou maist ascend,

⁶⁴ Ovid, *Metamorphoses* vii 19–21: 'Desire persuades me one way, reason another. I see the better, and approve; but I follow the worse.' Medea is speaking.

Not sunk in carnal pleasure, for which cause
Among the Beasts no Mate for thee was found.⁶⁵

Raphael distinguishes between love and passion: love refines the thinking, love enlarges the heart, love is grounded in reason; love of the human is (as Plato argued in the *Symposium*) the ladder ('scale' here) by which one may ascend to love of God. Passion is bestial. Adam is really being presented with a choice ('Reason also is choice') about how he perceives love: he could understand love as that which draws upon his highest faculty (reason) and draws him upward towards God; or he could reduce himself to considering love as no more than sensual desire, in which case he will be responding to, and cultivating, only the animal instincts in him. But, as Raphael points out, no mate was found for Adam among the beasts because that is not where he belongs. For, as the narrator says in Book IV when telling his reader that Adam and Eve do indeed have sex before the Fall, it is by 'wedded Love', which is 'Founded in Reason', that 'adulterous lust was driv'n from men | Among the bestial herds to raunge'.⁶⁶

Adam repeats this lesson to Eve when she is trying to persuade him that she should work alone. They need refreshment during their work,

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 deni'd, and are of Love the food,
Love not the lowest end of human life.
For not to irksom toile, but to delight
He made us, and delight to Reason joyn'd.⁶⁷

Smiles perhaps flow from reason because they are an intellectual recognition of, and delight in, another rational creature. 'Smiling,' says Hume, 'is so great an Indication of Reason, that some Philosophers have alter'd the *Definition of Man*, from *Animal Rationale* to *Risibile*, affirming Man to be the only Creature endowed with the Power of Laughter, denied to other Creatures.'⁶⁸ Adam has absorbed Raphael's lesson, at least in theory. At any rate, he knows enough to explain to Eve the crucial relationship between reason and freedom:

within himself
The danger lies, yet lies within his power:
Against his will he can receive no harm.
But God left free the Will, for what obeyes
Reason, is free, and Reason he made right,
But bid her well beware, and still erect,
Least by some faire appeering good surpris'd
She dictate false, and misinforme the Will
To do what God expressly hath forbid.⁶⁹

⁶⁵ PL viii 561–6, 586–94. *diffident*: distrustful.

⁶⁶ PL iv 750–5.

⁶⁷ PL ix 237–43.

⁶⁸ Hume, p. 250.

⁶⁹ PL ix 348–56.

The will (by which Milton presumably means that motion within man which brings about an action) is left free by God, but such freedom consists not in the unthinking exercise of the will but in the control of the will by reason, so that man's actions are directed towards the right ends. But, says Adam, reason needs to be on her guard, still 'erect' (that is, responsive to man's loftiest aspirations),⁷⁰ in order not to be deceived by some specious appearance and thereby misdirect the will to a base or transgressive act. For, as Milton had noted in his *Commonplace Book*, reason is man's strongest safeguard.⁷¹ Eve hears what Adam says, but when faced with the serpent's arguments, fatally trusts her own powers of reasoning in place of God's absolute prohibition.



As Satan leads Eve to the Tree, Milton gives us one of his most notable epic similes:

Hope elevates, and joy
Bright'ns his Crest, as when a wandering Fire,
Compact of unctuous vapour, which the Night
Condenses, and the cold invirons round,
Kindl'd through agitation to a Flame,
Which oft, they say, some evil Spirit attends
Hovering and blazing with delusive Light,
Misleads th' amaz'd Night-wanderer from his way
To Boggs and Mires, and oft through Pond or Poole,
There swallow'd up and lost, from succour farr.
So glister'd the dire Snake, and into fraud
Led *Eve* our credulous Mother, to the Tree
Of prohibition, root of all our woe.⁷²

This powerful simile is sufficiently long and detailed to set up an alternative narrative: as we think of Eve approaching the Tree under the guidance of Satan, we also follow another story from the quotidian world, one which speaks to us of the frailty of our perception. Formally the comparison likens the gleam on the serpent's crest to the light of an *ignis fatuus*, the phosphorescent light which hovers over marshy ground and leads travellers astray;⁷³ but the simile reaches far beyond this description of the snake's physical appearance. It is much more a simile for

⁷⁰ For the significance of 'erect' in *PL* see Chapter 12 FALL, pp. 139–40.

⁷¹ *fortitudo hominis non in corpore sed in ratione, quæ firmissimum hominis presidium et munimentum est, consistit* ('A man's strength depends not upon his body but upon his reason, which is for a human being the strongest safeguard and defense') (*Commonplace Book: Works* xviii 134; c.1639–40; quoting Lactantius).

⁷² *PL* ix 633–45.

⁷³ Cf. John Smith's use of this image of the *ignis fatuus*: 'All the Light and Knowledge that may seem sometimes to rise up in unhallowed mindes, is but like . . . those foolish fires that fetch their birth from terrene exudations, that doe but hop up & down, and flit to and fro upon the surface of this earth where they were first brought forth; and serve not so much to enlighten, as to delude us; nor to

what is happening to Eve, for the way in which the glittering light of the serpent's rhetoric is deceiving her; but it also—like the epic similes of Homer and Virgil—interlaces the poem with the world of the reader, and in this case draws us into reflecting on the experience of the night-time traveller who, deluded by a false or misrecognized light, wanders away from his true path. Man is so easily misled by appearances; he cannot know for certain the true status of what he sees, or the truth of the explanations which he is offered ('they say' that some evil spirit attends these lights, but they may not be right).

The passage also takes its place in a complex dialogue between poets, for Milton is recalling the moment in *A Midsummer Nights Dreame* when one of the fairies recognizes Puck as that Robin Goodfellow who is accustomed to 'Misleade night-wanderers, laughing at their harme'.⁷⁴ There is nothing particularly sinister in Puck's activities: they are practical jokes, but do not lead man existentially astray. Milton's imagination—perhaps responding to the play's presentation of the wanderings of the lovers in the wood, their loss of identity, and the befuddlement of their reason by their desire—has recalled Shakespeare's wording and reuses this appropriate phrasing; if we hear the verbal echo, we are drawn into Milton's darker reflection that supernatural powers do not jest, but have a real, deadly ability to mislead night-wanderers to their damnation. In turn, Milton's vision is recast in the Earl of Rochester's use of a similar image in his *A Satyre against Reason and Mankind* (which circulated in manuscript in 1674), where reason is compared to an *ignis fatuus*:

Reason, an Ignis fatuus of the Mind,
Which leaving Light of Nature, sense, behind;
Pathless and dangerous wandring wayes it takes,
Through Errours fenny boggs and thorny brakes:
Whilst the misguided follower climbs with pain
Mountains of whimseys heapt in his own brain;
Stumbling from thought to thought, falls headlong down
Into doubts boundless Sea.⁷⁵

Though we cannot be certain that Rochester had this passage of *Paradise Lost* in mind when writing his satire, his use of the characteristically Miltonic words 'Error' and 'wandring' (as well as 'boggs'⁷⁶) points to this being his calculated riposte to Milton. For Milton, Eve is being misled by desire, and by a reason imperfectly attuned to the divine will; for Rochester, reason itself misleads man by drawing him away from the light of nature which is 'sense'—meaning here the physical perceptions and pleasures of the body: implicitly or explicitly, this is a complete rejection of Miltonic theology and morality, because for Milton the

direct the wandring traveller into his way, but to lead him farther out of it' ('The True Way of Attaining to Divine Knowledge', in *The Cambridge Platonists*, pp. 130–1).

⁷⁴ Shakespeare, *A Midsummer Nights Dreame* II i 39. The echo was noted by H. J. Todd (Miner *ad loc*).

⁷⁵ John Wilmot, Earl of Rochester, *A Satyre against Reason and Mankind* ll. 12–19, from *The Works of John Wilmot, Earl of Rochester*, edited by Harold Love (Oxford, 1999), p. 57.

⁷⁶ *PL* ii 592, 621, 948, 939; ix 641.

senses in paradise are amply gratified by nature, but neither at the expense of reason, nor in defiance of God.⁷⁷



So the serpent leads Eve to the Tree. The use and misuse of reason is a principal motif in what follows.⁷⁸ The serpent tells Eve that after eating the fruit of the Tree of Knowledge he had found 'Strange alteration in me, to degree | Of Reason in my inward Powers',⁷⁹ and Eve accepts this. She had already found 'Much reason'⁸⁰ in the looks of some animals. Now, as she listens to the serpent's words, she finds them 'impregn'd | With Reason, to her seeming, and with Truth',⁸¹ and she accepts it as a fact that, despite the curse of death which has been attached to the Tree, the serpent 'hath eat'n and lives, | And knows, and speaks, and reasons, and discerns, | Irrational till then.'⁸² And when she returns from the Tree after taking its fruit she tells Adam that

the Serpent wise,
Or not restrain'd as wee, or not obeying,
Hath eat'n of the fruit, and is become,
Not dead, as we are threatn'd, but thenceforth
Endu'd with human voice and human sense,
Reasoning to admiration.⁸³

The corruption of Eve's reason is neatly shown by her casual 'Or...or' (meaning 'either...or'): either the serpent has not been forbidden by God to eat this fruit, or he has not obeyed; the brevity with which Eve skips over these heavily laden questions is now a sign of her neglect of reason. She fails utterly to show the resolute resistance, based on sound understanding, of the Lady in Milton's *Maske*, who when confronted with the tempter Comus says:

this Jugler
Would think to charm my judgement, as mine eyes
Obtruding false rules pranckt in reasons garb.⁸⁴

⁷⁷ Dryden in turn responds to Rochester's passage at the opening of *Religio Laici* (1682), when he argues that although reason has a limited role in bringing man to understand something of God, only faith can bring true illumination:

Dim as the borrowed beams of moon and stars
To lonely, weary, wandering travellers
Is reason to the soul; and as on high
Those rolling fires discover but the sky
Not light us here, so reason's glimmering ray
Was lent, not to assure our doubtful way,
But guide us upward to a better day:
And as those nightly tapers disappear
When day's bright lord ascends our hemisphere,
So pale grows reason at religion's sight,
So dies, and so dissolves in supernatural light.

(ll. 1–11)

See *The Poems of John Dryden*, edited by Paul Hammond and David Hopkins, 5 vols (London, 1995–2005), ii 106–8.

⁷⁸ As Grossman says, 'In Milton's telling, the Fall itself is a failure to deliberate' ('Poetry and Belief', p. 388).

⁷⁹ *PL* ix 599–600.

⁸⁰ *PL* ix 559.

⁸¹ *PL* ix 737–8.

⁸² *PL* ix 764–6.

⁸³ *PL* ix 867–72.

⁸⁴ *Maske* ll. 756–8; *Works* i 113.

But of this Tree we may not taste nor touch;
 God so commanded, and left that Command
 Sole Daughter of his voice; the rest, we live
 Law to our selves, our Reason is our Law.⁸⁵

One of Satan's techniques in his seduction of Eve is to use a series of rhetorical questions.⁸⁶ These seem to offer the freedom of a response to the addressee, but in reality they are freighted with predetermined answers. To all these Eve should have answers, or should know that they are beyond her reasoning. To any reader these questions include some difficult challenges, such as, 'What can your knowledge hurt him, or this Tree | Impart against his will if all be his?'⁸⁷ These are puzzles for theologians and philosophers, but they should not puzzle Eve, who has only to remind herself that God has simply forbidden them to eat the fruit. There need be no discussion. But she worries away at this simple concept 'forbid' until she convinces herself by her own attempt at reasoning that it is without force:

In those last lines Eve is making a basic error in assuming that knowledge is synonymous with wisdom. The reader of the Psalms, however, knows that ‘The feare of the LORD *is* the beginning of wisdom’,⁸⁹ and Raphael had already imparted to Adam the crucial distinction between knowledge and wisdom, and the necessary limitations of the desire to know.⁹⁰ Eve is beginning to copy the Satanic

⁹⁰ See Chapter 21 KNOWLEDGE AND WISDOM, pp. 308–11.

method of avoiding argument—avoiding the careful analysis of key terms—by means of rhetorical questions, a form of debate with herself which now becomes characteristic of her. There are seven rhetorical questions in the speech during which she decides to take the fruit, and such questions lead her into territory where she is necessarily ignorant ('For us alone | Was death invented?'⁹¹) or where she knows the answer but chooses to ignore it: 'what hinders then | To reach, and feed at once both Bodie and Mind?'⁹² What hinders? Simply, divine prohibition.



Adam and Eve have misunderstood the relationship between reason and passion, and the radical importance of reason to love. After their first postlapsarian sex, the couple are troubled by other passions which follow on from the passion of lust and ruin the peace of mind which they had once enjoyed:

not at rest or ease of Mind,
They sate them down to weep, nor onely Teares
Rained at thir Eyes, but high Winds worse within
Began to rise, high Passions, Anger, Hate,
Mistrust, Suspicion, Discord, and shook sore
Thir inward State of Mind, calm Region once
And full of Peace, now tost and turbulent:
For Understanding rul'd not, and the Will
Heard not her lore, both in subjection now
To sensual Appetite, who from beneath
Usurping over sovran Reason claimd
Superior sway.⁹³

As Adam himself had earlier warned that they might,⁹⁴ understanding and will have been subordinated to sensual appetite, and 'sovran Reason' is no longer sovereign. Eve has also misunderstood the relation of individual reason to freedom, since she has assumed that her freedom consists in the unrestrained exercise of her ability to reason independently, though all she shows is that she is a weak logician, an incurious hearer, and a devious (and self-deceiving) rhetorician. Adam, too, has deceived himself, and eventually admits in Book X that despite all his specious reasonings in self-exculpation,

all my evasions vain
And reasonings, though through Mazes, lead me still
But to my own conviction: first and last
On mee, mee only, as the sourse and spring
Of all corruption, all the blame lights due.⁹⁵

⁹¹ *PL* ix 766–7. ⁹² *PL* ix 778–9.

⁹³ *PL* ix 1120–31. *Region*: kingdom, realm (*OED*³ 1a). Cf. Adam, watching the miseries of his descendants, who is 'To sorrow abandond, but worse felt within, | And in a troubl'd Sea of passion tost' (*PL* x 717–18). For reason as the sovereign power within man cf. Horatio's reference to Hamlet's 'Sovereignty of Reason' (*Hamlet* I iv 73; for an explanation see *Hamlet*, edited by Harold Jenkins (London, 1982), p. 453); and cf. Donne's reference to reason as God's 'viceroy' in him (see p. 154 n. 30).

⁹⁴ See pp. 159–60. ⁹⁵ *PL* x 829–33.

In Book XII Michael seeks to correct and redefine the relationship between reason and liberty when commenting on Adam's reaction to the story of Nimrod, who sought dominion over his fellow-men:

Justly thou abhorr'st
That Son, who on the quiet state of men
Such trouble brought, affecting to subdue
Rational Libertie; yet know withall,
Since thy original lapse, true Libertie
Is lost, which alwayes with right Reason dwells
Twinn'd, and from her hath no diuidual being:
Reason in man obscur'd, or not obeyd,
Immediately inordinate desires
And upstart Passions catch the Government
From Reason, and to servitude reduce
Man till then free. Therefore since hee permits
Within himself unworthie Powers to reign
Over free Reason, God in Judgement just
Subjects him from without to violent Lords;
Who oft as undeservedly enthrall
His outward freedom: Tyrannie must be,
Though to the Tyrant thereby no excuse.
Yet sometimes Nations will decline so low
From vertue, which is reason, that no wrong,
But Justice, and some fatal curse annex
Deprives them of thir outward libertie,
Thir inward lost:⁹⁶

True liberty, says Michael, depends upon the exercise of 'right Reason', which is reason brought into alignment with the will of God. When man does not attend to and follow his reason, desires and passions usurp the government of the self which is properly the role of reason, and the consequence of this is the loss of liberty. Thus enslaved internally by his own passions, man becomes vulnerable to the external political oppression wielded by tyrants. There is an ineluctable bond between the inner tyranny of the passions and the lazy acquiescence in political tyranny, for, as Milton says at the opening of *The Tenure of Kings and Magistrates* (1649):

IF men within themselves would be govern'd by reason, and not generally give up thir understanding to a double tyrannie, of Custom from without, and blind affections within, they would discern better, what it is to favour and uphold the Tyrant of a Nation. But being slaves within doors, no wonder that they strive so much to have the public State conformably govern'd to the inward vitious rule, by which they govern themselves. For indeed none can love freedom heartilie, but good men; the rest love not freedom, but licence; which never hath more scope or more indulgence then under Tyrants.⁹⁷

'What obeyes | Reason, is free';⁹⁸ but to disobey reason—which is the principle of divine order at work in the human mind, as in creation at large—is to enslave oneself.

⁹⁶ *PL* xii 79–101.

⁹⁷ *Tenure: Works* v 1.

⁹⁸ *PL* ix 351–2.

14

Free

And render me more equal, and perhaps,
A thing not undesireable, sometime
Superior; for inferior who is free?

Paradise Lost ix 823–5



As so often happens in *Paradise Lost*, the reader's initial perspective on a concept is provided by Satan. It is Satanic freedom which we first encounter, Satanic freedom which entices and corrupts Eve; and we come to unlearn such an understanding, and its concomitant temptations, through the definitive words of God, the heroic protests of Abdiel, and the expositions of Michael. It is early in the first book of the poem that we first hear Satan protesting his freedom:

Here at least
We shall be free; th' Almighty hath not built
Here for his envy, will not drive us hence:
Here we may reign secure, and in my choyce
To reign is worth ambition though in Hell:
Better to reign in Hell, then serve in Heav'n.¹

Satan, who is so often in this poem an incompetent theologian,² imagines that it is possible to be free in a place—Hell—in which God will not intervene. Here, thinks Satan, 'we may reign secure'. It is notable that Satan's thinking moves so rapidly from the idea of freedom to the prospect of reigning, as if freedom were synonymous for him with power over others, and there is a pregnant ambiguity in the plural pronoun in 'we may reign': is this the royal 'we' which asserts Satan's personal sovereignty, or an ultra-democratic 'we' which supposes that all the rebel angels will reign equally? Perhaps he wishes the latter to be heard, but intends the former. The relationship of equality to freedom is a problem to which the poem will return. Meanwhile there is the word 'secure' to consider: not simply 'free from care, apprehension, or anxiety', and 'protected from or not exposed to

¹ *PL* i 258–63.

² Cf. Benjamin Myers: 'the fallen angels are heretical theologians of a debased and distorted Calvinism. They depict God as an ethically arbitrary, tyrannical being who undermines the freedom of his creatures and whose own goodness is negated by naked sovereignty' (*Milton's Theology of Freedom* (Berlin, 2006), p. 70). Myers' book is a lucid and judicious discussion of Milton's concept of liberty in the context of the theological tradition.

danger', but, negatively, 'overconfident; careless; complacent'.³ Security was often, in early-modern English, a false promise, a self-deceiving assurance of safety, which is what we see undermining Satan's confident claims to autonomy and power. Overconfident and complacent rather than free from danger, Satan imagines Hell only as a space in which God will not intervene, not one in which he cannot intervene, and thus tacitly acknowledges that the fallen angels are still subject to God's power.

This raises the larger question of how to conceive of freedom within a structure which is subject to a higher power. Milton's thinking on this point appears to have been influenced by the classical Roman concept of liberty which shaped European political and legal discourse into the Renaissance.⁴ It is a quintessentially republican view.⁵ There is a fundamental distinction between those who are free men, *liberi homines*, and those who live in a condition of servitude, under the power of a master and in subjection to his arbitrary will, his *arbitrium*. According to this theory, the mere presence of even benevolent monarchical power creates servitude, and only a republic secures true liberty, because under a monarchy the subject always fears the arbitrary intervention of the monarch, even when such power is held in abeyance. One crucial implication of this theory, according to Quentin Skinner, is that

liberty can be lost or forfeited even in the absence of any acts of interference. The lack of freedom suffered by slaves is not a consequence of their being hindered in the exercise of their desires. Slaves whose choices happen never to conflict with the will of their master may be able to act without the least interference. They nevertheless remain wholly bereft of their liberty... forced to live in a state of unending anxiety as to what may or may not be about to happen to them.⁶

³ OED³ s.v. *secure* *adj.* 1a, 6a. The dangers of feeling secure are expressed in some of the OED's citations: 'This pistle sheweth howe secure prowed & negligent he was in his prosperite' (Joye, 1545); 'But we be secure & vncarefull, as though false Prophetes coulde not haue meddled with vs' (Foxe, 1563); 'The way to be safe, is never to bee secure' (Quarles, 1654). Cf. *Macbeth* III v 32–3: 'And you all know, Security | Is Mortals cheefest Enemy'.

⁴ See Quentin Skinner's essay on Milton's concept of liberty, 'What does it mean to be a free person?', *London Review of Books*, 22 May 2008, pp. 16–18, and his 'John Milton and the Politics of Slavery', in *Milton and the Terms of Liberty*, edited by Graham Parry and Joad Raymond (Cambridge, 2002), pp. 1–22, the latter revised in his *Visions of Politics: Volume 2: Renaissance Virtues* (Cambridge, 2002), ch. 11.

⁵ Milton associates the free and effective use of eloquence with the democratic polity of classical Athens and with 'free', i.e. republican, Rome:

As when of old som Orator renound
In *Athens* or free *Rome*, where Eloquence
Flourishd, since mute.

(PL ix 670–2)

Implicitly, eloquence is 'since mute' because subsequent states have been monarchical.

⁶ Quentin Skinner, *Hobbes and Republican Liberty* (Cambridge, 2008), pp. ix–xii, drawing particularly on the *Digest* of Justinian. Hobbes, by contrast, maintains that liberty is simply 'the absence of Opposition', and that 'the Liberty of the man... consisteth in this, that he finds no stop, in doing what he has the will, desire, or inclination to doe' (Thomas Hobbes, *Leviathan*, edited by Noel Malcolm, 3 vols (Oxford, 2012), ii 324), so according to the Hobbesian model only an actual (presumably physical) impediment counts as a restraint upon liberty.

Milton argues that commonwealths (that is, republics) preserve the freedom and the property of the people, whereas in monarchies everyone is dependent upon the goodwill of the king:

For every Common-wealth is in general defin'd, a societie sufficient of it self, in all things conducive to well being and commodious life. Any of which requisit things if it cannot have without the gift and favour of a single person, or without leave of his privat reason, or his conscience, it cannot be thought sufficient of it self, and by consequence no Common-wealth, nor free; but a multitude of Vassalls in the Possession and domaine of one absolute Lord; and wholly obnoxious to his will.⁷

As he says in *The Tenure of Kings and Magistrates*, under a monarchy the people have only an illusion of freedom, and

may please thir fancy with a ridiculous and painted freedom, fit to coz'n babies; but are indeed under tyranny and servitude; as wanting that power, which is the root and sourse of all liberty, to dispose and *æconomize* in the Land which God hath giv'n them, as Maisters of Family in thir own house and free inheritance. Without which natural and essential power of a free Nation, though bearing high thir heads, they can in due esteem be thought no better then slaves and vassals born, in the tenure and occupation of another inheriting Lord. Whose goverment, though not illegal, or intolerable, hangs over them as a Lordly scourge, not as a free goverment; and therefore to be abrogated.⁸

In a monarchy, therefore, the subject never has true freedom because he is always aware that the ruler may intervene at any moment to compel or to restrain. Kingly power always 'hangs over' the people. Whether or not this model of illusory liberty under a monarchical system applies to the world of *Paradise Lost*, in which God appears as the omnipotent ruler, is a question to which we shall return.

Satan oscillates between monarchical and democratic rhetoric as it suits him, as we see when he says:

Mee though just right, and the fixt Laws of Heav'n
Did first create your Leader, next free choice.⁹

When did Satan's followers create him their leader through 'free choice'? What exactly is the 'just right' to which he appeals? If the laws of Heaven made Satan their leader, how is that compatible with the fallen angels' freedom? And why should the laws of Heaven apply to them now that Heaven itself has been rejected? These rhetorical claims rapidly pass unexamined. When Satan was rallying his supporters in the War in Heaven, his call to liberty rapidly metamorphosed into something else:

⁷ *Eikonoklastes*: Works v 175–6. *obnoxious to*: vulnerable to injury from.

⁸ *Tenure*: Works v 40. *æconomize*: to manage a household (*OED*³ *s.v.* *economize v.* 1, first example of the word, and sole example this sense, which is a literal application of the Greek *οικονομέω*). Milton knew a good deal about historical slavery, and wrote vividly about the physical conditions of slaves: see Ruth Mohl, *John Milton and His commonplace Book* (New York, 1969), pp. 128–34. Mohl also notes (pp. 192–3) Milton's insistence that rulers should be the servants of their people, not their masters.

⁹ *PL* ii 18–19.

Companions deare,
 Found worthy not of Libertie alone,
 Too mean pretense, but what we more affect,
 Honour, Dominion, Glorie, and renowne.¹⁰

Liberty is too mean a goal; what really matters is power.

The attitude of some of the rebel angels towards freedom is exemplified by Mammon, who urges his fellows not to pursue

our state
 Of splendid vassalage, but rather seek
 Our own good from our selves, and from our own
 Live to our selves, though in this vast recess,
 Free, and to none accountable, preferring
 Hard liberty before the easie yoke
 Of servile Pomp.¹¹

Mammon's ideal of freedom is to reject the 'splendid vassalage' of Heaven with its 'servile offerings',¹² to live for himself and from his own resources, 'to none accountable', in the 'vast recess'¹³ which is Hell. The vocabulary here draws upon the seventeenth-century tradition which extolled rural retirement as a source of spiritual refreshment,¹⁴ but we see how Mammon has perverted this ideal if we set alongside his speech the lines that Oldham wrote, perhaps with this very use of 'to none accountable' in mind, when he imagined

That heav'n would bless me with a small estate,
 Where I might find a close obscure retreat;
 There, free from Noise, and all ambitious ends,
 Enjoy a few choice Books, and fewer Friends,
 Lord of my self, accountable to none,
 But to my Conscience, and my God alone.¹⁵

For Oldham in this private retreat, to be 'Lord of my self, accountable to none' is nevertheless to be accountable to God and to his conscience; for Mammon, it means serving only his own self. Is that freedom? When Mammon proclaims that he prefers 'Hard liberty before the easie yoke | Of servile Pomp' this sounds like a true Miltonic aspiration which we might gloss from *Samson Agonistes*:

But what more oft in Nations grown corrupt,
 And by thir vices brought to servitude,
 Then to love Bondage more then Liberty,
 Bondage with ease then strenuous liberty.¹⁶

¹⁰ *PL* vi 419–22.

¹¹ *PL* ii 251–7.

¹² *PL* ii 246.

¹³ *recess*: a remote and secluded spot, a secret or private place (*OED*³ 7a).

¹⁴ For the tradition of retirement to the countryside or the garden as a moral and spiritual imperative see Maren-Sofie Røstvig, *The Happy Man: Studies in the Metamorphoses of a Classical Ideal*, second edition (Oslo, 1962).

¹⁵ John Oldham, 'A Satyr. Address'd to a Friend' (1683), ll. 117–22, in *The Poems of John Oldham*, edited by Harold F. Brooks and Raman Selden (Oxford, 1987), p. 229.

¹⁶ *SA* ll. 268–71; Samson speaking.

But, as so often when listening to the rhetoric of Milton's characters, we need to pause, consider, and distinguish: here, we need to distinguish between the servitude into which a corrupt people's vices have brought them, and the willing service of God; and then between that service and the abject 'vassalage' into which Mammon has translated it; to distinguish also between the strenuous liberty of the servant of God and the freedom which Mammon seeks, which is, for Milton, only another form of bondage, bondage to the easy indulgence of one's own will. There is always an important distinction in Milton's writing between the servant and the slave, between service and servitude.¹⁷ Two texts might come into the reader's mind when listening to these speeches of Mammon and Samson: 'my yoke is easie, and my burden is light',¹⁸ and 'whose service is perfect freedom'.¹⁹ Such are the touchstones by which Milton expects us to judge the diabolical rhetoric of ease and freedom.

The rhetoric of freedom is used freely—that is, loosely, irresponsibly, self-deceivingly—by the rebel angels. They complain, for instance, 'that Fate | Free Vertue should enthral to Force or Chance',²⁰ though the idea that they represent 'Free Vertue' is a self-deception, whether 'Vertue' here means a moral quality, or the power of a supernatural being, or physical strength:²¹ whatever moral qualities they possessed have been perverted into their opposites through their exercise of the freedom to fall; their status as angelic beings has been forfeited; and their physical strength has been shown to be illusory in the War in Heaven. Bitter ironies attend the word 'free' in Satan's mouth. He tells Sin and Death:

I come no enemy, but to set free
From out this dark and dismal house of pain,
Both him and thee, and all the heav'nly Host
Of Spirits that in our just pretenses arm'd
Fell with us from on high.²²

So the freedom which the angels exercised in falling leads to Sin and Death being set free to wreak their havoc upon the human world, to tyrannize over mankind. And Satan's sarcastic address to Adam and Eve—

my dwelling haply may not please
Like this fair Paradise, your sense, yet such

¹⁷ The Son himself when clothing Adam and Eve 'disdain'd not to begin | Thenceforth the form of servant to assume, | As when he wash'd his servants feet' (*PL* x 213–15).

¹⁸ Matthew xi 30. Cf. Milton's comment in *Divorce*: 'let him not op'n his lips against the providence of heav'n, or tax the ways of God and his divine truth: for they are equal, easie, and not burdensome; nor doe they ever crosse the just and reasonable desires of men' (*Works* iii 496).

¹⁹ From the Collect for Peace in the Order for Morning Prayer in the *Book of Common Prayer* (1559) (*The Book of Common Prayer: The Texts of 1549, 1559, and 1662*, edited by Brian Cummings (Oxford, 2011), p. 111). Milton refers to this prayer in *Reason*: see p. 191. Cf. Richard Vines, who says of Christian liberty in a sermon to the Lord Mayor of London in 1654 that 'the right use of this liberty is the imployment and exercise of it in Gods service', and he continues: 'True liberty is a power to do what we ought, not what we will', nor is 'a wicked man let loose to lust and licentiousness'. 'The law is a law of liberty, but it is a bond of duty; let your freedom enlarge you to service; let your service limit and bound your freedom' (Richard Vines, *Πειθαρχία: Obedience to Magistrates, Both Supreme and Subordinate* (London, 1656), second sermon, pp. 12–15).

²⁰ *PL* ii 550–1.

²¹ Respectively, *OED*³ *s.v.* virtue *n.* 1, 2; 3; 4, 5.

²² *PL* ii 822–6.

Accept your Makers work; he gave it me,
Which I as freely give.²³

—echoes Christ's injunction, 'freely ye haue receiued, freely giue',²⁴ providing another instance of how Milton conceives of Satan as a deformed parody of the redemptive Son.

But in Book V Satan's rhetorical deployment of 'free' is challenged by Abdiel. First, Satan addresses his followers:

Natives and Sons of Heav'n possest before
By none, and if not equal all, yet free,
Equally free; for Orders and Degrees
Jarr not with liberty, but well consist.
Who can in reason then or right assume
Monarchie over such as live by right
His equals, if in power and splendor less,
In freedome equal? or can introduce
Law and Edict on us, who without law
Erre not, much less for this to be our Lord,
And look for adoration to th' abuse
Of those Imperial Titles which assert
Our being ordain'd to govern, not to serve?²⁵

His first claim is that the angels are 'Natives and Sons of Heav'n': they belong there by native right and sonship, and are 'possest... | By none', so they are no one's slave: in terms of the Roman theory of freedom, therefore, they were indeed free—though this scarcely fits with Mammon's subsequent description of their heavenly condition as 'vassalage'. Moreover, they were 'if not equal all, yet free, | Equally free': each had his place in the heavenly hierarchy, but this was consistent, says Satan, with freedom. Yet if these angels are 'ordain'd to govern, not to serve', whom are they to govern? One another, so turning other angels into their servants? What Satan resents, and incites his followers also to resent, is not hierarchy per se, for he is himself a determined and manipulative hierarch, but the superior position granted to the Son whose equal Satan claims to be 'by right' (whatever that means), even though the angels have less power and splendour.²⁶ One can imagine Milton himself speaking such lines in one of his defences of the execution of Charles I:

Who can in reason then or right assume
Monarchie over such as live by right
His equals, if in power and splendor less,
In freedome equal?

²³ *PL* iv 378–81.

²⁴ Matthew x 8. The words are immediately preceded by the command, 'cast out deuils'.

²⁵ *PL* v 790–802. Later Satan boasts:

I in one Night freed
From servitude inglorious welnigh half
Th' Angelic Name.

(*PL* ix 140–1)

²⁶ For Milton's notions of hierarchy see Chapter 10 EQUAL.

By what right or by what reason could Charles claim monarchical authority over those Englishmen who are by right his equals, who are by birth equally free, but whose freedom would disappear if a single person asserted monarchical power over them? But the Son is not Charles I, and monarchy is an inadequate term—a palpably defective metaphor—for the kind of power which God and his Son exercise. Monarchy is, however, more obviously an appropriate form through which to understand the kind of power which Satan seeks to exercise over his supposedly equal and free followers.²⁷

Abdiel challenges Satan's interpretation of freedom and order:

unjust thou saist
Flatly unjust, to binde with Laws the free,
And equal over equals to let Reigne,
One over all with unsucceeded power.
Shalt thou give Law to God, shalt thou dispute
With him the points of libertie, who made
Thee what thou art, and formd the Pow'rs of Heav'n
Such as he pleasd, and circumscrib'd thir being?
...

But to grant it thee unjust,
That equal over equals Monarch Reigne:
Thy self though great and glorious dost thou count,
Or all Angelic Nature joind in one,
Equal to him begotten Son, by whom
As by his Word the mighty Father made
All things, ev'n thee, and all the Spirits of Heav'n
By him created in thir bright degrees,
Crownd them with Glory, and to thir Glory nam'd
Thrones, Dominations, Princedoms, Vertues, Powers.²⁸

Order, equality, freedom are, truly understood, just such as God determines: they receive their definition from him, not from Satan. God seeks to elevate not to abase his creation, and Satan cannot claim to be equal to the Son since it was through the Son—the divine *logos*—that all things, including Satan, were created. Moreover, the titles assigned to the angelic hierarchy—‘Thrones, Dominations, Princedoms, Vertues, Powers’—are titles of glory not of power. Abdiel's response redefines the concepts of freedom, service, and power which are so central to Satan's rhetorical vocabulary. Later, Satan resumes the argument, saying derisively to Abdiel:

At first I thought that Libertie and Heav'n
To heav'nly Soules had bin all one; but now
I see that most through sloth had rather serve,

²⁷ See Stevie Davies, *Images of Kingship in 'Paradise Lost': Milton's Politics and Christian Liberty* (Columbia, Mo., 1983).

²⁸ *PL* v 818–40.

Ministring Spirits, traird up in Feast and Song;
 Such hast thou arm'd, the Minstrelsie of Heav'n,
 Servilitie with freedom to contend.²⁹

The war is reconfigured here as the contention of servility against freedom. As with Mammon's speech, we hear in 'I see that most through sloth had rather serve' a version of Milton's own diagnosis of the easy servility of the masses such as we find at the opening of *The Tenure of Kings and Magistrates* (1649):

IF men within themselves would be govern'd by reason, and not generally give up thir understanding to a double tyrannie, of Custom from without, and blind affections within, they would discern better, what it is to favour and uphold the Tyrant of a Nation. But being slaves within doors, no wonder that they strive so much to have the public State conformably govern'd to the inward vitious rule, by which they govern themselves. For indeed none can love freedom heartilie, but good men; the rest love not freedom, but licence; which never hath more scope or more indulgence then under Tyrants.³⁰

But it is necessary to distinguish the double servitude to tyrants and to passions from the service which is obedience to God, and Abdiel responds to Satan's speech with a far-reaching definition of servitude:

Unjustly thou deprav'st it with the name
 Of *Servitude* to serve whom God ordains,
 Or Nature; God and Nature bid the same,
 When he who rules is worthiest, and excells
 Them whom he governs. This is servitude,
 To serve th' unwise, or him who hath rebell'd
 Against his worthier, as thine now serve thee,
 Thy self not free, but to thy self enthralld.
 Yet leudly dar'st our ministring upbraid.
 Reign thou in Hell thy Kingdom, let mee serve
 In Heav'n God ever blest, and his Divine
 Behests obey, worthiest to be obey'd,
 Yet Chains in Hell, not Realms expect.³¹

²⁹ *PL* vi 164–9. In Book IV Gabriel rebukes Satan for his hypocrisy in denouncing 'servitude':

thou sly hypocrite, who now wouldst seem
 Patron of liberty, who more then thou
 Once fawn'd, and cring'd, and servilly ador'd
 Heav'n's awful Monarch? wherefore but in hope
 To dispossess him, and thy self to reigne?

(*PL* iv 957–61)

³⁰ *Tenure: Works* v 1. *affections*: A strong word at this date: 'passions' as a controlling emotion (*OED*³ 1b). It is notable that Milton adds the adjective 'blind', implying that the passions which govern man extinguish the inner sight which God has placed in him. See my *Milton and the People* (Oxford, 2014) for Milton's awareness of the incapacity of the people for true freedom. For the tyranny of 'Custom' see further pp. 200–1.

³¹ *PL* vi 174–86. The Cambridge Platonist John Smith remarked that 'A right knowledge of God would beget a *freedom* & *Liberty* of Soul within us, and not *servility*' ('Of Superstition', in his *Select Discourses* (London, 1660), p. 27).

As Abdiel says, Satan perverts the meaning of service by calling it 'Servitude'.³² True servitude is to follow those who have turned their back on wisdom and order; Satan is not free, but self-enslaved to his own desires. This may sound paradoxical, but self-assertion and self-satisfaction (as Mammon in effect proposes) are forms of enslavement because they remove the individual creature from his place in the divinely created order, divert his path from his true *telos*, and bind him in subjection to his own 'affections'. Satan's pursuit of power will ultimately, says Abdiel, bind him more strongly in chains of his own making.

Poignantly, Satan shows that he does actually understand this in his soliloquy on the top of Mount Niphates in Book IV. The service of God was not servitude, he admits,

nor was his service hard.
What could be less then to afford him praise,
The easiest recompence, and pay him thanks,
How due!³³

He acknowledges that most of the angels did not fall, and asks:

Hadst thou the same free Will and Power to stand?
Thou hadst: whom hast thou then or what to accuse,
But Heav'ns free Love dealt equally to all?
Be then his Love accurst, since love or hate,
To me alike, it deals eternal woe.
Nay curs'd be thou; since against his thy will
Chose freely what it now so justly rues.³⁴

Satan recognizes that he did have the free will to stand, that is, to remain an angel of light, and that nothing and no one constrained his fall. So nothing and no one can be blamed, except, he says, 'Heav'ns free Love dealt equally to all'. At first sight this seems a strange move in the argument, for how could the free bestowal of love be blamed? But the word 'equally' reminds us that Satan has a complex attitude to equality: claiming equality with the Son, he resented being subordinate to him, but he upholds heavenly and infernal hierarchies in which all are not equal in power or splendour while nevertheless asserting that all are equally free. Here he seems to resent that God's love has been shown 'equally to all', as if there should have been some differential observed in the allocation of love.³⁵ Momentarily Satan curses the divine love for consigning him to eternal woe, but then immediately recognizes the absurdity of this evasion of his own responsibility, finally acknowledging that 'against his thy will | Chose freely'.



³² *depravist*: 'pervert the meaning of' (*OED* s.v. deprave v. 3); also 'to vilify, defame, decry, disparage' (*OED* 4, citing this instance as its last example).

³³ *PL* iv 45–8. Satan's recognition that the service of God is 'easiest recompence' is part of a chain of uses of the word 'easy' in this context: see Chapter 8 *EASE*.

³⁴ *PL* iv 66–72.

³⁵ Cf. the parable of the owner of the vineyard who pays all his workmen the same wage, regardless of the length of time they have spent working (Matthew xx 1–16).

It is God, in Book III, who expounds without rhetorical obfuscation the nature of freedom. God himself is wholly and perfectly free, as he says of the act of creation in which

I uncircumscrib'd my self retire,
And put not forth my goodness, which is free
To act or not, Necessitie and Chance
Approach not mee, and what I will is Fate.³⁶

As for freedom as it pertains to the angels and to mankind,

I made him just and right,
Sufficient to have stood, though free to fall.
Such I created all th' Ethereal Powers
And Spirits, both them who stood and them who faild;
Freely they stood who stood, and fell who fell.³⁷

Man therefore has the freedom (which necessarily entails having the capacity) to stand or to fall.³⁸ If angels and man were not free, they could not act out of love, but only under constraint:

Not free, what proof could they have givn sincere
Of true allegiance, constant Faith or Love,
Where onely what they needs must do, appeard,
Not what they would? what praise could they receive?
What pleasure I from such obedience paid,
When Will and Reason (Reason also is choice)
Useless and vain, of freedom both despoild,

³⁶ *PL* vii 170–3.

³⁷ *PL* iii 98–102. *faild*: 'Fail' has several shades of meaning which are relevant here: 'to prove deficient upon trial . . . to give way before an enemy' (*OED* *s.v.* fail *v.* 4a); 'not to render the due or expected service or aid . . . to disappoint' (5a); 'to come short of performing one's duty or functions' (9a); 'to be at fault; to miss the mark, go astray, err' (11a; last example 1590). For a careful discussion of Milton's presentation of free will in *PL* see Dennis Richard Danielson, *Milton's Good God: A Study in Literary Theodicy* (Cambridge, 1982), esp. ch. 5.

³⁸ At *PL* x 8–11 the narrator reiterates that Adam and Eve had sufficient strength to resist any temptation, saying that God

Hinder'd not *Satan* to attempt the minde
Of Man, with strength entire, and free will arm'd,
Complete to have discover'd and repulst
Whatever wiles of Foe or seeming Friend.

In *De Doctrina* Milton states the divine command and its consequences with laconic clarity: *si steteris, manebis; non steteris, eiiciere; si non comederis, vives; comederis, moriere* ('if you stand firm, you will remain; if you do not stand firm, you will be expelled; if you do not eat, you will live; if you do eat, you will die') (*OCW* viii 62–3). St Augustine explained that the original freedom of Adam and Eve 'consisted not in the fact that they were "unable to sin" (*non posse peccare*), but rather in the fact that they were both "able to sin" (*posse peccare*) and "able not to sin" (*posse non peccare*)' (Myers, *Milton's Theology of Freedom*, p. 16, citing Augustine's *De Correptione et Gratia* 29–33 (*Patrologia Latina* liv 933–6)).

Made passive both, had servd necessitie,
Not mee.³⁹

The freedom which God has given to his creation is absolute, but, as it entails the freedom to abuse that freedom, man is capable of enthralling—that is, enslaving—himself; and enslaving oneself means being a slave to one's passions, as Abdiel told Satan.⁴⁰ God continues:

I formd them free, and free they must remain,
Till they enthrall themselves: I else must change
Thir nature, and revoke the high Decree
Unchangeable, Eternal, which ordain'd
Thir freedom, they themselves ordain'd thir fall.⁴¹

However, after the Fall, and as a consequence of it, man will be granted another form of freedom, which is the freedom to accept (and, of course, to refuse) that grace which constitutes an offer of redemption which God himself makes freely:

Man shall not quite be lost, but sav'd who will,
Yet not of will in him, but grace in me
Freely voutsaft.⁴²

The prelapsarian will was innately free to stand or fall; the postlapsarian will is also free, but in a different way, for it is free to embrace salvation, though now this is not because of its own innate efficacy but only because it is endowed with grace.⁴³ Postlapsarian man will still have the freedom to accept or to reject that offered grace.⁴⁴ Moreover, redemption comes because the Son freely offers himself:

³⁹ PL iii 103–11. Cf. God's later speech:

no Decree of mine
Concurring to necessitate his Fall,
Or touch with lightest moment of impulse
His free Will, to her own inclining left
In eevn scale.

(PL x 43–7)

There is a political parallel to God's argument in Henry Parker's *Observations upon some of his Majesties late Answers and Expresses* [London, 1642]: 'not that Prince which is the most potent over his subjects, but that Prince which is most Potent in his subjects, is indeed most truly potent... in true realitie of power, that King is most great and glorious, which hath the most and strongest subjects, and not he which tramples upon the most contemptible vassells.' Princes should seek to 'magnifie themselves by infranchising their subjects' (pp. 1–2).

⁴⁰ For the idea of enslavement in PL see Myers, *Milton's Theology of Freedom*, pp. 137ff.

⁴¹ PL iii 124–8. Cf. 'mans own freewill self-corrupted is the adequat and sufficient cause of his disobedience' (*Divorce: Works* iii 441).

⁴² PL iii 173–5.

⁴³ Cf. *De Doctrina: Cùm autem statuisset Deus homines restituere, decrevit etiam sine dubio... amisam libertatem, aliqua saltem ex parte restituere voluntati* ('But when God had decided to restore humankind, he also indubitably decreed... to restore lost freedom to the will, in some measure at least') (*OCW* viii 94–5).

⁴⁴ Arminian theology insisted that God's grace was not irresistible (Myers, *Milton's Theology of Freedom*, p. 42). In *De Doctrina* Milton maintains that salvation depends on the liberating grace of God, which is available to all, but also on the decisive act of the human will in accepting that grace (Myers, p. 51). But, as Myers says (p. 49), Milton's 'most striking departure from the Reformed orthodox

I for his sake will leave
 Thy bosom, and this glorie next to thee
 Freely put off, and for him lastly dye.⁴⁵

Such a free surrender of glory contrasts with the pursuit of self-glorification which Satan (and, later, Eve) considers to be the mark of freedom, and this self-negating action is in effect the poem's ideal definition of freedom as service.



How do Adam and Eve understand their freedom? This question may be divided into how they understand their freedom vis-à-vis their Creator, and how they understand their freedom within their relationship to each other. The narrator recounts that before the Fall

in thir looks Divine
 The image of thir glorious Maker shon,
 Truth, wisdom, Sanctitude severe and pure,
 Severe but in true filial freedom plac'd;
 Whence true autoritie in men; though both
 Not equal, as thir sex not equal seemd.⁴⁶

Their holiness ('Sanctitude') is exact ('severe'⁴⁷) because the image of their Maker is still seen in them, but it is not a rigorous and constraining⁴⁸ holiness because it derives from 'true filial freedom'. Milton often adds the qualifier 'true' to a noun or adjective in order to draw its meaning away from commonplace definitions and towards his own preferred meaning;⁴⁹ here the word asks the reader to reflect on what true filial freedom would entail,⁵⁰ and he has already given us an answer in the example of the Son freely laying aside his glory in order to die for mankind. For Adam and Eve, true filial freedom will also entail obedience, while for their descendants 'true authority', presumably in both the political and the domestic sphere, will

and Arminian views of predestination lies in [his] repudiation of the idea of reprobation'. Cf. *De Doctrina: testatus est Deus, velle se omnium salutem, nullius interitum... nihil odisse quod fecit, nihil omisisse quod ad salutem omnium sufficeret... Deus neminem nisi post gratiam, eamque sufficientem, repudiatam ac spretam, idque serò, ad gloriam longanimitatis atque iustitiae suae patefaciendam, paenitentiae ac salutis aeternae aditu excludit* ('God has clearly—and frequently at that—testified that he wants the salvation of all and the death of none... hates nothing that he has made, and has left out nothing that might suffice for the salvation of all... God excludes no one from access to penitence and eternal salvation except after grace—and that sufficient—has been spurned and scorned, and exclusion comes late, so as to reveal the glory of his long-suffering and justice') (*OCW* viii 76–7, 104–5). See further Stephen M. Fallon, "Elect above the Rest": Theology as Self-Representation in Milton', in *Milton and Heresy*, edited by Stephen B. Dobranski and John P. Rumrich (Cambridge, 1998), pp. 93–116, and his 'Milton's Arminianism and the Authorship of *De Doctrina Christiana*', *Texas Studies in Literature and Language* 41 (1999) 103–27.

⁴⁵ *PL* iii 238–40. For the theology of the free self-offering of the Son see Myers, *Milton's Theology of Freedom*, pp. 107–8.

⁴⁶ *PL* iv 291–6. ⁴⁷ Hume *ad loc.* glosses 'severe' as 'strict, exact'.

⁴⁸ Which is another meaning of 'severe': *OED s.v. severe adj.* 2.

⁴⁹ See Hammond, *Milton and the People*, pp. 58–9.

⁵⁰ 'In true Filial freedom plac'd; Consisting in that Frank and ready Obedience that Sons pay to their Fathers' (Hume, *ad loc.*).

consist in such filial obedience to God, not in self-assertion over others. But freedom and equality are not synonymous, nor is equality a necessary condition of freedom, and it is clear that Adam and Eve are not equal because of their different gender. Later, this inequality will be perceived by Eve as a constraint upon her freedom.

Adam explains to Eve that

needs must the power
That made us, and for us this ample World
Be infinitely good, and of his good
As liberal and free as infinite.⁵¹

Here the words 'liberal' and 'free' both mean 'generous':⁵² God, out of his liberty and freedom, has liberally and freely endowed Adam and Eve with all the gifts of paradise, requiring in return only one service, as Adam acknowledges:

Then let us not think hard
One easie prohibition, who enjoy
Free leave so large to all things else, and choice
Unlimited of manifold delights.⁵³

The permission which they enjoy is 'free' (both 'generous' and 'granting their freedom'), so that unlike the subjects of a terrestrial monarchy, Adam and Eve are not deprived of their liberty. They have no reason to fear the arbitrary intervention of a monarch who may suddenly add obligations or curtail choices, because all has been laid out in advance: there is just 'One easie prohibition', and all else is free.

This recognition is informed more fully by Raphael's explanation to Adam. God has instructed the archangel:

such discourse bring on,
As may advise him of his happie state,
Happiness in his power left free to will,
Left to his own free Will, his Will though free,
Yet mutable; whence warne him to beware
He swerve not too secure.⁵⁴

The insistent repetition of 'free' and 'will' underlines the poem's crucial point that the Fall is not predetermined, and that Adam and Eve have absolute free will. However, that will, being free, is mutable:⁵⁵ if Adam and Eve had been created

⁵¹ *PL* iv 412–15.

⁵² Cf. 'And freely all thir pleasant fruit for food | Gave thee' (*PL* vii 540–1; Raphael to Adam).

⁵³ *PL* iv 432–5. The delights of paradise include marital sex, though after the Fall there will be some who seek to restrict the sexual freedom of others, 'Defaming as impure what God declares | Pure, and commands to som, leaves free to all' (*PL* iv 746–7).

⁵⁴ *PL* v 233–8. For 'secure' see pp. 166–7.

⁵⁵ As the Westminster Assembly explained: 'After God had made all other creatures, he created man, male and female, with reasonable and immortal souls, indued with knowledge, righteousness and true holiness, after his own image; having the Law of God written in their hearts, and power to fulfill it. And yet, under a possibility of transgressing, being left to the liberty of their own will, which was subject unto change' (*Articles of Christian Religion, Approved and Passed by Both Houses of Parliament, After Advice Had with the Assembly of Divines by Authority of Parliament Sitting at Westminster* (London, 1648), pp. 10–11).

with a will which was immutably bound to obey God, then that will would not have been free; freedom necessarily entails mutability. The prelapsarian will is free to choose change, defection, and fall. As Raphael consequently reminds Adam:

God made thee perfet, not immutable;
 And good he made thee, but to persevere
 He left it in thy power, ordaind thy will
 By nature free, not over-rul'd by Fate
 Inextricable, or strict necessity;
 Our voluntarie service he requires,
 Not our necessitated, such with him
 Findes no acceptance, nor can find, for how
 Can hearts, not free, be tri'd whether they serve
 Willing or no, who will but what they must
 By Destinie, and can no other choose?
 My self and all th' Angelic Host that stand
 In sight of God enthron'd, our happie state
 Hold, as you yours, while our obedience holds;
 On other surety none; freely we serve,
 Because wee freely love, as in our will
 To love or not; in this we stand or fall.⁵⁶

Here Raphael introduces a word which is rarely heard in discussions of free will: 'love'.⁵⁷ It is the freely willed love of the angels for their Creator which leads them to obey, and hence to 'stand'.⁵⁸

Adam acknowledges Raphael's emphasis on love when he replies that he already knew himself and Eve

⁵⁶ *PL* v 524–40. *requires*: Raphael's argument shows that this means 'seeks' (a Latinate sense) rather than 'demands'. For the association of freedom and service cf. the Westminster Assembly's *Articles* (p. 33): 'the end of Christian Liberty... is, that being delivered out of the hands of our enemies, we might serve the Lord'. Dryden draws upon Raphael's speeches to Adam as the basis for a long discussion of free will and necessity between Adam, Raphael, and Gabriel (*The State of Innocence, and Fall of Man: An Opera* (London, 1677), pp. 23–6).

⁵⁷ Traherne has an eloquent meditation on God's gift of freedom to mankind, and the need for there to be freedom if there is to be love:

ALL that we can fear, or except against, is his Omission, in forbearing to compell his Creatures to love, whether they will or no. But in that Liberty which he gave them, his Love is manifested most of all. In giving us a Liberty it is most apparent: for without Liberty there can be no Delight, no Honour, no Ingenuity, or Goodness at all: No action can be Delightful that is not our Pleasure in the Doing. All Delight is free and voluntary by its Essence. Force and Aversion are inconsistent with its nature, Willingness in its operation is the Beauty of the Soul, and its Honour founded in the freedom of its Desire... Now tho GOD infinitely hated Sin, yet he gave us an irrevocable Power to do what we pleased, and adventured the Hazzard of that which he infinitely hated, that being free to do what we would, we might be Honourable and delightful in doing (freely, and of our own Accord) what is Great and Excellent. For without this Liberty there can be no Love, since Love is an active and free affection; that must spring from the Desire and pleasure of the Soul. It is the Pleasure of a Lover to promote the Felicity of his object. Whatsoever Services he is compelled to do, he is either merely passive in them or Cross unto them, they are all void of the Principal Grace and beauty that should adorn them.

(Thomas Traherne, *Christian Ethicks: or, Divine Morality* (London, 1675), pp. 306–8)

⁵⁸ For the significance of 'stand' see Chapter 12 FALL, pp. 137–8.

To be both will and deed created free;
 Yet that we never shall forget to love
 Our maker, and obey him whose command
 Single, is yet so just, my constant thoughts
 Assur'd me, and still assure.⁵⁹

Adam follows Raphael in joining love and obedience. In reflecting subsequently on the relationship between love and passion, after he has been rebuked by Raphael for his inordinate attachment to Eve, he reassures Raphael that his passions are under his rational control, and are not tyrants to which he is subjected:

Yet these subject not; I to thee disclose
 What inward thence I feel, not therefore foild,
 Who meet with various objects, from the sense
 Variously representing; yet still free
 Approve the best, and follow what I approve.
 To love thou blam'st me not, for love thou saist
 Leads up to Heav'n, is both the way and guide.⁶⁰

He does not, Adam maintains, allow the alluring impressions which his senses receive from Eve to 'subject' him; he is not 'foild' by them.⁶¹ He remains free, and in that condition of freedom he is able to 'Approve the best, and follow what I approve', a reversal—and perhaps a rather naïve reversal—of Ovid's pithy formulation of the problem of akrasia: *video meliora proboque, | deteriora sequor*.⁶² Later he will see the better course, and turn away. Raphael is not convinced by Adam's confidence in his capacity to see and follow the good regardless of his passions, and warns him:

take heed least Passion sway
 Thy Judgement to do aught, which else free Will
 Would not admit.⁶³

And Raphael reiterates the crucial message:

stand fast; to stand or fall
 Free in thine own Arbitrement it lies.
 Perfet within, no outward aid require.⁶⁴

⁵⁹ PL v 549–53.

⁶⁰ PL viii 607–13.

⁶¹ *foild*: overthrown, defeated (OED s.v. foil v. 4); defiled, polluted (OED 6).

⁶² Ovid, *Metamorphoses* vii 20–1, Medea speaking: 'I see the better and approve of it, but I follow the worse'. Socrates maintained that no one does evil willingly, knowing it to be evil; actions which go against what is best are the outcome either of ignorance of the facts or a lack of understanding of what is best (Plato, *Protagoras* 358d). Aquinas taught that the intellect necessarily tends towards the good, and to know the good is to choose it; Ockham, however, maintained that ethical responsibility depends upon the fact that evil is willed *as* evil, not merely under the guise of good (Myers, *Milton's Theology of Freedom*, pp. 22, 28). Eve's Fall might be construed as an example of Socrates' position, as she argues herself into a misunderstanding of what is best, but the Fall of Adam is a conscious, informed decision to disobey God and prefer life with Eve. Though one could argue that this constitutes a misunderstanding of what is the best course, the poetry hardly suggests this. He deliberately chooses the worst.

⁶³ PL viii 635–7.

⁶⁴ PL viii 640–2. *Arbitrement*: freedom of the will, free choice (OED s.v. arbitrament n. 1). *require*: seek.

How, then, does it happen that their free will leads Adam and Eve to their Fall? Adam's lesson to Eve is clear enough:

God left free the Will, for what obeyes
Reason, is free, and Reason he made right,
But bid her well beware, and still erect.⁶⁵

And reason requires the subordination, the service, of the other faculties:

know that in the Soule
Are many lesser Faculties that serve
Reason as chief.⁶⁶

The rule of reason over other faculties, and over the passions, is a divinely created hierarchy. Another such hierarchy is that which unites Adam and Eve, but Adam recognizes that it cannot be a hierarchy of power, and when Eve persists in wanting to garden alone he says, 'Go; for thy stay, not free, absents thee more'.⁶⁷ If he were to insist on her staying, that exercise of power would turn Eve into a subject in a coercive monarchy; as he says after the Fall—in answer to Eve's complaint that he should have 'Command[ed] me absolutely not to go',⁶⁸ as if he were an absolute monarch—he could only use persuasion, for 'beyond this had bin force, | And force upon free will hath here no place'.⁶⁹ Adam has preserved Eve's freedom—but at what cost to her and to himself?

Soon it seems to Eve that freedom of another sort is within her reach, and it includes the promise of superiority. Satan urges her: 'Goddess humane, reach then, and freely taste',⁷⁰ 'freely' combining the senses 'in freedom' and 'liberally', ironically reminding us that Adam has described God's gifts as 'liberal and free', that is, generous and without restrictions.⁷¹ Raphael had told Adam that God 'freely all thir pleasant fruit for food | Gave thee';⁷² now Satan repeats to Eve a perversion of that lavish divine invitation. She in turn will shortly repeat the Satanic formula when holding out the fruit to Adam and saying, 'On my experience, *Adam*, freely taste'.⁷³ Subsequently when 'She gave him of that fair enticing Fruit | With liberal hand',⁷⁴ the narrator's phrasing recalls what Adam had said when praising God for his generosity to man, 'for whose well being | So amply, and with hands so liberal | Thou hast provided all things'.⁷⁵ Thus is the liberal gift of liberty abused. Eve pauses before eating, convincing herself that the prohibition on eating from the Tree amounts to a prohibition of goodness and wisdom, and is therefore without force:

what forbids he but to know,
Forbids us good, forbids us to be wise?
Such prohibitions binde not. But if Death

⁶⁵ *PL* ix 351–3. *erect*: See Chapter 12 FALL, pp. 139–40 and Chapter 13 FANCY AND REASON, pp. 159–60.

⁶⁶ *PL* v 100–2.

⁶⁷ *PL* ix 372.

⁶⁸ *PL* ix 1156.

⁶⁹ *PL* ix 1173–4.

⁷⁰ *PL* ix 732.

⁷¹ *PL* iv 415.

⁷² *PL* vii 540–1.

⁷³ *PL* ix 988.

⁷⁴ *PL* ix 996–7.

⁷⁵ *PL* viii 361–3.

Bind us with after-bands, what profits then
Our inward freedom?⁷⁶

At this point the 'inward freedom' which she posits is, in effect, a self-willed rejection of God's commandment, which she represents as a form of bondage. After taking the fruit, Eve says that she will visit the Tree as an act of daily worship and 'the fertil burden ease | Of thy full branches offer'd free to all'.⁷⁷ Now it is seemingly the Tree itself which is so freely offering its fruit. Without really understanding it, for she has corrupted the meanings of freedom and bondage, Eve has bound herself to the service of the Tree in so far as it has come to symbolize the passions (notably pride and greed⁷⁸) to which she has enthralled herself. The fruit will, she tells herself, change her relation to Adam,

And render me more equal, and perhaps,
A thing not undesirable, sometime
Superior; for inferior who is free?⁷⁹

It may well be true in a postlapsarian monarchy that someone in an inferior, subject position cannot be truly free, but freedom before the Fall had been of a different kind, for Eve had been both inferior to Adam and yet free herself, by her own resources, to stand or fall: indeed, Adam, her superior, preserved her freedom in allowing her to go. Postlapsarian Adam also corrupts the language of freedom when he decides against trying to shield Eve from the wrath of God by taking the blame on himself, arguing that he is not free to do so; rather, he says to himself,

strict necessitie
Subdues me, and calamitous constraint
Least on my head both sin and punishment,
However insupportable, be all
Devolv'd.⁸⁰

But no necessity constrains him; and moreover necessity, as the narrator remarks elsewhere, is 'The Tyrants plea'.⁸¹ In the state of disillusion which follows the Fall, Eve sees freedom only in suicide, and says to Adam:

Then both our selves and Seed at once to free
From what we fear for both, let us make short,
Let us seek Death.⁸²

⁷⁶ *PL* ix 758–2.

⁷⁷ *PL* ix 801–2.

⁷⁸ Augustine identified *concupiscentia* (a term promoted by Tertullian) as the root of man's original sin; though often construed as primarily sexual desire, 'in Augustinian thought, concupiscence may be generally defined as the tendency which impels man to turn from the supreme and immutable good, which is God, in order to find his satisfaction and comfort in that which is mutable and less than God, that is, in creatures' (Norman Powell Williams, *The Ideas of the Fall and of Original Sin* (London, 1927), pp. 243–5, 365–6).

⁷⁹ *PL* ix 823–5.

⁸⁰ *PL* x 131–5. For this and other claims by fallen men or angels that they are subject to necessity, see Myers, *Milton's Theology of Freedom*, p. 115.

⁸¹ *PL* iv 394.

⁸² *PL* x 999–1001.

This is where the misunderstanding and the misuse of freedom have led, to the point of surrender to the bondage of death. It is another instance of the victory of passion over the rational will, though in this case the passion is that of despair.



After this failure of prelapsarian freedom, man in his postlapsarian condition will struggle to extricate himself from the Hobbesian state of nature, as Milton explained in *The Tenure of Kings and Magistrates* (1649):

No Man who knows ought, can be so stupid as to deny that all men naturally were borne free, being the image and resemblance of God himself, and were by privilege above all the creatures, born to command and not to obey: and that they liv'd so. Till from the root of *Adams* transgression, falling among themselves to doe wrong and violence, and foreseeing that such courses must needs tend to the destruction of them all, they agreed by common league to bind each other from mutual injury, and joyntly to defend themselves against any that gave disturbance or opposition to such agreement. Hence came Citties, Townes and Common-wealths.⁸³

But postlapsarian man will frequently lose his freedom to tyrants, as Michael warns Adam. Some peoples will be conquered in battle, and

enslav'd by Warr
Shall with thir freedom lost all vertu loose
And fear of God, from whom thir pietie feign'd
In sharp contest of Battel found no aide
Against invaders; therefore coold in zeale
Thenceforth shall practice how to live secure,
Worldlie or dissolute, on what thir Lords
Shall leave them to enjoy.⁸⁴

It was, says Michael, their lack of true piety which led such men to their defeat, and in this defeat they lose all virtue and fear of God; lacking 'zeale' for the Lord, they concentrate on living 'secure', accepting the limited freedom of the slave, 'on what thir Lords | Shall leave them to enjoy', contentedly subject to the monarchical power which hangs over them. Then there arises Nimrod, whom Milton considered to be the first monarch,⁸⁵

⁸³ *Tenure*: Works v 8. 'Till from the root of *Adams* transgression' indicates that Milton follows the Augustinian notion of original sin, according to which all human beings were present in Adam when he fell, and are therefore partakers of Adam's guilt (see Myers, *Milton's Theology of Freedom*, p. 134; Williams, *The Ideas of the Fall*, pp. 325ff; Augustine, *De Civitate Dei* xiii 14). There are, of course, significant differences between Milton's account of the origins of civil society and that of Hobbes: for Milton, the violence which society was established in order to contain derives from the original sin of Adam, whereas for Hobbes it is the result of man's innate desires; and the authorities which are established in a Miltonic commonwealth are only entrusted with power by the people, whereas in the Hobbesian commonwealth such power is transferred from the individuals to the sovereign.

⁸⁴ *PL* xi 797–804.

⁸⁵ Nimrod was 'the first that founded Monarchy' (*Eikonoklastes*: Works v 185; cf. *Defensio*: Works vii 396 (*tyrannorum primus*)).

who on the quiet state of men
 Such trouble brought, affecting to subdue
 Rational Libertie; yet know withall,
 Since thy original lapse, true Libertie
 Is lost, which alwayes with right Reason dwells
 Twinn'd, and from her hath no diuinal being:
 Reason in man obscur'd, or not obeyd,
 Immediately inordinate desires
 And upstart Passions catch the Government
 From Reason, and to servitude reduce
 Man till then free. Therefore since hee permits
 Within himself unworthie Powers to reign
 Over free Reason, God in Judgement just
 Subjects him from without to violent Lords;
 Who oft as undeservedly enthrall
 His outward freedom: Tyrannie must be,
 Though to the Tyrant thereby no excuse.
 Yet somtimes Nations will decline so low
 From vertue, which is reason, that no wrong,
 But Justice, and some fatal curse annex
 Deprives them of thir outward libertie,
 Thir inward lost.⁸⁶

Nimrod attempted⁸⁷ to 'subdue | Rational Libertie', that is, the liberty which resides in the free exercise of right reason, as Raphael had explained to Adam. Now, after the Fall, says Michael, 'true Libertie | Is lost, which alwayes with right Reason dwells | Twinn'd'. That is not to say that there is now no liberty or no reason, but that reason is henceforth liable to be 'obscur'd, or not obeyd'; as a result 'inordinate desires' and 'upstart Passions' rebel against and capture the government from reason, and reduce man to servitude to himself.⁸⁸ Michael's gloss 'vertue, which is reason' might seem surprising, but Milton has insisted that 'reason is choice'⁸⁹ and that virtue is a matter of freely choosing the right path.⁹⁰ The revolt of the passions against reason repeats the revolt of the rebel angels against the heavenly order.

There is, Michael continues, a necessary connection between man's servitude to passion and his servitude to tyranny; but whereas in *The Tenure of Kings and Magistrates* Milton had maintained that those who are inwardly slaves to their

⁸⁶ *PL* xii 80–101. Cf.

Thir Makers Image, answerd *Michael*, then
 Forsook them, when themselves they villifi'd
 To serve ungovern'd appetite, and took
 His Image whom they serv'd, a brutish vice.

(*PL* xi 515–18)

villifi'd: made vile and debased.

⁸⁷ *affecting*: aiming at, aspiring to (*OED*³ *s.v.* affect *v.*² 1a).

⁸⁸ For the relationship between reason and passion in Milton's thinking, see Chapter 13 *FANCY AND REASON*, p. 156.

⁸⁹ *PL* iii 108.

⁹⁰ Cf. the passage from *Areopagitica* quoted on pp. 40–1.

passions seek to reproduce this servitude at the level of the public sphere, thus creating tyrants who will allow licentious behaviour, Michael explains the connection differently, saying that political servitude to tyrants is God's punishment for man's inner slavery. So in extreme cases—and Milton would no doubt include Restoration England in such a category—'Nations will decline so low' that justice 'Deprives them of thir outward libertie, | Thir inward lost'. The rejection by the English people of the godly commonwealth for an ungodly monarchy seems also to haunt these lines on the Israelites, who faced the lure of a return to slavery:

the Race elect
Safe towards *Canaan* from the shoar advance
Through the wilde Desert, not the readiest way,
Least entring on the *Canaanite* allarmd
Warr terrifie them inexpert, and feare
Return them back to *Egypt*, choosing rather
Inglorious life with servitude.⁹¹

It is only just that nations should lose their outward liberty when they have inwardly enslaved themselves.

But there is a prospect of redemption from such an abject condition, for after the imperfect law of Moses there will be a second covenant which will lead mankind

From shadowie Types to Truth, from Flesh to Spirit,
From imposition of strict Laws, to free
Acceptance of large Grace, from servil fear
To filial, works of Law to works of Faith.⁹²

The covenant and the Mosaic laws which governed the Israelites give way for the Christian to a 'free | Acceptance of large Grace', a freedom which draws the believer also 'from servil fear | To filial', away from a servitude to passions and to tyrants into a renewed form of the 'true filial freedom'⁹³ which we saw in Adam and Eve before the Fall. However, even under this new dispensation those who wield spiritual power will abridge liberty by appropriating secular power (a charge which Milton had levelled at the Laudian clergy of the 1640s, but which applied equally to the Presbyterian ministers of the 1650s and the restored Anglican hierarchy of the 1660s). As Milton says in his sonnet to Cromwell, 'new foes aries | Threatning to bind our soules with secular chaines'.⁹⁴ For, as Michael warns Adam,

Then shall they seek to avail themselves of names,
Places and titles, and with these to joine
Secular power, though feigning still to act
By spiritual, to themselves appropriating
The Spirit of God, promis'd alike and giv'n

⁹¹ PL xii 214–20. In this passage 'the readiest way' echoes the title of Milton's *The Readie & Easie Way to Establish a Free Commonwealth* (published on the eve of the Restoration in 1660), and 'Return them back to Egypt' echoes Milton's fear, expressed at the end of that tract, that the English people are 'now chusing them a captain back for *Egypt*' (*Readie Way: Works* vi 149).

⁹² PL xii 303–6.

⁹³ PL iv 294.

⁹⁴ Sonnet XVI l. 12: *Works* i 65.

To all Beleevers; and from that pretense,
 Spiritual Lawes by carnal power shall force
 On every conscience; Laws which none shall finde
 Left them inrould, or what the Spirit within
 Shall on the heart engrave. What will they then
 But force the Spirit of Grace it self, and binde
 His consort Libertie.⁹⁵

Though Milton was not quite an antinomian,⁹⁶ this passage is clear in its warning against those who would seek to impose laws on the Spirit, on what Milton defines as 'the Spirit of Grace it self' and 'His consort Libertie'. For postlapsarian man grace brings liberty—that is, the freedom to embrace salvation and escape from the bondage of the passions—but some will refuse the liberty which the Spirit brings, and some will seek to deny that liberty to others.



Milton returns to liberty and servitude, expanding his definitions, in his two subsequent poems, *Paradise Regain'd* and *Samson Agonistes*. In the former the Apostles seek from God the intervention of the long-awaited Messiah to 'free thy people from thir yoke',⁹⁷ but such direct action to implement political freedom turns out to be one of the temptations which the Son faces, and rejects. Satan urges him:

If Kingdom move thee not, let move thee Zeal,
 And Duty; Zeal and Duty are not slow;
 But on Occasions forelock watchful wait.
 They themselves rather are occasion best,
 Zeal of thy Fathers house, Duty to free
 Thy Country from her Heathen servitude.⁹⁸

The moral clue here lies in the word 'Occasions'. Occasio or Fortuna is the pagan goddess who arbitrarily gives good things to men and as arbitrarily snatches them away. To seize Fortune by the forelock would be to turn away from divine providence and embrace an amoral world of chance and opportunity. It would be a rejection of *kairos*, the divine time scheme.⁹⁹ Why, insists Satan, does Jesus not lead a rebellion against Tiberius, and

expel this monster from his Throne
 Now made a stye, and in his place ascending
 A victor people free from servile yoke?¹⁰⁰

⁹⁵ *PL* xii 515–26.

⁹⁶ See Norman T. Burns, "'Then Stood Up Phinehas': Milton's Antinomianism, and Samson's", *Milton Studies* 33 (1997) 27–46, and Christopher John Donato, 'Against the Law: Milton's (Anti?) Nomianism in *De Doctrina Christiana*', *Harvard Theological Review* 104 (2011) 69–91. There is a Satanic form of antinomianism, evident when Satan resents what he sees as the imposition of 'Law and Edict on us, who without law | Erre not' (*PL* v 798–9).

⁹⁷ *PR* ii 48.

⁹⁸ *PR* iii 171–6.

⁹⁹ See Hammond, *Milton and the People*, pp. 230–9.

¹⁰⁰ *PR* iv 100–2.

The Israelites may not have vaunted their freedom, but Samson himself had loved bondage more than liberty; in his case, this was a servitude to his wife, for

foul effeminacy held me yok't
Her Bond-slave; O indignity, O blot
To Honour and Religion! servil mind
Rewarded well with servil punishment!
The base degree to which I now am fall'n,
These rags, this grinding, is not yet so base
As was my former servitude, ignoble,
Unmanly, ignominious, infamous,
True slavery, and that blindness worse then this,
That saw not how degeneratly I serv'd.¹⁰⁵

A servile mind has been aptly rewarded with a servile punishment, and yet the outward servitude, the condition of being a wretched prisoner, is less ignominious than the inward servitude of Samson to his infatuation with Dalila, which led him away from his vocation to serve God by freeing his own people.¹⁰⁶ The Philistine officer urges him to 'compliance' by which to 'win the Lords | To favour, and perhaps to set thee free'.¹⁰⁷ But any freedom which might be conferred by the Philistines would not be true freedom: that comes only when Samson begins to hear and then to follow the inner workings of the Spirit; he identifies these only as 'Some rousing motions',¹⁰⁸ but they are, for Milton, examples of the freely given grace from God that itself confers 'true filial freedom',¹⁰⁹ which is true filial service. Samson would, finally, be able to concur with the Lady in *A Maske* when she says defiantly to the enchanter Comus:

Thou canst not touch the freedom of my minde
With all thy charms, although this corporal rinde
Thou haste immanac'd, while Heav'n sees good.¹¹⁰

With similar, somewhat jejune, confidence her Elder Brother had asserted that 'Vertue may be assail'd, but never hurt, | Surpriz'd by unjust force, but not enthrall'd'.¹¹¹ (Here 'enthrall'd' means 'enslaved'.) Milton's imagination ran much upon bondage, physical and metaphysical: the binding of the Lady by Comus and of Samson by the Philistines; Samson's enslavement to his own desires; the self-enthrallment of Satan to evil; and the bondage of sin from which the Son redeems Adam and his heirs. For God has the power to liberate from slavery, inward or outward, as the Psalmist says in Milton's translation:

In straights and in distress
Thou didst me disinthrall.¹¹²



¹⁰⁵ SA ll. 410–19. *effeminacy*: undue susceptibility to the sexual attractions of women.

¹⁰⁶ SA ll. 36–42. ¹⁰⁷ SA ll. 1411–12. ¹⁰⁸ SA l. 1382. ¹⁰⁹ PL iv 294.

¹¹⁰ *Maske* ll. 662–4; *Works* i 110. ¹¹¹ *Maske* ll. 588–9; *Works* i 107.

¹¹² 'Psal. IV. Aug. 10. 1653' ll. 3–4; *Works* i 126. *disinthrall*: the *OED*'s only previous citation is from Sandys' paraphrase on the Psalms of 1636.

In the *Defensio Secunda* (1654) Milton retrospectively placed most of his prose writings under the sign of liberty, maintaining that they had been devoted to the definition and the promotion of freedom in three areas: in religion, in the civic sphere, and in domestic life.¹¹³ He had sought

si qua in re possem libertatis veræ ac solidæ rationem promovere; quæ non foris, sed intus quærenda, non pugnando, sed vitam rectè instituendo, rectèque administrando adipiscenda potissimum est. Cum itaque tres omnino animadverterem libertatis esse species, quæ nisi adsint, vita ulla transigi commodè vix possit, Ecclesiasticam, domesticam seu privatam, atque civilem.¹¹⁴

From this perspective the anti-prelatical tracts of the early 1640s had maintained the freedom of individual Protestants to seek their own path to salvation, free from the tyranny—as he saw it—of the bishops. The polemics in defence of the regicide¹¹⁵ and the new republic had promoted the freedom of citizens to choose their rulers, free from the tyranny—as he saw it—of an hereditary monarch. And the divorce tracts had argued for the liberty of an individual to end an oppressive marriage. While the principles to which Milton appeals when addressing threats to civil liberty may sometimes take their origin from Roman ideals and definitions, what fundamentally motivates Milton's writings on liberty, providing both their rhetorical resources and their passionate commitment, is his vision of true Christian liberty, an appeal to the liberty of the Gospel against the deadening hand of law.¹¹⁶ The ideas of freedom and tyranny, of service and servitude, which will flower in *Paradise Lost* and the other later poems, are worked out first in the corpus of Milton's prose writings.

As early as 1641 Milton said that he had 'determin'd to lay up as the best treasure, and solace of a good old age, if God voutsafe it me, the honest liberty of free speech from my youth, where I shall think it available in so dear a concernment as the Churches good'.¹¹⁷ It is the primary liberty of free speech which enables all other liberties. Such is the liberty of Abdiel speaking truth in the face of Satan.

¹¹³ In the same year, 1654, he wrote to Henry Oldenburg that 'this unexpected contest with the Adversaries of Liberty took me off against my will when I was intent on far different and altogether pleasanter studies' (*hoc cum libertatis adversariis inopinatum certamen, diversis longe, & amœnioribus omnino me studiis intentum, ad se rapuit invitum*) (*Works* xii 64–5); it is not clear what these *amœnioribus studiis* were, but they might have been work on *PL*.

¹¹⁴ 'to consider in what way I could contribute to the progress of real and substantial liberty; which is to be sought for not from without, but within, and is to be obtained principally not by fighting, but by the just regulation and by the proper conduct of life. Reflecting, therefore, that there are in all three species of liberty, without which it is scarcely possible to pass any life with comfort, namely, ecclesiastical, domestic or private, and civil' (*Defensio Secunda: Works* viii 130–1).

¹¹⁵ Martin Dzelzainis argues that Milton never precisely defended regicide, because in his eyes Charles was no longer king when he was executed: see Martin Dzelzainis, 'Milton and the Regicide', in *John Milton: Life, Writing, Reputation*, edited by Paul Hammond and Blair Worden (Oxford, 2010), pp. 91–105. He did, however, defend the deposing and execution of the man who, in the eyes of most Englishmen, and of his European readers, was still the anointed King of England.

¹¹⁶ In this respect the otherwise illuminating work of Quentin Skinner on Milton's concepts of liberty and slavery is incomplete, in that Professor Skinner does not significantly address Milton's primarily religious motivation.

¹¹⁷ *Reason: Works* iii 232.

At the beginning of *Areopagitica* (1644) Milton placed an epigraph from Euripides which evokes the Greek tradition of free speech in a free commonwealth without the coercive imposition of the will of a single ruler.¹¹⁸ Liberty of free speech in the face of power, which the Athenians called *παρρησία*,¹¹⁹ was, says Milton, permitted even to slaves in Roman society, for

The *Romans* had a time once every year, when their Slaves might freely speake their minds, twere hard if the free borne people of *England*, with whom the voyce of Truth for these many yeares, even against the proverb, hath not bin heard but in corners... when liberty of speaking, then which nothing is more sweet to man, was girded, and straight lac't almost to a broken-winded tizzick... if now the conceal'd, the aggrev'd, and long persecuted Truth, could not be suffer'd speak... twere something pinching in a Kingdome of free spirits.¹²⁰

Milton's 'Kingdome of free spirits' was being endangered, he thought, because the bishops considered their authority to be *jure divino*, whereas episcopacy was, properly considered, only a human institution which men had the right to challenge and change, having, indeed, 'the same humane priviledge, that all men have ever had since *Adam*, being borne free'.¹²¹ The liturgy itself was for Milton a form of bondage, prescribing speech in a set, customary form and proscribing the free testimony of the Spirit, for 'how constantly the Priest puts on his Gown and Surplice, so constantly doth his praier put on a servile yoaik of Liturgie'.¹²² Rather than encourage that free prayer, free study, and free debate which led to truth (or, as Milton often says, to a seemingly personified 'Truth') the bishops imposed 'Servile, and thral-like feare',¹²³ restricting public discussion, and with it the liberation which comes from the truth:

For the property of Truth is, where she is publicly taught, to unyoke & set free the minds and spirits of a Nation first from the thraldom of sin and superstition, after which all honest and legal freedom of civil life cannot be long absent; but Prelaty whom the tyrant custom begot a natural tyrant in religion, & in state the agent & minister of tyranny... [turns everything] to the drosse and scum of slavery breeding and settling both in the bodies and the souls of all such as doe not in time with the

¹¹⁸ See Hammond, *Milton and the People*, pp. 77–81. Later in the tract he says: 'Give me the liberty to know, to utter, and to argue freely according to conscience, above all liberties' (*Areopagitica: Works* iv 346). He also recalls that when visiting Italian scholars in 1638–9 he was 'counted happy to be born in such a place of *Philosophic* freedom, as they suppos'd England was, while themselves did nothing but bemoan the servil condition into which lerning amongst them was brought... And though I knew that England then was groaning loudest under the Prelaticall yoaik, neverthelesse I took it as a pledge of future happines, that other Nations were so perswaded of her liberty' (*Areopagitica: Works* iv 329–30).

¹¹⁹ It was particularly claimed by Athenians as their privilege (*LSJ s.v. παρρησία*). The idea of *παρρησία* was studied by Michel Foucault in some late lectures: see his posthumously published *Fearless Speech*, edited by Joseph Pearson (Los Angeles, 2001), and 'Parrēsia', translated by Graham Burchell, *Critical Inquiry* 41 (2015) 219–53.

¹²⁰ *Animadversions: Works* iii 112. *tizzick*: coughing (*OED*³ *s.v. phthisis n.*).

¹²¹ *Episcopacy: Works* iii 81.

¹²² *Eikonoklastes: Works* v 221.

¹²³ *Reformation: Works* iii 3. Cf. Milton's warning that episcopacy will 'use that fleshly strength which ye put into his hands to subdue your spirits by a servile and blind superstition, and that againe shall hold such dominion over your captive minds' (*Reason: Works* iii 269).

soveran treacle of sound doctrine provide to fortifie their hearts against her Hierarchy. The service of God who is Truth, her Liturgy confesses to be perfect freedom, but her works and her opinions declare that the service of Prelaty is perfect slavery, and by consequence perfect falshood.¹²⁴

Subservience to bishops is a form of slavery, and therefore a form of falsehood; by contrast truth sets a nation free, first from sin and superstition, and then from any civic coercion.

It is, says Milton, crucial for the Christian religion that men be free to probe every doctrine, for without that liberty there is no religion.¹²⁵ For Milton all forms of freedom, civic and ecclesiastical, lead to truth—if rightly used—and truth is known pre-eminently by the study of scripture: ‘religion, and . . . native liberty . . . [are] two things God hath inseparably knit together, and hath disclos’d to us that they who seek to corrupt our religion are the same that would inthrall our civill liberty.’¹²⁶ This liberty is quite distinct from that republican liberty prized by classical Romans, for it is specifically the liberty of those who have been freed from the bondage of the law by the Gospel, and who have been transformed by the redemptive work wrought by Christ from being servants to being sons. In 1659, on the eve of the Restoration which would re-establish episcopacy and, with it, state control over religion, Milton spelled out his definition of freedom, and warned against its imminent loss, by quoting St Paul:

even so we, when we were children, were in bondage under the rudiments of the world: but when the fullness of time was come, God sent forth his son &c. to redeem them that were under the law, that we might receive the adoption of sons &c. Wherefore thou art no more a servant, but a son &c. But now &c. how turn ye again to the weak and beggarly rudiments, whereunto ye desire again to be in bondage? . . . Hence it plainly appears that if we be not free we are not sons, but still servants unadopted; and if we turn again to those weak and beggarly rudiments, we are not free . . . Ill was our condition chang’d from legal to evangelical, and small advantage gotten by the gospel, if for the spirit of adoption to freedom, promis’d us, we receive again the spirit of bondage to fear; if our fear which was then servile towards God only, must be now servile in religion towards men: strange also and proposterous fear, if when and wherein it hath attained by the

¹²⁴ *Reason: Works* iii 272. For the prayer which Milton cites here see p. 170 n. 19. For Milton’s understanding of custom as a form of tyranny cf. pp. 173 and 200–1, and his warning in *Defensio Secunda* against those who would introduce into church and state the worst of all tyrannies, the tyranny of their own corrupted customs and opinions: *pessimamque omnium tyrannidem, vel pravaram consuetudinum vel opinionum suarum & in rempublicam & in ecclesiam inducant* (*Works* viii 238).

¹²⁵ Cf. *quantum inter sit religionis Christianae, concedi libertatem non excutiendae solum cuiusque doctrinae, palamque ventilandae, sed etiam de ea, prout cuique fide persuasum est, sentiendi atque etiam scribendi. sine qua libertate, religio nulla, Evangelium nullum est; sola vis viget; qua stare Christianam religionem, turpe et probrosum est: servitus adhuc durat; non legi, ut olim, divinae, sed, quod miserrimum est, humanae; vel, verius ut dicam, inhumanae tyrannidi servienda* (‘How crucial it is for the Christian religion that the freedom be granted not simply of probing every doctrine, and of winnowing it in public, but also of thinking and indeed writing about it, in accordance with each person’s firm belief. Without that liberty, there is no religion, no Gospel; violence alone prevails; but it is disgraceful and shameful that the Christian religion should stand upon violence: our slavery endures still; not as previously to divine law, but what is most wretched of all, to human law; or, to speak more accurately, we must be slaves to inhuman tyranny’) (*De Doctrina: OCW* viii 8–9).

¹²⁶ *Apology: Works* iii 336.

redemption of our Saviour to be filial only towards God, it must be now servile towards the magistrate. Who by subjecting us to his punishment in these things, brings back into religion that law of terror and satisfaction, belonging now only to civil crimes; and thereby in effect abolishes the gospel by establishing again the law to a far worse yoke of servitude upon us then before.¹²⁷

Magistrates¹²⁸ who impose the law upon Englishmen's free exercise of religion will be 'bereaving them of that sacred libertie which our Saviour with his own blood purchas'd for them'.¹²⁹ It is in a free commonwealth rather than in a monarchy that this liberty is best preserved and fostered:

The whole freedom of man consists either in spiritual or civil libertie. As for spiritual, who can be at rest, who can enjoy any thing in this world with contentment, who hath not libertie to serve God and to save his own soul, according to the best light which God hath planted in him to that purpose, by the reading of his reveal'd will and the guidance of his holy spirit? . . .

This liberty of conscience which above all other things ought to be to all men dearest and most precious, no government more inclinable not to favor only but to protect, then a free Commonwealth; as being most magnanimous, most fearless and confident of its own fair proceedings.¹³⁰

Such liberty 'is the certain and the sacred gift of God'.¹³¹

Though Milton's writings about religious liberty are mostly to be found in his campaigns against the curtailing of individual freedoms by the bishops, or the interference in matters of religion by the authorities of the civil state, there are some instances in which he makes it clear that, theologically, the free will of postlapsarian man is in effect his restoration through Christ¹³² to a pristine, Adamic liberty, and that man is free either to embrace or to refuse that grace which offers salvation:

Quaenam autem est ista voluntatis renovatio nisi eius ad libertatem pristinam restitutio? . . . Quid autem amplius postulare à Deo nostra optio potest quàm ut liberi à servitute peccati ad imaginemque divinam restituti, possimus esse salvi si velimus?

¹²⁷ *Treatise: Works* vi 31–2, citing Galatians iv. *rudiments*: etymologically from the Latin *rudimentum*, and *rudis*, 'imperfect'. Cf. Milton's description of Anglican liturgical practices as 'the Jewish beggary, of old cast rudiments' (*Reformation: Works* iii 2) and his comment that 'ceremony . . . is but a rudiment of the Law' (*Reason: Works* iii 247). The implication is that to depend upon law and ceremony is to be like a child who understands only the rudiments, the earliest elements, of a subject, rather than like an adult who deploys his own reason in the free pursuit of truth.

¹²⁸ In the seventeenth century 'magistrate' meant 'A civil officer charged with the administration of the law, a member of the executive government. . . . In this general sense the *magistrate* may be the sovereign or any subordinate officer with executive power within the state. However the term came increasingly to be applied to local justices, at first in the English boroughs and later in the countryside as well' (*OED*³ s.v. *magistrate*).

¹²⁹ *Treatise: Works* vi 32.

¹³⁰ *Readie Way: Works* vi 141–2.

¹³¹ *Treatise: Works* vi 35.

¹³² In his poetry Milton never uses the term 'Christ' after his poem 'On the new forcers of Conscience under the Long PARLIAMENT' (c.1646); in *PL* he uses only the term 'the Son', with a single reference to 'Jesus son of Mary' (x 183), when the allusion is to the historical figure; *PR* uses both 'Jesus' and 'Son of God'. In *De Doctrina* Milton frequently refers to both *Filius* and *Christus*; he seems to prefer *Filius* when speaking theologically about the Son of God (e.g. *OCW* viii 128–34), and *Christus* when referring to the Jesus of the Gospels and his sayings (e.g. *OCW* viii 156–8).

Volemus enim certè si liberi sumus: sin fortè quis nolit, accusare neminem nisi semetipsum potest.¹³³

Vitae novae prima munia sunt intelligentia rerum spiritualium, et charitas sive sanctitas vita[e.] Quae duo munia quemadmodum in morte spirituali l[a]befacta et quasi extincta sunt, ita nunc in vita nova spirituali intellectus magna ex parte luci suae, suae voluntas libertati in Christo restituitur.¹³⁴

The new life (*vita nova*) which Milton celebrates here is the life of a renewed intellect and a will restored to its freedom. Having been freed from slavery to sin, the free Christian is not to be re-enslaved by bishops and magistrates:

Libertas Christiana est qua liberatore Christo, à servitute peccati, adeoque legis hominúmque praescripto velut manumissi liberamur, ut filii ex servis facti, ex pueris adulti Deo per spiritum veritatis ducem in charitate serviamus.¹³⁵

The law from which man has been freed is the covenantal law of the Old Testament, and so much is orthodox Christian teaching; but it is clear that Milton also holds that through his redemption man has been freed from bondage to human laws as well: not that one need not obey the laws of the state, but rather that the state should not create laws which impose obligations upon the free Christian which God himself does not impose. For *si Deus nos iudicaturus est per legem libertatis, cur homo nos praeiudicat per legem servitutis?*¹³⁶ Therefore, *Quam libertatem si magistratus tollit, tollit ipsum Evangelium.*¹³⁷ It was Charles I who was primarily responsible for the curtailment of religious freedom by the government through the apparatus of the state church and its bishops, and in the King's apologia *Eikon Basilike* Milton saw evidence of the 'combination between Tyranny and fals Religion . . . Heer we may see the very dark roots of them both turn'd up, and how they twine and interweave one another in the Earth, though above ground shooting up in two sever'd Branches.'¹³⁸

¹³³ 'But what exactly is this renewal of the will except its restoration to former liberty? . . . Now what more can our power of choice demand from God than that, being free from the slavery of sin and restored to the divine image, we can be saved if we wish? For surely we shall wish it if we are free; but if anyone should perhaps refuse it, he can accuse no one except himself' (*De Doctrina*: OCW viii 560–3).

¹³⁴ 'The main functions of the new life are an understanding of spiritual things, and charity or holiness of life. Just as these two functions were weakened and virtually extinguished in spiritual death, so now in the new spiritual life, in Christ the intellect is in great part restored to its [original] enlightenment, and the will [is restored] to its freedom' (*De Doctrina*: OCW viii 598–9; square brackets in the original).

¹³⁵ 'Christian freedom is that whereby, with Christ freeing [us], we are freed from the slavery of sin—and likewise from the prescript of the law and of human beings—like manumitted [slaves], so that, having become sons after being slaves, [and] adults after being children, we may be slaves to God in charity through the spirit of truth as our guide' (*De Doctrina*: OCW viii 716–17; square brackets in the original). The bold type in OCW reproduces the emphases in the original scribal MS.

¹³⁶ 'If God is going to judge us according to the law of freedom, why does man prejudice us according to the law of slavery?' (*De Doctrina*: OCW viii 718–19).

¹³⁷ 'If a magistrate removes this freedom, he removes the Gospel itself' (*De Doctrina*: OCW viii 722–3).

¹³⁸ *Eikonoklastes*: Works v 226.

'Freedom' and 'liberty' are of course malleable terms in the political sphere, vulnerable to contentious definition and polemical manipulation from different standpoints. One royalist writer condemned Parliament's use of the term 'free state' to describe the republic which it had instituted, saying that 'Their expressions have generally a false sense, or a false application', for 'all that freedome, which their Free State shall enjoy, is a libertie in these men to do what they please', and 'the people justly deserve this base slavery, if they discern not the difference to live free subjects to a lawfull Monarch, from this Unfree State under upstart Tirants'.¹³⁹ Milton, throughout his political tracts, maintained that the English were a free people, and England a free nation.¹⁴⁰ But as the Civil War led to the Commonwealth, and what seemed to him to be its disappointed hopes, Milton appears to have placed less and less faith in the capacity of the people to embrace true liberty.¹⁴¹ He thought that 'liberty' was often a cover for the uninhibited pursuit of self-gratification: 'For indeed none can love freedom heartilie, but good men; the rest love not freedom, but licence'.¹⁴² 'Licence they mean when they cry libertie'.¹⁴³ This connection, the deep-rooted moral and psychological link which binds man into slavery, actually inclines the man who is slave to his passions to embrace tyranny because it affords him the easy life devoid of decision making and responsibility.¹⁴⁴ For, as he says in *Of Reformation Touching Church-Discipline in England* (1641),

Well knows every wise Nation that their Liberty consists in manly and honest labours, in sobriety and rigorous honour to the Marriage Bed... and when the people slacken, and fall to loosenes, and riot, then doe they as much as if they laid downe their necks for some wily Tyrant to get up and ride. Thus learnt *Cyrus* to tame the *Lydians*, whom

¹³⁹ *Traytors Deciphered in an Answer to a Shamelesse Pamphlet, Intituled, A Declaration of the Parliament of England* (n.p., 1650), pp. 5, 55. The writer also objects to Parliamentarians invoking the Roman republic as a model, for 'If they had well weighed the miseries of the Roman State by such popular reformations, as they now pretend, & how often the streetes ran with the blood of the Citizens upon such occasions, & how lightly they were carried to their own ruine under the false pretences of libertie, and to serve private ambition, they would not have been so fond of that condition' (pp. 56–7).

¹⁴⁰ For examples see Mohl, *John Milton and His Commonplace Book*, pp. 214–22. But Milton also regarded himself as bringing liberty to other European nations through his writings: *Videor jam mihi... libertatem diu pulsam atque exulem, longo intervallo domum ubique gentium reducere... restitutum nempe civilem librum vitæ cultum, per urbes, per regna, perque nationes disseminare* ('it seems to me, that... I am bringing back, bringing home to every nation, liberty, so long driven out, so long an exile... that I am spreading abroad among the cities, the kingdoms, and nations, the restored culture of citizenship and freedom of life') (*Defensio Secunda: Works* viii 14–15).

¹⁴¹ See Hammond, *Milton and the People*, esp. ch. 8.

¹⁴² *Tenure: Works* v 1.

¹⁴³ Sonnet XII l. 11: *Works* i 63 (written in 1646). Milton is referring to the 'Hoggs' who rejected the arguments of his divorce tracts. The link between liberty and licence is a polemical commonplace in this period: see Skinner, *Hobbes and Republican Liberty*, pp. 30–4. Parliament itself said that those in negotiation with Charles' party were seeking to enslave 'the People, whom they deceive in the mean time with the name of Liberty, with which they would cloak their own licentiousness' (*A Declaration of the Parliament of England, in Vindication of Their Proceedings... 27 Septembr. 1649* (London, 1649), p. 22). The contrast between liberty and licence goes back at least to Livy, who wrote: *Hac mercede iuventus nobilis corrupta non modo non ire obviæ iniuriæ, sed propalam licentiam suam malle quam omnium libertatem* (*Ab Urbe Condita* iii 37: 'The young nobles were corrupted by these bribes, and not only did not oppose injustice, but openly preferred their own licence to the liberty of all'). Tacitus said that fools called licence liberty: *licentiae, quam stulti libertatem vocitant* (*Dialogus de Oratore* 40).

¹⁴⁴ See the quotation from *Tenure*, p. 173.

by Armes he could not, whilst they kept themselves from Luxury; with one easy Proclamation to set up *Stews*, dancing, feasting, & dicing he made them soone his slaves.¹⁴⁵

Liberty, then, requires the manly exercise of reason (enlightened by divine grace and informed by study of the scriptures) whereas licence entails the corrupting tyranny of the passions which a wily ruler can exploit, creating a docile people who are content with material pleasures. It would, says Milton at the beginning of his *Defensio* of the English people (1651), be a bad state of affairs if slavery were eloquent and liberty mute, and if reason were unable to fulfil its role as a champion of liberty:

Pessimè enim vel natura vel legibus comparatum fuisset, si arguta servitus, libertas muta esset. . . miserum esset, si hæc ipsa ratio, quo utimur Dei munere, non multò plura ad homines conservandos, liberandos, et, quantum natura fert, inter se æquandos, quàm ad opprimendos et sub unius imperio malè perdendos argumenta suppeditaret.¹⁴⁶

The predicament of such a people under the dominion of one man is exemplified for Milton by the rule of Charles I, and in *Eikonoklastes* Milton addresses the claim made by Charles that his own freedom required him to exercise his reason and conscience in defence of his kingdom. Charles had maintained, says Milton,

*that reason ought to be us'd to men, force and terror to Beasts; that he deserves to be a slave who captivates the rationall soverantie of his soule, and liberty of his will to compulsion; that he would not forfeit that freedom which cannot be deni'd him, as a King, because it belongs to him as a Man and a Christian, though to preserve his Kingdom, but rather dye enjoying the Empire of his soule, then live in such a vassalage as not to use his reason and conscience to like or dislike as a King.*¹⁴⁷

As a purely philosophical argument—that a man should not enslave the freedom of his own reason and conscience by submitting to external compulsion—this is admirable; but, says Milton, it leads Charles to exercise this freedom not *qua* individual but *qua* king, and thus to impose his own reason and conscience on his subjects, thereby forcing them into precisely that servitude which he himself claimed the right to avoid:

He confesses a rational sovrantie of soule, and freedom of will in every man, and yet with an implicit repugnancy would have his reason the sovrane of that sovranty, and

¹⁴⁵ *Reformation: Works* iii 52–3. For Milton's association of liberty with manliness cf. his diagnosis of the English people being in 'a degenerat and fal'n spirit from the apprehension of native liberty, and true manlines' (*Divorce: Works* iii 372); and his encomium of German manliness: *Hinc Germanorum virile & infestum servituti robur* ('Here is the manly strength of the Germans, disdainful of slavery') (*Defensio Secunda: Works* viii 12–13).

¹⁴⁶ 'Nature and laws would be in bad state if slavery were eloquent, and liberty mute. . . And it would be deplorable indeed, if the reason with which mankind is endued, which is God's gift, should not furnish more arguments for men's preservation, for their deliverance, and, as much as the nature of the thing will bear, for their equality, than for their oppression and utter ruin under one man's dominion' (*Defensio: Works* vii 10–13). It is worth noting here the parenthetical qualification which Milton applies to the ideal of equality.

¹⁴⁷ *Eikonoklastes: Works* v 131. The italics here and in the next example indicate that Milton is quoting from or paraphrasing Charles' text.

would captivate and make useless that natural freedom of will in all other men but himself. But them that yeeld him this obedience he so well rewards, as to pronounce them worthy to be Slaves... It was not the inward use of his reason and of his conscience that would content him, but to use them both as a Law over all his Subjects, *in whatever he declar'd as a King to like or dislike*. Which use of reason, most reasonless and unconscionable, is the utmost that any Tyrant ever pretended over his Vassals.¹⁴⁸

But it was to be safe and free, not to be vassals, that men first entered into civil society.¹⁴⁹

The rights of a free people vis-à-vis their rulers are addressed in the dispute with Salmasius which Milton conducted in his *Pro Populo Anglicano Defensio* of 1651.¹⁵⁰ Salmasius' royalist doctrines are, says Milton, slavish both in origin and in content: *Adeò ut hæc non ab homine libero in libera civitate... sed in ergastulo quovis aut catastâ, tam servili ingenio atque animo scripta esse videantur*.¹⁵¹ But Milton concedes that few men truly desire liberty, or are capable of using it: *fateor paucos ferè libertatem velle, aut eâ posse uti, solos nempe sapientes, et magnanimos; pars longè maxima justos dominos mavult, sed tamen justos*.¹⁵² So when Salmasius alleges that in their civil wars the English people destroyed the luxurious conditions which royal governance had brought about, Milton maintains that this supposed luxury was only a means of accustoming the people to bear their slavery, a slavery which they resolutely threw off:

At insulam beatam sub regibus, et luxu affluentem discordiis deformârunt. Immo luxu penè perditam, quò tolerantior servitutis esset, extinctis deinde legibus, et mancipata religione, servientem liberârunt.¹⁵³

¹⁴⁸ *Eikonoklastes*: Works v 131–2.

¹⁴⁹ *Primò homines ut tutò ac liberè sine vi atque injuriis vitam agerent, convenere in civitatem* ('It was in order to live safe and free, without suffering violence or wrong, that men first entered into a civil society') (*Defensio*: Works vii 34–5).

¹⁵⁰ Salmasius (Claude de Saumaise) had denounced the execution of the King in his *Defensio Regia* (1649), to which Milton replied in his *Pro Populo Anglicano Defensio* (1651). After Pierre du Moulin's *Regii Sanguinis Clamor* attacking Milton's treatise appeared in 1652, Milton replied with his *Defensio Secunda* (1654).

¹⁵¹ 'So that these doctrines, so slavish in nature and spirit, seem to have been penned not by a free man in a free state... but in some slave prison or on a platform where slaves are sold' (*Defensio*: Works vii 70–3). Salmasius himself, says Milton, is a servile creature: *vile animal Circæum, porcus immundus, turpissima servitute etiam sub femina assuetus; unde nullum gustum virtutis, et quæ ex ea nascitur, libertatis habes; omnes esse servos cupis, quòd nihil in tuo pectore generosum aut liberum sentis, nihil non ignobile atque servile aut loqueris aut spiras* ('a miserable Circean beast, a filthy swine, accustomed to foulest slavery even under a woman; so that you have not the least relish of manliness or of the liberty which is born of it. You would have all men slaves, because you do not have in your heart any magnanimous or free sentiment; you say nothing, you breathe nothing, except what is mean and servile') (*Defensio*: Works vii 510–13).

¹⁵² 'I confess there are but few, and those men of great wisdom and courage, that either desire liberty or are capable of using it. Far the greatest part of the world prefers just masters—masters, observe, but just ones' (*Defensio*: Works vii 74–5).

¹⁵³ 'With their quarrels they defaced and dishonoured an island which under its kings was happy and swam in luxury.' Yes, when its moral ruin through luxury was almost accomplished that it might the more indifferently bear with enslavement—when its laws were abolished, and its religion bought and sold—then they delivered it from slavery' (*Defensio*: Works vii 284–7). The italicized sentence is a quotation from Salmasius.

However, only some of the people threw off this slavery: others actually preferred the condition of slavery which permitted them a life of sloth and luxury: *Pars hæc servitutem et pacem cum ignavia atque luxuria ullis conditionibus volebat; pars altera tamen libertatem poscebat, pacem non nisi firmam atque honestam.*¹⁵⁴

Fundamentally it is Christ who liberates: *nihil aequè ac religio Christiana duas terribilissimas pestes, servitutem ac metum, ex vita ac mente hominum eiiciat atque expellat.*¹⁵⁵ Underlying Milton's concept of liberty is the sacrifice of Christ on the cross, who purchased for mankind a liberty which is not only personal but also collective:

quem quis nescit non privati solùm, sed etiam servi personam ideò sumpsisse, ut nos liberi essemus. Neque hoc de interna tantùm libertate intelligendum est, non de civili... Ipse sub tyrannis nascendo, serviendo, patiendò omnem honestam libertatem nobis acquisivit: ut posse servitutem, si necesse est, æquo animo pati, sic posse ad libertatem honestè aspirare non abstulit Christus, sed majorem in modum dedit.¹⁵⁶

Ultimately liberty comes not from the ruler, but from God: *Libertas nostra non Cæsaris, verùm ab ipso Deo natale nobis donum est.*¹⁵⁷ So it is that because liberty is God-given, it must also be godly, and requires that those who exercise it display temperance and piety; yet this is beyond the capacity of most men, as Milton explains at length in the *Defensio Secunda* (1654):

non convenit, non cadit in tales esse liberos; ut ut libertatem strepant atque jactent, servi sunt & domi & foris, nec sentiunt; & cùm senserint tandem, & velut ferocientes equi frænum indignantes, non veræ libertatis amore (quam solus vir bonus rectè potest appetere) sed superbiâ & cupiditatibus pravis impulsì, jugum excutere conabuntur... Scitote enim... quemadmodum esse liberum idem planè est atque esse pium, esse sapientem, esse justum ac temperantem, sui providum, alieni abstinentem, atque exinde demum magnanimum ac fortem, ita his contrarium esse, idem esse atque esse servum; solitòque Dei judicio & quasi talione justissimâ fit, ut quæ gens se regere séque moderari nequit, suisque ipsa se libidinibus in servitutem tradidit, ea aliis, quibus nollet, dominis tradatur; nec libens modò, sed invita quoque serviat... si servire durum est, atque nolitis, rectæ rationi obtemperare discite, vestrùm esse compotes.¹⁵⁸

¹⁵⁴ 'This part was for slavery and peace, with sloth and luxury, upon any terms; the other part, however, kept demanding liberty, and no peace except what was sure and honourable' (*Defensio: Works* vii 510–11).

¹⁵⁵ 'nothing can eject and expel slavery and fear, those twin loathsome pests, from human life and mind so well as the Christian religion can' (*De Doctrina: OCV* viii 2–5).

¹⁵⁶ 'Who does not know that he put himself into the condition not only of a subject, but even of a servant, that we might be free? Nor is this to be understood of inward liberty only, to the exclusion of civil liberty... He himself, by being born, and serving, and dying, under tyrants, has purchased all rightful liberty for us. As he has not withheld from us the resignation to submit patiently, if we must, to slavery, so he has not forbidden us to strive nobly for our liberty—indeed, he has granted this in fuller measure' (*Defensio: Works* vii 144–5).

¹⁵⁷ 'Our liberty is not Caesar's, but God's own birthday gift to us' (*Defensio: Works* vii 150–1).

¹⁵⁸ 'It does not suit, it does not fall to the lot of such men to be free. However they may bawl and boast about liberty, they are slaves both at home and abroad, and yet perceive it not; and when they shall at length perceive it, they will disdain the curb like headstrong horses, and from the impulse of pride and little desires, not from a love of genuine liberty (which a good man alone can properly attain) they will try to shake off the yoke... For know... that as to be free is precisely the same thing

Obedience to reason delivers liberty, which is synonymous with piety, with temperance, and with courage in the defence of that liberty. Liberty is synonymous with self-government, and the failure of self-government leads to psychological and political servitude. By contrast with those who surrendered themselves to such servitude, those who fought for true liberty were inspired not by personal glory or by any desire to emulate the ancients, but by a righteous zeal:

Quos non legum contemptus aut violatio in effrænatam licentiam effudit; non virtutis & gloriæ falsa species, aut stulta veterum æmulatio inani nomine libertatis incendit, sed innocentia vitæ, morumque sanctitas rectum atque solum iter ad libertatem veram docuit, legum & religionis Justissima defensio necessariò armavit. Atque illi quidem Deo perinde confisi, servitutem Honestissimis armis pepulere.¹⁵⁹

Classical republican liberty is only an empty name (*inane nomine libertatis*); what the people of England need to pursue instead is true Christian liberty.¹⁶⁰

Had Cromwell delivered that? Milton addresses Cromwell in the *Defensio Secunda* as the liberator of the country, the author and protector of the nation's liberty (*patriæ liberator, libertatis auctor, custosque idem & conservator*¹⁶¹), but warns him:

teipsum denique reverere, ut pro quâ adipiscendâ libertate, tot ærumnas pertulisti, tot pericula adiisti, eam adeptus, violatam per te, aut ullâ in parte imminutam aliis, ne sinas esse. Profectò tu ipse liber sine nobis esse non potes; sic enim naturâ comparatum est, ut qui aliorum libertatem occupat, suam ipse primus omnium amittat.¹⁶²

And turning to the people of England, he admonishes them that if they adhere to a defective understanding of liberty, they are liable to re-enslave themselves:

nisi libertas vestra ejusmodi sit, quæ neque parari armis, neque auferri possit, ea autem sola est, quæ pietate, justitiâ, temperantiâ, verâ denique virtute nata, altas atque intimas

as to be pious, wise, just and temperate, careful of one's own, abstaining from what is another's, and thence, in conclusion, magnanimous and brave—so, to be the opposite of these, is the same thing as to be a slave; and by the accustomed judgment, and as it were by the just retribution of God, it comes to pass, that the nation, which has been incapable of governing and ordering itself, and has delivered itself up to the slavery of its own lusts, is itself delivered over, against its will, to other masters—and whether it will or not, is compelled to serve. . . . If it be hard, if it be against the grain, to be slaves, learn to obey right reason, to be masters of yourselves' (*Defensio Secunda: Works* viii 248–51).

¹⁵⁹ 'These men were never let loose, by a contempt or violation of the laws, to an unreined licence; they were inflamed by no delusive vision of virtue and of glory, or by any foolish emulation of the ancients for the empty name of liberty; they were taught the straight and only way to true liberty, by innocence of life and sanctity of manners; they were compelled by necessity to arm in the just defence of the laws and of religion. Thus, confident of the divine aid, they drove out slavery in their glorious warfare' (*Defensio Secunda: Works* viii 8–9).

¹⁶⁰ In the light of Quentin Skinner's thesis about Milton's classical republican concept of liberty, it is interesting to note the scorn with which Milton dismisses classical ideas of liberty here.

¹⁶¹ *Defensio Secunda: Works* viii 224.

¹⁶² 'Last of all, respect yourself, and do not allow that liberty, which you have gained with so many hardships, so many dangers, to be violated by yourself, or in any way impaired by others. Indeed, without our freedom, you yourself cannot be free: for such is the order of nature, that he who forcibly seizes upon the liberty of others, is the first to lose his own' (*Defensio Secunda: Works* viii 226–7).

radices animis vestris egerit, non deerit profectò qui vobis istam, quam vi atque armis quævisse gloriâmini, etiam sine armis citò eripiat.¹⁶³

It hardly matters whether the tyrant who stands ready to re-enslave them is an ambitious Cromwell or a Charles Stuart waiting in the wings: only that liberty which springs from real virtue (*verâ virtute*) will save them.¹⁶⁴ If the people neglect the arts of peace, they will find that peace itself is their greatest enemy, because it is liable to degenerate into servitude; if they fail to banish superstition, they will be sold as plunder to the highest bidder. So,

Nisi avaritiam, ambitionem, luxuriam mentibus, immò familiis quoque vestris luxum expuleritis, quem tyrannum foris & in acie quærendum credidistis eum domi, eum intus vel duriorem sentietis, immò multi indies tyranni ex ipsis præcordiis vestris intolerandi pullulabunt.¹⁶⁵

Without that inner moral and spiritual reformation, the people will all too easily be led back into that slavery from which they have with so much effort and sacrifice been liberated:

Nay after such a faire deliverance as this, with so much fortitude and valour shown against a Tyrant, that people that should seek a King, claiming what this Man claimes, would shew themselves to be by nature slaves, and arrant beasts; not fitt for that liberty which they cri'd out and bellow'd for, but fitter to be led back again into thir old servitude, like a sort of clamouring & fighting brutes, broke loos from thir copyholds, that know not how to use or possess the liberty which they fought for; but with the faire words & promises of an old exasperated foe, are ready to be stroak'd & tam'd again, into the wonted and well pleasing state of thir true Norman villenage, to them best agreeable.¹⁶⁶

Are the English fit for freedom? Do they know how to possess it? Or do they really prefer the easy state of 'villenage' to which they have been accustomed, that state of 'ignoble ease, and peaceful sloath, | Not peace'¹⁶⁷?

¹⁶³ 'Unless your liberty is of that kind which can neither be acquired nor taken away by arms—and that alone is such, which, springing from piety, justice, temperance, in short, from real virtue, shall take deep and intimate root in your minds—you may be assured that there will not be lacking one who, even without arms, will speedily deprive you of what it is your boast to have gained by force of arms' (*Defensio Secunda: Works* viii 238–41).

¹⁶⁴ Milton's association of liberty with manliness (for which see p. 195 n. 145) is not absent here, for *virtus* ('virtue') is linked etymologically with *vir* ('man', i.e., 'male'), as Milton and his readers would have known.

¹⁶⁵ 'Unless you banish avarice, ambition, luxury from your thoughts, and all excess even from your families, the tyrant, whom you imagined was to be sought abroad, and in the field, you will find at home, you will find within, and that a more inexorable one; indeed, tyrants without number will be daily engendered in your own breasts, that are not to be borne' (*Defensio Secunda: Works* viii 240–1).

¹⁶⁶ *Eikonoklastes: Works* v 289–90. *copyholds*: copyhold was a form of tenure whereby land which was part of a manor was held by custom at the will of the lord of the manor (*OED* s.v. copyhold n. 1a). *villenage*: the state or condition of a feudal villen; complete subjection to a feudal lord or superior; bondage, serfdom, servitude (*OED* 2).

The myth of a 'Norman yoke' imposed on a hitherto free people is prominent in the writings of Winstanley (*The Complete Works of Gerrard Winstanley*, edited by Thomas N. Corns, Ann Hughes, and David Loewenstein, 2 vols (Oxford, 2009), *passim*); cf. Christopher Hill, *Puritanism and Revolution* (London, 1958), pp. 50–122.

¹⁶⁷ *PL* ii 227–8.

Since liberty is, for Milton, rooted in the individual's use of reason and his embrace of the Gospel, it follows that where the laws and customs of the state conflict with radical Christian liberty they should be set aside. And so since marriage should nurture a man's spiritual and intellectual life, it should be set aside whenever it is found to impede rather than to foster that aim. But as in the ecclesiastical and the political sphere men willingly embrace the tyranny of custom,¹⁶⁸ seeking 'to enslave the dignity of man, to put a garrison upon his neck of empty and overdignifi'd precepts',¹⁶⁹ so too in thinking about marriage and divorce, 'so it happ'ns for the most part, that Custome still is silently receiv'd for the best instructor . . . because her method is so glib and easie'.¹⁷⁰ Custom was, for Milton, a form of oppression because it prevented the exercise of 'free reasoning', and thus thwarted the pursuit of truth:

Hence it is, that Error supports Custome, Custome count'nances Error. And these two betweene them would persecute and chase away all truth and solid wisdom out of humane life, were it not that God, rather then man, once in many ages, calls together the prudent and Religious counsels of Men, deputed to repress the encroachments, and to worke off the inveterate blots and obscurities wrought upon our mindes by the subtle insinuating of Error and Custome: Who with the numerous and vulgar train of their followers make it their chiefe designe to envie and cry-down the industry of free reasoning, under the terms of humor, and innovation; as if the womb of teeming Truth were to be clos'd up, if shee presume to bring forth ought, that sorts not with their unchew'd notions and suppositions. Against which notorious injury and abuse of mans free soule to testifie and oppose the utmost that study and true labour can attaine, heretofore the incitement of men reputed grave hath led me . . . to be the sole advocate of a discount'nanc't truth.¹⁷¹

This tyranny of custom can lead to a self-imposed servitude to the literal interpretation of scripture, which he calls 'an alphabeticall servility',¹⁷² and a superstitious reverence for the letter rather than the spirit which reduces to a very narrow way that 'liberal path' which God has designed for man:

we literally superstitious through customary faintnesse of heart, not venturing to pierce with our free thoughts into the full latitude of nature and religion, abandon our selves to serve under the tyranny of usurpt opinions, suffering those ordinances which were allotted to our solace and reviving, to trample over us and hale us into a multitude of sorrowes which God never meant us. And where he set us in a fair allowance of way, with honest liberty and prudence to our guard, we never leave subtilizing and

¹⁶⁸ In his preface to *Tetrachordon* addressed to the Parliament, Milton writes that he was motivated to present *The Doctrine and Discipline of Divorce* to them because he saw them exercising 'the part of a good Magistrate, aiming at true liberty through the right information of religious and civil life . . . and to depresse the tyranny of error, and ill custome' (*Tetrachordon*: Works iv 63).

¹⁶⁹ *Divorce*: Works iii 373.

¹⁷⁰ *Divorce*: Works iii 367.

¹⁷¹ *Divorce*: Works iii 368–9. *subtle insinuating*: these two words have Satanic connotations: (i) 'the serpent was more subtil then any beast of the field' (Genesis iii 1), and 'subtle' is applied to Satan in *PL* ii 815 etc; (ii) 'insinuate' derives from the Latin *in* + *sinuare*, to bend or follow a wavy course (*OLD s.v. sinuo* 3), and Milton calls the serpent 'Insinuating' at *PL* iv 348.

¹⁷² *Divorce*: Works iii 427.

casuisting till we have straitn'd and par'd that liberal path into a razors edge to walk on, between a precipice of unnecessary mischief on either side.¹⁷³

But the free soul who stands out against the tyranny of custom may be misunderstood and misrepresented by those who think that liberty is synonymous with licence:

What though the brood of Belial, the draffe of men, to whom no liberty is pleasing, but unbridl'd and vagabond lust without pale or partition, will laugh broad perhaps, to see so great a strength of Scripture mustering up in favour, as they suppose, of their debaucheries; they will know better, when they shall hence learne, that honest liberty is the greatest foe to dishonest licence.¹⁷⁴

And it may also be that the licentious behaviour of some of the sectaries—who are religious folk at heart—is attributable to unjustified laws restraining them:

seeing that sort of men who follow *Anabaptism*, *Familism*, *Antinomianism*, and other fanatick dreams (if we understand them not amisse) be such most commonly as are by nature addicted to Religion, of life also not debausht, and that their opinions having full swinge, do end in satisfaction of the flesh, it may be come with reason into the thoughts of a wise man, whether all this proceed not partly, if not chiefly, from the restraint of some lawfull liberty, which ought to be giv'n men, and is deny'd them.¹⁷⁵

Many are 'deluded through belly-doctrines into a devout slavery'.¹⁷⁶ The body rather than the spirit rules if the only criterion for annulling a marriage is its non-consummation, and this legal definition of marriage as primarily a sexual union and nothing more is a form of tyranny, so that 'to grind in the mill of an undelighted and servil copulation, must be the only forc'd work of a Christian mariage'.¹⁷⁷ In taking this approach, the law itself is misguided, for

The Law is to tender the liberty and the human dignity of them that live under the Law, whether it be the mans right above the woman, or the womans just appeal against wrong and servitude. But the duties of Marriage contain in them a duty of benevolence, which to doe by compulsion against the Soul, where ther can bee neither peace, nor joy, nor love, but an enthrallment to one who either cannot, or will not bee mutual in the godliest and the civilest ends of that society, is the ignoblest, and the lowest slavery that a human shape can bee put to. This Law therefore justly and piously provides against such an unmanly task of bondage as this.¹⁷⁸



There is an inescapable paradox which underlies Milton's prose writings on liberty. Liberty is fundamentally the turning away of the individual from sin towards redemption, enabled by grace; it is an embrace of the Gospel rather than—and sometimes in defiance of—the law.¹⁷⁹ But grace is resistible; many do in fact resist

¹⁷³ *Divorce: Works* iii 496–7.

¹⁷⁵ *Divorce: Works* iii 426.

¹⁷⁷ *Divorce: Works* iii 403.

¹⁷⁴ *Divorce: Works* iii 370. *draffe*: dregs, lees.

¹⁷⁶ *Tetrachordon: Works* iv 75.

¹⁷⁸ *Tetrachordon: Works* iv 121.

¹⁷⁹ Milton would have liked the title of one of Winstanley's works, *The Law of Freedom*, even if he did not share the Digger's actual prescriptions.

it, and in so doing resist the freedom of the Gospel. To Milton, it seemed that the majority of the English people had turned their backs on true freedom, preferring tyranny. As a consequence, the minority who wish to embrace liberty have the right, and perhaps even the duty, to compel the slothful majority to be free. On the eve of the Restoration, when the English people were 'chusing them a captain back for *Egypt*'¹⁸⁰ to return them to slavery, Milton maintained that freedom was the main purpose of government:

which if the greater part value not, but will degeneratly forgoe, is it just or reasonable, that most voices against the main end of government should enslave the less number that would be free? More just it is doubtless, if it com to force, that a less number compell a greater to retain, which can be no wrong to them, thir libertie, then that a greater number for the pleasure of thir baseness, compell a less most injuriously to be thir fellow slaves. They who seek nothing but thir own just libertie, have alwaies right to winn it and to keep it, when ever they have power, be the voices never so numerous that oppose it.¹⁸¹

I am a servant of God, you are a slave to a tyrant; my freedom is a 'just libertie', your freedom is 'baseness'. So the godly may—perhaps must—compel the ungodly to be free. And the meaning of 'free' is to be determined by the godly themselves.

¹⁸⁰ *Readie Way: Works* vi 149.

¹⁸¹ *Readie Way: Works* vi 140–1.

15

God

God is light,
And never but in unapproached light
Dwelt from Eternitie.

Paradise Lost iii 3–5



*Deus incomprehensibilis. . . Quid ergo dicamus, fratres, de Deo? Si enim quod vis dicere, si cepisti, non est Deus: si comprehendere potuisti, alius pro Deo comprehendisti. Si quasi comprehendere potuisti, cogitatione tua te decepisti. Hoc ergo non est, si comprehendisti: si autem hoc est, non comprehendisti.*¹

‘God’ is an unusually complex word, complex in an unusual way. Other complex words denote a semantic field which may be rich and varied, even contradictory;² there may be intricate movements between literal and metaphorical meanings; the etymological roots of the language may be activated by Milton’s poetry, and buried meanings be brought into play. But ‘God’ is complex in that the word is, or should be, a perpetual reminder of its own failure. We cannot speak of God in his own nature directly, but only indirectly and imperfectly, in language whose definitions and whose imagery must remind us continually of its incapacity.³ As Milton says in *De Doctrina Christiana*, *De cognoscendo Deo quod loquimur, id de imperfecto hominum captu intelligi debet; nam Deus, prout in se est humanam cogitationem, nedum sensus longè superat*; and yet, put positively, *tantum sui retexit Deus, quantum vel nostra mens capere, vel naturae debilitas ferre potest.*⁴ There are

¹ ‘God is incomprehensible . . . So what, brothers, may we say about God? For if you say what you wish to say, if you have grasped him, this is not God. If you have been able to understand, you have understood something else instead of God. If you think that you have understood, your understanding deceives you. So if you understand it, it is not God; if it is God, you have not understood’ (St Augustine, *Sermo LII: De verbis Evangelii Matthaei, cap. III, 13–17, Venit Jesus a Galilaea in Jordanem ad Joannem, ut baptizaretur ab eo, etc., de Trinitate (Patrologia Latina xxxviii 360)*; my translation).

² For example *heimlich*, discussed by Freud in his classic essay *Das Unheimliche* (*Gesammelte Werke*, edited by Anna Freud et al., 18 vols (London and Frankfurt, 1940–68), xii 227–68; English translation as ‘The Uncanny’, in *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud*, edited by James Strachey et al., 24 vols (London, 1953–74), xvii 220–6).

³ Cf. *ST I*, q. 13, a. 1; CCC §§39–43; Ian T. Ramsey, *Religious Language: An Empirical Placing of Theological Phrases* (London, 1967).

⁴ ‘What we say about God must be understood in relation to humankind’s imperfect grasp; for God, as he really is, far outstrips human thought, let alone perception; ‘God has revealed as much of himself as either our mind can grasp or the weakness of our nature can bear’ (*De Doctrina: OCW* viii 26–7). Cf. C. A. Patrides, *Milton and the Christian Tradition* (Oxford, 1966), pp. 7–9 for seventeenth-century writers’ cautions against human claims to understand God. Benjamin Whichcote in his

ways of working through the innate incapacity of language in the matter of God. By way of the classic *via negativa* one may gradually approach a less abject failure of understanding by repeatedly saying, 'God is not this, God is not that', so that impediments to and distractions from understanding gradually fall away; this is a path stemming from Pseudo-Dionysius the Areopagite and followed by mystics such as Meister Eckhart and St John of the Cross.⁵ Or one may, in a text such as the *Summa Theologiae* of St Thomas, elaborate with great precision and subtlety what can be said and what cannot be said about God, but all the time maintaining a reverent care which is itself an implicit confession of human limitations. Or one may use poetic imagery in such a way that each utterance clearly stands in need of correction,⁶ as we find, for example, in George Herbert's profound sonnet 'Prayer', which offers a series of metaphors—some of which seem bizarre, others perhaps inconsistent when juxtaposed—which are not constrained into a sentence through the stringency of a verb: there is, the poem seems to be saying, no syntax in the experience of prayer, no logical development or sequence of cause and effect, only, as the poem concludes, 'something understood'.⁷ But that which is understood still eludes definition. If you understand it, you know that you cannot define it; if you can define it, you show that you have not understood. So with prayer, according to Herbert; *a fortiori*, so too with God, according to Augustine.

Te devote laudo, latens ueritas, prayed St Thomas: 'Devoutly I praise you, hidden truth'.⁸ It is the very hiddenness of God, the *deus absconditus*, which permits adoration, otherwise any human approach to the divine would be compelled, and any revelation would annihilate the beholder. So Moses is granted a sight of God after he has passed by, but not the sight of his face.⁹ The Eucharistic adoration which Aquinas utters is spoken in the presence of God made manifest in the consecrated host—manifest but at the same time veiled under the form, the species, of bread. Even the revelation of God in the historical figure of Christ is also a form of veiling, limiting this disclosure of the divine to what could be seen and understood in first-century Palestine, and subsequently transmitted through the inspired

'The Use of Reason in Matters of Religion' explains that there are two ways of speaking truly about God, 'The Way of *Perfection*', in which we 'find out what is best, and what is most perfect; and, then, attribute and ascribe it to God'; and 'the Way of *Negation*' in which 'Words and Phrases are all to be purg'd and purified from their Contraction, and Limitation, before we can ascribe them to God' (*The Cambridge Platonists*, edited by C. A. Patrides (London, 1969; reissued Cambridge, 1980), pp. 56–7).

⁵ For this tradition see Denys Turner, *The Darkness of God: Negativity in Christian Mysticism* (Cambridge, 1995), and for its application to Milton see Michael Bryson, 'A Poem to the Unknown God: *Samson Agonistes* and Negative Theology', *Milton Quarterly* 42 (2008) 22–43.

⁶ Milton says that since God created Adam after his own image (Genesis i 26), we should not be afraid to assign him what he assigned himself, *dummodo quod in nobis imperfectum ac debile est, id Deo sicubi tribuatur, perfectissimum atque pulcherrimum esse credamus*, 'so long as we believe that what is imperfect and feeble in us is most perfect and beautiful wherever assigned to God' (*De Doctrina*: OCV viii 30–1).

⁷ *The English Poems of George Herbert*, edited by Helen Wilcox (Cambridge, 2007), p. 178.

⁸ The text of the first line of the hymn is uncertain, with some authorities reading *Adoro te devote*, and some reading *deitas* for *ueritas*; the present text is from <<http://www.corpusthomaticum.org>>; see also *One Hundred Latin Hymns: Ambrose to Aquinas*, edited and translated by Peter Walsh and Christopher Husch (Cambridge, Mass., 2012), p. 366.

⁹ Exodus xxx 18–23.

but necessarily incomplete comprehension of apostles and evangelists. As Ralph Cudworth reflected:

the Gospel be not God, as he is in his own *Brightnesse*, but God *Vailed* and *Masked* to us, God in a state of Humiliation, and Condescent, as the Sun in a Rainbow; yet it is nothing else but a clear and unspotted Mirrour of Divine Holinesse, Goodnesse, Purity; in which Attributes lies the very Life and Essence of God himself. The Gospel is nothing else, but God descending into the World in *Our Form*, and conversing with us in our likeness; that he might allure, and draw us up to God, and make us partakers of his *Divine Form*.¹⁰

And as John Smith said, 'In this state we are not able to behold *Truth* in its own Native beauty and lustre; but while we are *vail'd* with mortality, *Truth* must *vail* it self too, that it may the more freely converse with us.'¹¹ Revelation requires veiling; human freedom requires the veiling of God.

Language stumbles at the threshold of the divine. If, as traditional theology insists, God is not one being, albeit the supreme one, in a class of beings, but is rather the source from which being itself is derived,¹² he is altogether beyond the comprehension (that is to say, the full grasping) of finite beings. The veiling of God may be necessary for human beings to be free, but any attempt to unveil God in human language appears to curtail the freedom of God within the limitations of mundane grammar and morality. Aquinas knew this, and at the outset of his great *Summa* he maps some of the limitations of rational thought as a way of approaching God;¹³ moreover, at the end of his life he would fall silent, his work incomplete: so deeply moved was he by what seems to have been a mystical vision of the Lord that he regarded all his theological efforts as mere straw.¹⁴ The incomplete writing is completed by wordless comprehension.

Such is the orthodox, Catholic tradition;¹⁵ but Milton, of course—voluble, self-confident, intolerant, and iconoclastic—struck out on his own path.¹⁶ Some

¹⁰ 'A Sermon Preached before the House of Commons. March 31, 1647', in Patrides, *The Cambridge Platonists*, p. 101.

¹¹ 'The Excellency and Nobleness of True Religion' in Patrides, *The Cambridge Platonists*, p. 146.

¹² See E. L. Maskell, *He Who Is: A Study in Traditional Theism* (London, 1943), p. 9; and more recently David Bentley Hart, *The Experience of God: Being, Consciousness, Bliss* (New Haven, Conn., 2013).

¹³ *ST I*, q. 1.

¹⁴ After celebrating Mass on the feast of St Nicholas in 1273, Thomas wrote nothing more; he told his amanuensis Reginald, 'All that I have written seems to me like straw compared with what has now been revealed to me' (James A. Weisheipl, O.P., *Friar Thomas d'Aquino: His Life, Thought, and Works* (Oxford, 1975), p. 321).

¹⁵ See Joseph Cardinal Ratzinger, *Introduction to Christianity*, translated by J. R. Foster (San Francisco, 2004), pp. 254–7 for 'the law of disguise'. Reformation theologians were also well aware of the hiddenness of God, and indeed Ratzinger cites on p. 255 Luther's idea that God is hidden *sub contrario*. See B. A. Gerrish, '"To the Unknown God": Luther and Calvin on the Hiddenness of God', *Journal of Religion* 53 (1973) 263–92; and Michael Lieb on Luther and Calvin's understanding of the hiddenness of God in his *Theological Milton: Deity, Discourse and Heresy in the Miltonic Canon* (Pittsburgh, Pa., 2006) pp. 73–6, and his ch. 2 generally for this tradition and its bearing on Milton.

¹⁶ If the adult Milton belonged to any religious group, it was the Independents. See N. H. Keeble, 'Milton's Christian Temper', in *John Milton: Life, Writing, Reputation*, edited by Paul Hammond and Blair Worden (Oxford, 2010), pp. 107–24. Milton's early religious affiliations have been variously

critics of *Paradise Lost* have been uneasy about Milton's God, both on theological and on poetic grounds, arguing *inter alia* about Milton's Arianism, and about the problems of predestination, foreknowledge, and free will which God sets out with fierce clarity in Book III of the poem, an exposition which sometimes alienates readers who find the discourse an exercise in self-exculpation rather than an expression of love for his creation.¹⁷ The dogmatic side of Milton—for whom the tentative, the ambiguous, and the elusiveness of the numinous all alike seem uncongenial—is often to be seen in his treatment of God in *Paradise Lost*, as well as in his exposition of what he would have us take to be Christian doctrine in his Latin prose treatise *De Doctrina Christiana*.¹⁸ Perhaps it is really the implication of the Deity within epic which causes problems: not for Milton the mystical approach of the Dante of *Paradiso*. Seen from the perspective of the mystical tradition of the cloud of unknowing, it may even seem crass for the poet to seek to comprehend God within the human syntax of epic—which is to say, within the common modes of speech and silence, within temporality and the laws of cause and effect, attributing to him the actions of a recognizable (and morally responsible) agent. But there are many ways in which Milton reminds us of exactly those limitations of language which the mystics understood: the subtlety with which he deploys the

interpreted, with Barbara Lewalski seeing him as a young puritan (Barbara K. Lewalski, *The Life of John Milton* (Oxford, 2000)), while Gordon Campbell and Thomas Corns find evidence of early Laudian sympathies (Gordon Campbell and Thomas N. Corns, *John Milton: Life, Work, and Thought* (Oxford, 2008)). See also Nicholas McDowell, 'How Laudian Was the Young Milton?', *Milton Studies* 52 (2011) 3–22; and Deborah Shuger, 'Milton's Religion: The Early Years', *Milton Quarterly* 46 (2012) 137–53.

¹⁷ Amongst those many critics who have discussed the God of *PL*, the principal disputants have been C. S. Lewis, *A Preface to 'Paradise Lost'* (Oxford, 1960); William Empson, *Milton's God* (London, 1965); and Dennis Richard Danielson, *Milton's Good God: A Study in Literary Theodicy* (Cambridge, 1982). For a survey of the arguments about Milton's God see John Leonard, *Faithful Labourers: A Reception History of 'Paradise Lost', 1667–1970*, 2 vols (Oxford, 2013), ch. 7. C. A. Patrides' learned study *Milton and the Christian Tradition* sometimes tends to assimilate Milton to a uniform and orthodox tradition: see John P. Rumrich, *Milton Unbound: Controversy and Reinterpretation* (Cambridge, 1996), pp. 29–30. For Milton's understanding of the divine, and the traditions upon which he draws, see Michael Lieb's richly detailed *Poetics of the Holy: A Reading of 'Paradise Lost'* (Chapel Hill, N.C., 1981), its sequel *Theological Milton: Deity, Discourse and Heresy in the Miltonic Canon* (Pittsburgh, Pa., 2006), and Benjamin Myers, *Milton's Theology of Freedom* (Berlin, 2006). For recent studies of the problems of presenting God in narrative see John Creaser, "'Fear of Change': Closed Minds and Open Forms in Milton", *Milton Quarterly* 42 (2008) 161–82, esp. pp. 167–9, and Samuel Fallon, 'Milton's Strange God: Theology and Narrative Form in *Paradise Lost*', *ELH* 79 (2012) 33–57.

¹⁸ There are problems in using *De Doctrina* as a straightforward gloss on *PL*, because it is a Latin prose treatise not an English poem; it is imperfectly revised; it is in places derivative from previous systematic theologies; its method is primarily the accumulation of scriptural quotations; and it is a private rather than a public document (or at least was kept unpublished in Milton's lifetime) and is therefore a milieu in which Milton felt free to express views which might have caused him trouble if proposed in print. Nevertheless, the book is an invaluable guide to Milton's theological thought. For a careful study of the connections between *De Doctrina* and *PL* see Maurice Kelley, *This Great Argument: A Study of Milton's 'De Doctrina Christiana' as a Gloss upon 'Paradise Lost'* (Princeton, N.J., 1941). The status of *De Doctrina* as an authentically Miltonic document was convincingly established in Gordon Campbell, Thomas N. Corns, John K. Hale, and Fiona J. Tweedie, *Milton and the Manuscript of 'De Doctrina Christiana'* (Oxford, 2007), and it has recently been scrupulously edited and translated in *The Complete Works of John Milton: Volume VIII: De Doctrina Christiana*, edited by John Hale et al. (Oxford, 2012).

imagery of dark and light; the tentativeness with which he elaborates epic similes which entwine Heaven and Earth, pre- and postlapsarian worlds, while frequently ending in some form of fracture, a confession of unlikeness;¹⁹ the mistaken apprehensions of the fallen angels, with their literal-minded understandings of God's power which may sometimes articulate our own misapprehensions; and the many forms of negation (the word 'not', and the prefixes 'un-' and 'in-'²⁰) which evoke our human perceptions only to reveal their frailty or their fallacy. The attributes of God which Milton sets out in *De Doctrina* include negatives: God is *immensus & infinitus, immutabilis* and *incorruptibilis*, words which may be applied because *dum creatis in rebus quod imperfectum est, de Deo negant*.²¹

Aware of the impossibility of writing a classical epic with Christianized versions of the pagan gods,²² and yet aware of the gravitational pull which the epic form and its assumptions about time, space, and causality exert in such a direction, Milton repeatedly draws the reader away from mundane presuppositions and our tendency to anthropomorphize the Deity. *Si quasi comprehendere potuisti, cogitatione tua te decepisti*.



Milton the poet begins by placing his work in an intimate but reverently tentative relationship with God:

Sing Heav'nly Muse, that on the secret top
Of *Oreb*, or of *Sinai*, didst inspire
That Shepherd, who first taught the chosen Seed,
In the Beginning how the Heav'ns and Earth
Rose out of *Chaos*: Or if *Sion* Hill
Delight thee more, and *Siloa's* Brook that flow'd
Fast by the Oracle of God; I thence
Invoke thy aid to my adventurous Song,
That with no middle flight intends to soar
Above th' *Aonian* Mount, while it pursues
Things unattempted yet in Prose or Rhime.
And chiefly Thou O Spirit, that dost prefer
Before all Temples th' upright heart and pure,
Instruct me, for Thou know'st; Thou from the first
Wast present, and with mighty wings outspread
Dove-like satst brooding on the vast Abyss

¹⁹ A parenthesis after the description of Lucifer's palace in Heaven reminds us of the distance of human language from divine realities: '(so call | That Structure in the Dialect of men | Interpreted)' (*PL* v 760–2). Neil Forsyth points out that there are no similes for God or the Son in *PL* (*The Satanic Epic* (Princeton, N.J., 2003), p. 103).

²⁰ See Chapter 25 NOT.

²¹ 'in God's case they negate what in created things is imperfect' (*De Doctrina*: OCW viii 34, 36, 42–3).

²² For the relation of *PL* to classical epic see Charles Martindale, *John Milton and the Transformation of Ancient Epic* (London, 1986), and Tobias Gregory, *From Many Gods to One: Divine Action in Renaissance Epic* (Chicago, 2006), ch. 5, who offers a short, lucid account of Milton's presentation of God in relation to contemporary debates over predestination and free will.

And mad'st it pregnant: What in me is dark
 Illumin, what is low raise and support;
 That to the highth of this great Argument
 I may assert Eternal Providence,
 And justify the wayes of God to men.²³

Milton does not begin by invoking God directly; rather he calls upon that 'Heav'nly Muse' to sing 'Of Mans First Disobedience'.²⁴ As Patrick Hume pointed out,²⁵ Homer, Virgil, Tasso, and Spenser had previously invoked the Muse, but Milton's appeal summons the aid of the heavenly Muse who taught Moses to narrate the creation of the world. We do not know quite who or what this heavenly Muse is, for it, or she, has no precise precedent in poetry or theology. Later in the passage Milton adds, 'And chiefly Thou O Spirit, that dost prefer | Before all Temples th' upright heart and pure': this is the Holy Spirit, of which the heavenly Muse may be a manifestation (or may not be: the syntax around 'chiefly' smudges the relation between Muse and Spirit). Milton's creativity is subordinated in prayer to the heavenly Muse, and then to the Spirit; but there is no doubting the ambition of his project as he compares himself with Moses, who first taught the people of Israel the story of the origins of the world, and then proceeds to claim an analogy between the divine creation of the world and the inspiration of his own poem. This opening passage seeks to establish both an intimate proximity with God (indeed, an in-dwelling of the Holy Spirit within the poet) and a reverent distance. Is Milton invoking the Spirit which prefers the upright and pure heart because he is already upright and pure, and therefore an appropriate vessel for divine inspiration, or is this a prayer for the Spirit to make him so? The phrasing does not settle on either implication, and so the invocation hovers between assertion and surrender. Similarly, Milton complicates the generating voice of the poem: it is the Muse who sings, but Milton who will assert and justify. This approach to the Deity is conceptually cautious, reverently humble, but also (at least vis-à-vis his fellow men) proud in its ambition.²⁶

Later invocations express a reverent uncertainty about how to address the divine. Book VII opens with the prayer, 'Descend from Heav'n *Urania*, by that name | If rightly thou art call'd',²⁷ a submissively agnostic 'if'. And at the beginning of Book III Milton says:

HAIL holy Light, offspring of Heav'n first-born,
 Or of th' Eternal Coeternal beam
 May I express thee unblam'd?
 ...
 Or hear'st thou rather pure Ethereal stream,
 Whose Fountain who shall tell?²⁸

²³ *PL* i 6–26.

²⁴ *PL* i 1.

²⁵ Hume, *ad loc.*

²⁶ Since pride and ambition contributed to Satan's fall (*PL* iv 40), it is important that the poet's ambition is contained within this prayer for divine aid.

²⁷ *PL* vii 1–2. For the idea that the divine name is not to be known see Lieb, *Poetics of the Holy*, p. 178 and his ch. 8 generally. For a discussion of *Urania* see William B. Hunter, *The Descent of Urania: Studies in Milton, 1946–1988* (Lewisburg, Pa., 1989), pp. 31–45.

²⁸ *PL* iii 1–3, 7–8. For a discussion of this passage see Albert R. Cirillo, "Hail Holy Light" and Divine Time in *Paradise Lost*, *Journal of English and Germanic Philology* 68 (1969) 45–56.

The light which the poet needs is not ordinary light but divine illumination, yet he draws back from defining it: is this holy light the offspring of Heaven (the first thing which God created) or is it the coeternal beam of the Eternal (an uncreated, everlasting emanation of God himself)? Or should it more properly be understood as a 'pure Ethereal stream, | Whose Fountain who shall tell?', a light whose origin lies beyond the Poet's comprehension? The hesitation in these questions is a mark of reverence and humility. *Hoc ergo non est, si comprehendisti.*



Such are Milton's approaches to the God who lies beyond the text, calling upon the Muse and the Spirit to animate his voice; let us turn now to some of the ways in which ideas of 'God' are deployed within the text: God as described by the narrator; God as understood by Adam and by Eve both before and after the Fall; and, to begin with, God as imagined by Satan and his followers. Such images, which are sometimes misunderstandings, travesties, and idols, are as important to the reader's understanding of the true God as any direct expositions from the Poet himself.

Satan's initial references to God denote him as an adversary, which is ironic, given that 'Satan' means 'adversary' in Hebrew.²⁹ At first, Satan avoids naming God, just saying evasively 'he with his Thunder'. Subsequently God is 'the Potent Victor in his rage', 'the mightiest', 'the angry Victor', 'Our Enemy', 'the Conquerour', 'the Thunderer', 'the Torturer'.³⁰ Throughout Books I and II Satan and his associates think of God in terms of a military adversary who has been victorious through might in battle, one

Whom reason hath equald, force hath made supream
Above his equals.

...

Whom Thunder hath made greater.³¹

In effect, Satan conceives of God in his own image, for as John Smith noted, some men 'are apt to attribute their impotent passions and peevishness of Spirit to him', and 'are apt to count this Divine Supremacy as but a piece of Tyranny that by its Sovereign Will makes too great encroachments upon their Liberties, and that which will eat up all their Right and Property'.³²

²⁹ *OED s.v. Satan n.*, etymology; Wilson, p. 555; cf. *PL* ii 629; 1 Peter v 8.

³⁰ *PL* i 93, 95, 99, 169, 188, 323, ii 28, 64. As Fish says, for the fallen angels 'God ... is likely to be a difficult word to utter. Quite soon the devils resort to circumlocutions and diabolic euphemisms, and begin to fashion a new language, one more consistent with the version of history they now proceed to write' (Stanley Eugene Fish, *Surprised by Sin: The Reader in 'Paradise Lost'* (Berkeley, Calif., 1967), p. 97). Myers says that 'this God whom the fallen angels "create" is a grim parody of the Calvinist deity, an omnipotent being who arbitrarily exercises absolute power', and he points out that although the fallen angels describe God as a torturer, they are 'free to build a palace, to conduct parliamentary debates, and even to create music. Their hell is peculiarly characterised by a *lack* of torture' (*Milton's Theology of Freedom*, pp. 58–61).

³¹ *PL* i 248–9, 258.

³² John Smith, 'Of Superstition', in *Select Discourses* (London, 1660), p. 27. He repeats the idea in 'The Excellency and Nobleness of True Religion': 'Some are apt to look upon God as some *Peevish* and *Self-will'd* thing, because themselves are such; and seeing that their own *Absolute* and naked *Wills* are for the most part the *Rules* of all their actions and the impositions which they lay upon others; they think

Satan's comprehension stretches no further than to conceive of God as power, and of power as force. The rebel angels 'His utmost power with adverse power oppos'd',³³ he says, but this assumption that their two powers are of the same order is fallacious: it is not that they were unevenly matched, but that Satanic power and divine power are ontologically different.³⁴ So for Satan to claim that his revolt against God 'shook his throne' and that consequently God 'from the terrour of this Arm... Doubted his Empire'³⁵ shows how little he understands (or at least how little he is prepared to admit³⁶). Satan refuses to 'deifie his power',³⁷ though he has in effect reduced God's deity into mere power, and will in turn seek to deify his own power by exalting himself above his followers. Satan also appears to believe that God's triumph—and by implication his power—is only temporary, when he refers to

our grand Foe,
Who now triumphs, and in th'excess of joy
Sole reigning holds the Tyranny of Heav'n.³⁸

Quite apart from the pejorative term 'Tyranny',³⁹ and the implication in 'Sole reigning' that Heaven may previously have seen some form of shared rule or even democracy,⁴⁰ the word 'now' is important, as it assumes that God triumphs only in time, and only now after the military defeat of the rebel angels.⁴¹ Traditional theology, however, would insist that God exists outside of time.⁴²

that Heaven's Monarchy is such an *arbitrary* thing too, as being govern'd by nothing else but by an *Almighty Absolute Will* (*Select Discourses*, p. 396; reprinted in Patrides, *The Cambridge Platonists*, p. 160).

³³ *PL* i 103.

³⁴ Satan has no power other than that permitted to him by God: see the discussion in Chapter 11 *EVIL*, p. 114.

³⁵ *PL* i 105, 113–14. In referring to 'this Arm' Satan is appropriating a frequent biblical term for the power of God (see Wilson, p. 31 for examples).

³⁶ Though Satan does refer to God's Providence (*PL* i 162), an inadvertent confession that divine power is not altogether as he would prefer to imagine.

³⁷ *PL* i 112.

³⁸ *PL* i 122–4.

³⁹ Used again by Moloc at *PL* ii 59.

⁴⁰ Cf. Satan's claim that

he who reigns
Monarch in Heav'n, till then as one secure
Sat on his Throne, upheld by old repute,
Consent or custome.

(*PL* i 637–40)

Milton despised appeals to custom, citing Cyprian to the effect that 'Custome without Truth is but agednesse of Error' (*Reformation: Works* iii 29). He would no doubt have agreed with Tertullian that 'Our Lord Christ called himself Truth not Custom' (*Dominus noster Christus veritatem se, non consuetudinem cognominavit* (*De Virginibus Velandis* i 1: *Patrologia Latina* ii 889; my translation).

⁴¹ Cf. 'he | Who now is Sovran' (*PL* i 245–6). Boethius says this about the meaning of 'now': *tantumque inter nostrarum rerum praesens, quod est nunc, interest ac divinarum, quod nostrum 'nunc' quasi currens tempus facit et sempiternitatem, divinum vero 'nunc' permanens neque movens sese atque consistens aeternitatem facit* ('there is this great difference between the present of our affairs, which is now, and the divine present: our 'now' connotes changing time and sempiternity; but God's 'now', abiding unmoved, and immovable, connotes eternity' (*De Trinitate* IV). In scholastic thought God exists in an eternal present, the *nunc stans* or *nunc aeternitatis*, which does not have duration (*ST* I q.10 art. 2 ad. 1); cf. *ST* I, q. 10, a. 4, r. 2 on the meaning of *nunc* in the context of eternity.

⁴² *ST* I, q. 10, a. 2–4.

Beelzebub shares Satan's assumptions when he says that they

in dreadful deeds
Fearless, endanger'd Heav'n's perpetual King;
And put to proof his high Supremacy,
Whether upheld by strength, or Chance, or Fate.⁴³

There is a contradiction here between the admission that God's rule is 'perpetual', and the claim that their revolt endangered God and tested ('put to proof') his supremacy. Beelzebub's supposition that God's supremacy must be upheld by either strength, chance, or fate indicates his inability to understand the nature of divine power.⁴⁴ Like Satan, Beelzebub can only think in terms of military force, the victory which it brings to one party, and the subjection which it inflicts on the other:

he our Conquerour, (whom I now
Of force believe Almighty,
...
That we may so suffice his vengeful ire,
Or do him mightier service as his thralls
By right of Warr.⁴⁵

To Beelzebub, service is that which is extorted from the vanquished as 'thralls'; by contrast, we shall be told by Raphael that the angels 'freely...serve, | Because wee freely love'.⁴⁶

Similar misconceptions about God and Heaven mark the infernal council in Book II. Satan addresses his followers thus:

Powers and Dominions, Deities of Heav'n,
For since no deep within her gulf can hold
Immortal vigor, though opprest and fall'n,
I give not Heav'n for lost.⁴⁷

Satan is not above claiming that 'the fixt Laws of Heav'n' made him their leader,⁴⁸ but when invoking 'Heav'n' conceives of it in material terms as a place and a prize, calling it their 'inheritance' and the place of their 'prosperity',⁴⁹ not acknowledging it as a state of union with God. Moloc also believes that the war against God is a matter of military prowess, for 'His trust was with th' Eternal to be deem'd | Equal in strength',⁵⁰ and he imagines that if they were to resume the war God's throne could be 'Mixt with *Tartarean* Sulphur, and strange fire'.⁵¹ At the same time, in

⁴³ *PL* i 130–3.

⁴⁴ It is not clear from the syntax whether Beelzebub means that the outcome of their revolt has determined how God's supremacy is upheld, or that the reason for his supremacy is still undetermined. In respect of 'fate', Myers (*Milton's Theology of Freedom*, p. 64) notes that Arminian writers often accused Calvinist theologians of promoting a doctrine of fatalism.

⁴⁵ *PL* i 143–4, 148–50.

⁴⁶ *PL* v 538–9. Cf. Moloc's reference to the fallen angels as 'The Vassals of his anger' (ii 90), and Mammon's evocation of what would be their 'splendid vassalage' in Heaven if they submitted (ii 252).

⁴⁷ *PL* ii 11–14.

⁴⁸ *PL* ii 18.

⁴⁹ *PL* ii 38–9.

⁵⁰ *PL* ii 46–7.

⁵¹ *PL* ii 69.

advocating a form of guerrilla war against God, Moloc makes an inadvertent acknowledgement:

by proof we feel
Our power sufficient to disturb his Heav'n,
And with perpetual inrodes to Allarme,
Though inaccessible, his fatal Throne.⁵²

When Moloc envisages making 'perpetual inrodes' in Heaven he does not pause to consider the utter futility of unending raids on God its 'perpetual King'.⁵³ He is correct in recognizing that God's throne is inaccessible to them (though he does not properly understand why), but the more interesting word here is 'fatal': Moloc attributes the security of God's throne to fate, but the word also implies that the power of God will be, or already has been, fatal to the fallen angels.⁵⁴ Belial, by contrast, recognizes that no attack which they can make can affect God, for

our great Enemy
All incorruptible would on his Throne
Sit unpolluted, and th' Ethereal mould
Incapable of stain would soon expel
Her mischief, and purge off the baser fire
Victorious.⁵⁵

(Though this is far from being his intention, Belial's words are for the reader a primitive exercise in negative theology in their recognition that God is 'incorruptible . . . unpolluted . . . Incapable of stain'.) Nor, he thinks, can they hope for annihilation to end their pain (and the negatives continue: God is not impotent, not unaware):

Will he, so wise, let loose at once his ire,
Belike through impotence, or unaware,
To give his Enemies thir wish, and end
Them in his anger, whom his anger saves
To punish endless?⁵⁶

In calling God 'wise', the conceptually impoverished Belial means little more than 'cunning', for this wisdom is the tactic of an enemy who seeks to inflict maximum pain, but Belial does at least understand that God is all-powerful and all-seeing, and cannot be challenged by force or circumvented by wiles:

for what can force or guile
With him, or who deceive his mind, whose eye
Views all things at one view? he from heav'ns hight
All these our motions vain, sees and derides;
Not more Almighty to resist our might
Then wise to frustrate all our plots and wiles.⁵⁷

⁵² *PL* ii 101–4.

⁵³ *PL* i 131.

⁵⁴ Cf. Chapter 3 CHANCE, FATE, AND PROVIDENCE, pp. 20–1.

⁵⁵ *PL* ii 137–42.

⁵⁶ *PL* ii 155–9.

⁵⁷ *PL* ii 188–93.

And yet Belial, in his pursuit of 'ignoble ease, and peaceful sloath, | Not peace',⁵⁸ also finds it convenient to argue (like Eve later on) that God, 'perhaps thus farr remov'd' may 'Not mind us not offending'.⁵⁹ But perhaps he will.

Mammon also rejects the idea of defeating God in renewed warfare, and is equally dismissive of any scenario which entails the fallen angels returning to Heaven on God's terms:

Suppose he should relent
And publish Grace to all, on promise made
Of new Subjection; with what eyes could we
Stand in his presence humble, and receive
Strict Laws impos'd, to celebrate his Throne
With warbl'd Hymns, and to his Godhead sing
Forc't Halleluiahs; while he Lordly sits
Our envied Sovran, and his Altar breathes
Ambrosial Odours and Ambrosial Flowers,
Our servile offerings. This must be our task
In Heav'n this our delight; how wearisom
Eternity so spent in worship paid
To whom we hate.⁶⁰

'Grace' is the key word in this passage.⁶¹ Without becoming embroiled in speculation as to whether God might or might not offer grace to the rebel angels,⁶² what is important here is Mammon's conception of the state which such grace—forgiveness and restitution—would inaugurate. He imagines that grace would entail 'Subjection' to 'Strict Laws', a condition in which he would envy the power of their hated ruler. If Mammon were to accept heavenly grace with envy and hatred, then almost by definition it would not be grace that he accepted, nor would it be Heaven that he inhabited.⁶³ Specious argument reappears when Mammon says:

This deep world
Of darkness do we dread? How oft amidst
Thick clouds and dark doth Heav'ns all-ruling Sire
Choose to reside, his Glory unobscur'd,
And with the Majesty of darkness round
Covers his Throne; from whence deep thunders roar
Must'ring thir rage, and Heav'n resembles Hell?
As he our darkness, cannot we his Light

⁵⁸ *PL* ii 227–8.

⁵⁹ *PL* ii 211–12. *mind*: remember, recollect (*OED*³ *s.v.* *mind* *v.* 2, citing this example); turn one's attention to, take notice of (*OED*³ 4). Cf. Eve at ix 811–16, similarly deploying a deceptive 'perhaps'. See Chapter 20 IF AND PERHAPS.

⁶⁰ *PL* ii 237–49.

⁶¹ *grace*: mercy, pardon, forgiveness (*OED*³ *s.v.* *grace* *n.* 5); see Chapter 16 GRACE.

⁶² At *PL* iii 130–2 God says, 'Man...shall find grace, | The other [i.e. the rebel angels] none', because the angels fell 'Self-tempted, self-deprav'd' whereas man was seduced. It seems to be an open question whether God refuses grace to the angels because of their wilfulness, or whether the angels' wilfulness is in itself a refusal of grace. (God's 'shall' might be interpreted as indicating either his decision or his foreknowledge.) Mammon's attitude is certainly a refusal of grace.

⁶³ See further Myers, *Milton's Theology of Freedom*, p. 66.

Imitate when we please? This Desart soile
 Wants not her hidden lustre, Gemms and Gold;
 Nor want we skill or Art, from whence to raise
 Magnificence; and what can Heav'n shew more?⁶⁴

This is multiply fallacious: the darkness of Hell signifies alienation from God for the faithless, whereas the darkness of Heaven protects the eyes of the faithful from his dazzling light; and the divine light is ontologically of an altogether different order from the gleams which come from the materials of Hell. Mammon the materialist has fallen into several category errors.

Satan, however, does not altogether share this error about the divine light; in him there seem still to be some vestiges of unfallen understanding, for amidst the bravado of his concluding speech to the diabolical council there are traces of a genuine longing for the light of Heaven. He applauds his followers' decision,

which from the lowest deep
 Will once more lift us up, in spight of Fate,
 Neerer our ancient Seat; perhaps in view
 Of those bright confines, whence with neighbouring Arms
 And opportune excursion we may chance
 Re-enter Heav'n; or else in some milde Zone
 Dwell not unvisited of Heav'ns fair Light
 Secure, and at the brightning Orient beam
 Purge off this gloom; the soft delicious Air,
 To heal the scarr of these corrosive Fires
 Shall breathe her balme.⁶⁵

There is, of course, some element of deception or self-deception in the rhetoric of 'perhaps', the blaming of 'Fate', and the reliance upon 'chance'; moreover the word 'opportune' is sadly ironic, for etymologically it refers to a wind blowing a vessel towards harbour,⁶⁶ but no favourable wind will blow Satan towards his harbour: he has no harbour. However, there is a poignant longing in this speech for the fair light of Heaven and for the healing which its 'soft delicious Air' would bring, even if he is only thinking now of light and of healing in material rather than spiritual terms. His aspiration to move 'Neerer our ancient Seat' likewise thinks of Heaven geographically. Satan is unable to turn towards the source of the light. Rather, he is greeted by his followers as if he were himself a god:

Towards him they bend
 With awful reverence prone; and as a God
 Extoll him equal to the highest in Heav'n.
 ...
 Midst came thir mighty Paramount, and seemd
 Alone th' Antagonist of Heav'n, nor less
 Than Hells dread Emperour with pomp Supream,
 And God-like imitated State.⁶⁷

⁶⁴ *PL* ii 262–73. ⁶⁵ *PL* ii 392–402.

⁶⁶ *OED*³ *s.v.* opportune *adj.*; from the Latin *ob* + *Portunus* (the god of harbours).

⁶⁷ *PL* ii 477–9, 508–11.

The indefinite article in 'a God' is telling; he is, implicitly, one god amongst many—and therefore no God.⁶⁸ This is only the 'God-like imitated State' of the author of lies.

Satan, the master of lies and of imitation, knows how to speak the language of Heaven when addressing Uriel,⁶⁹ but in soliloquy on Mount Niphates he voices a complex attitude to the God whom he has rejected. Gone, now, are the bombastic claims about warring with Heaven, and in their place we overhear a painful acknowledgement of a dependency⁷⁰ which moves close to being gratitude, and is quite unlike Mammon's depiction of hated servitude to a resented tyrant:

Pride and worse Ambition threw me down
 Warring in Heav'n against Heav'ns matchless King;
 Ah wherefore! he deserv'd 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.
 What could be less then to afford him praise,
 The easiest recompence, and pay him thanks,
 How due! yet all his good prov'd ill in me,
 And wrought but malice; lifted up so high
 I sdeind subjection, and thought one step higher
 Would set me highest, and in a moment quit
 The debt immense of endless gratitude,
 So burthensome still paying, still to ow;
 Forgetful what from him I still receivd,
 And understood not that a grateful mind
 By owing owes not, but still pays, at once
 Indebted and dischargd; what burden then?⁷¹

The words 'gratitude' and 'grateful' come from the same Latin root as 'grace' (*gratus*, *gratia*), so in refusing gratitude Satan is refusing grace: he is rejecting the gifts with which God has endowed him. Satan cannot accept God as God, and finally declares:

Evil be thou my Good; by thee at least
 Divided Empire with Heav'ns King I hold
 By thee, and more then half perhaps will reign.⁷²

At this point he relapses into the fallacy of imagining that God's rule is a mundane kind of empire, a power which can be divided. And this is an assumption

⁶⁸ Milton says that the fallen angels were worshipped on Earth as gods (*PL* i 364ff).

⁶⁹ *PL* iii 654ff.

⁷⁰ Cf. Ratzinger: 'Hell consists in man's being unwilling to receive anything, in his desire to be self-sufficient. It is the expression of enclosure in one's own being alone ... Conversely, it is the nature of that upper end of the scale which we have called heaven that it can only be received, just as one can only give hell to oneself. "Heaven" is by nature what one has not made oneself and cannot make oneself; in Scholastic language it was said to be, as grace, *donum indebitum et superadditum naturae* (an unowed gift added over and above nature)' (*Introduction to Christianity*, pp. 312–13). Cf. Chapter 11 *Evil*, p. 113.

⁷¹ *PL* iv 40–57.

⁷² *PL* iv 110–12.

which can only lead to Satan's defeat. Or rather, this is the moment of his self-defeat.



Milton's approach to the problem of using human language to describe God—to define his attributes, describe his actions and motives, to invent speech for him, and generally to incorporate him within the syntax of epic—is seen first in Book III. When the angels hymn God as 'Immutable, Immortal, Infinite',⁷³ they praise him by evoking what he is not, and when Milton tells us what God 'is', the language is multiply defective:

God is light,
And never but in unapproached light
Dwelt from Eternitie.⁷⁴

The word 'is' here cannot simply be the copula: 'is' must mean something like 'is metaphorically represented by', as we understand when we read that 'God is light, and in him is no darknesse at all' in the first Epistle of John (ὁ Θεὸς φῶς ἐστὶ, καὶ σκοτία ἐν αὐτῷ οὐκ ἔστιν οὐδεμία),⁷⁵ or when Thomas Wilson says, 'God, who is like Light, both for the brightnesse of his majesty, and his most pure and single Nature, being of infinite knowledge and holinesse, without any darknesse of ignorance or sin'.⁷⁶ The verb 'to be' here also functions as a trace of the name which God gave himself when speaking to Moses: 'I AM THAT I AM',⁷⁷ where the plenitude of the statement—the most fundamental of a priori propositions—resists the attachment of any other predicate for 'I am'. The tautology fashions 'I am' into a circle of perfection. Nor can we really understand what 'light' means, or how 'light' in the first line relates to the 'light' in the second.⁷⁸ Is 'light' a metaphor for God? But if light is created by God, and creation happens *ex deo*,⁷⁹ then light should be a metonymy rather than a metaphor or simile. Is it created light which is signified by the second occurrence of the word, or is that light an uncreated emanation of the Deity? Either way, there is a paradox here, in saying that light dwelt in light, so we are edged towards reflecting on the metaphorical reach and the intrinsic failure of the image. Then the multiple negatives, 'never but...unapproached', remind us of the necessary role of negation in religious language where positive statements risk impoverishing the Deity. 'Unapproached' is recorded by the *Oxford English Dictionary* as Milton's coinage with the obvious meaning 'not approached',⁸⁰ but it probably also means 'not approachable',⁸¹ which would be consonant with what

⁷³ PL iii 373. ⁷⁴ PL iii 3–5. ⁷⁵ 1 John i 5.

⁷⁶ Wilson, p. 379. ⁷⁷ Exodus iii 14.

⁷⁸ For the tradition of associating light with God see Lieb, *Poetics of the Holy*, ch. 9. He notes particularly the distinction between *lux* (uncreated light) and *lumen* (material light) (p. 203). Cf. Ephesians iv 10; *De Doctrina*: OCW viii 296–7; *Reformation: Works* iii 76.

⁷⁹ Milton thought that the world was created *ex deo* (*De Doctrina*: OCW viii 288–91) rather than *ex nihilo*, which is the traditional orthodox Christian belief (*ST* I, q. 45, a. 1; CCC §§296–8; resolution of the Fourth Lateran Council (1215) in Denzinger §800, cf. §1333).

⁸⁰ OED s.v. 'unapproached'.

⁸¹ For the early-modern use of the passive participle in *-ed* to mean *-able* see E. A. Abbott, *A Shakespearean Grammar* (London, 1870; reprinted New York, 1966), §375.

St Paul says: God 'onely hath immortalitie, dwelling in the light, which no man can approach vnto'.⁸² The preposition 'in' (particularly when associated with 'Dwelt') implies physical location, but God cannot be physically located, since he is everywhere.⁸³ Finally, there is a further paradox in 'Dwelt from Eternitie': to use the past tense of a verb with God as its subject places him in time,⁸⁴ whereas God is beyond time; moreover, eternity is not just a very long period of time,⁸⁵ and since eternity has no beginning, one cannot really say that someone did something 'from Eternitie'. In these twelve words, 'is' is an inadequate though essential verb; 'light' and 'light' are not synonymous and their precise meaning and mutual relationship are unclear; negatives confess their own conceptual impoverishment; 'in' is an inadequate preposition; 'unapproached' is a coinage with a double meaning; 'dwelt' is used in a misleading tense; and 'from Eternitie' is conceptually confused. All these erroneous and awkward usages are, as it were, necessary failings, precise poetic approaches to imprecision, to that which cannot be described but can only be evoked by straining the language.

Milton continues:

Now had the Almighty Father from above,
From the pure Empyrean where he sits
High Thron'd above all highth, bent down his eye,
His own works and their works at once to view:
About him all the Sanctities of Heaven
Stood thick as Starrs, and from his sight receiv'd
Beatitude past utterance; on his right
The radiant image of his Glory sat,
His onely Son.⁸⁶

Here, in what will prove to be a common technique in *Paradise Lost*, Milton draws together the abstract and the apparently concrete when evoking God and Heaven in order to stretch our imagination and awake our wonder. 'Empyrean' ('relating to the highest or most exalted part or sphere of Heaven') was well established in English as an adjective, but this is the first recorded use of the word as a noun,⁸⁷ importing a strangeness into the designation of some kind of physical location

⁸² 1 Timothy vi 16.

⁸³ STI, q. 8, a. 2. Cf. Boethius: *quod ubique est ita dici videtur non quod in omni sit loco (omnino enim in loco esse non potest) sed quod omnis ei locus adsit ad eum capiendum, cum ipse non suscipiatur in loco; atque ideo nusquam in loco esse dicitur, quoniam ubique est sed non in loco* ("He is everywhere" seems to mean not that he is in every place, for he cannot be in any place at all—but that every place is present to him for him to occupy, although he himself is not received by any place, and therefore he is said to be nowhere in place, since he is everywhere but not in any place' (*De Trinitate* IV)). On God's omnipresence cf. *De Doctrina* (OCW viii 38–9). For the imaginary geography of *PL* see H. F. Robins, 'Satan's Journey: Direction in *Paradise Lost*', in *Milton Studies in Honor of Harris Francis Fletcher* (Urbana, Ill., 1961), pp. 91–103; Jackson I. Cope, *The Metaphoric Structure of 'Paradise Lost'* (Baltimore, Md., 1962), ch. 3; Walter Clyde Curry, *Milton's Ontology, Cosmogony and Physics* (Lexington, Ky., 1966); and Dennis Danielson, *'Paradise Lost' and the Cosmological Revolution* (Cambridge, 2014).

⁸⁴ St Paul writing to Timothy uses the present participle, οἰκῶν. See Lieb, *Poetics of the Holy*, pp. 212ff. for the idea of God dwelling.

⁸⁵ STI, q. 10, a. 4; contrast 'aeviternity' (for which see STI, q. 10, a. 5).

⁸⁶ *PL* iii 56–64. ⁸⁷ *OED*³ s.v. *empyrean* n. B1, actually citing *PL* vii 73.

where God 'sits'.⁸⁸ Similarly 'High Thron'd above all highth' teases the reader's imagination through the rhetorical figure of *polyptoton*, and because 'highth' has several possible meanings: (i) physical elevation or altitude (so God is enthroned somewhere which is physically higher than anything else); (ii) exalted rank; (iii) the highest point of something immaterial (e.g. greatness or excellence); (iv) 'the heavens' (so God is enthroned above, not in, the heavens).⁸⁹ The line challenges us to hold together these various possibilities, the physical and the metaphysical, the literal and the metaphorical, until we are no longer sure how these terms might apply. Furthermore, 'highth' evokes St Paul's prayer that the Ephesians 'May be able to comprehend with all Saints, what is the breadth, and length, and depth, and height' of the love of Christ,⁹⁰ so we know that 'high' and 'highth' are signifiers not of location but of the intensity of divine glory and love. 'Sanctities' is another linguistic novelty, because it is normally an abstract noun,⁹¹ but is used here as a title for the angels as supreme instances of holiness. Finally, 'on his right | The radiant image of his Glory sat': we know that the right hand of God signifies '1. The place of honour, delights, joyes... 2. The full exaltation of dignity, honour, glory... 3. Strength and power... 4. Gods word with power... 5. God himself'.⁹² But even with these symbolic meanings in mind, we encounter a conceptual strangeness when we are told that the 'image... sat'. Such estranging language appears again in respect of the Son when Milton says, 'on thee | Impresst the effulgence of his Glorie abides'.⁹³ Here Milton once again draws together the physical and the abstract. 'Effulgence' is another of Milton's coinages,⁹⁴ for he has created an English noun from the Latin verb *effulgere*, to shine or blaze forth. This blazing forth of the divine glory is 'Impresst' on the Son: the image comes from the strongly physical activity of imprinting, applying something with such pressure as to make a mark; and while by Milton's day the word was often used figuratively for the impression made by some idea on the mind,⁹⁵ here in *Paradise Lost*, where we are imaginatively and theologically attuned to the task of conceptualizing the physical and the metaphysical—and the metaphysical *via* the physical—we cannot avoid noticing the disjuncture between subject and verb, between effulgence and impressing, which seem incompatible metaphors.

The physical and the metaphysical are frequently joined or juxtaposed. God plants the garden of Eden,⁹⁶ and even heaps up the waste soil to form a mountain,

⁸⁸ For the tradition of imagining God in particular places see Lieb, *Poetics of the Holy*, chs 6–7. On pp. 348–9 Lieb reconstructs the way that Milton imagines the geography of Heaven in *PL*.

⁸⁹ Respectively, *OED s.v. height n.* 1, 7, 12, 13; the last example for sense 13 is from 1615.

⁹⁰ Ephesians iii 18; cf. *PL* viii 413. *OED s.v. height n.* 1b shows that this instance of the word in the AV passed into figurative use.

⁹¹ *OED s.v. sanctity n.* records only abstract senses, except for two rare uses as a synonym for the papal or patriarchal title 'Holiness'.

⁹² Wilson, p. 536, omitting scriptural references. Cf.

So spake the Father, and unfolding bright
Toward the right hand his Glorie, on the Son
Blaz'd forth unclouded Deitie.

(*PL* x 63–5)

⁹³ *PL* iii 387–8.

⁹⁴ *OED s.v. effulgence n.*

⁹⁵ *OED s.v. impress v.*¹ 1, 3.

⁹⁶ *PL* iv 210.

'for God had thrown | That Mountain as his Garden mould high rais'd'.⁹⁷ In their heavenly banquet the angels 'Quaff immortalitie and joy' as if these were drinks.⁹⁸ Abdiel tells Satan that 'every Soule in Heav'n | Shall bend the knee',⁹⁹ as if souls had knees. Satan's rebellion carries 'Warr so neer the Peace of God in bliss', as if the peace of God were a location.¹⁰⁰ The spatial imagination is also confounded when Milton writes:

Him God beholding from his prospect high,
Wherein past, present, future he beholds,
Thus to his onely Son foreseeing spake.¹⁰¹

A 'prospect' may be either abstract or concrete; if concrete, it is an elevated place which affords a wide view, and this is what seems to be intended here, as God is able to see Satan from his high vantage point. But 'Wherein' does not altogether fit this meaning, for we would expect 'from which' if 'prospect' were a place or position, so if God sees Satan 'in' his prospect, then prospect must have the abstract sense of 'the action of looking out':¹⁰² as a result the place of looking and the act of looking are fused, which reminds us that this seeing is no ordinary sight but the simultaneous knowledge of past, present, and future. When God creates the world,

Heav'n op'nd wide
Her ever during Gates, Harmonious sound
On golden Hinges moving, to let forth
The King of Glorie in his powerful Word
And Spirit coming to create new Worlds.
On heav'nly ground they stood.¹⁰³

If repunctuated, this description of the gates would be more easily comprehensible:

Heav'n op'nd wide
Her ever during Gates (Harmonious sound!)
On golden Hinges moving.

We know, of course, that it is the gates which move on golden hinges, not the sound, but Milton's phrasing momentarily creates the entrancing idea of sound moving on golden hinges.¹⁰⁴ And prayers have an almost physical embodiment:

To Heav'n thir prayers
Flew up, nor missd the way, by envious windes
Blow'n vagabond or frustrate: in they passd
Dimentionless through Heav'nly dores; then clad

⁹⁷ *PL* iv 225–6. *mould*: loose, broken earth (*OED*³ *s.v.* *mould* *n.*¹ 1).

⁹⁸ *PL* v 638. This line was added in the second edition of *PL* (1674).

⁹⁹ *PL* v 816–17.

¹⁰⁰ *PL* vii 55. *OED*³ *s.v.* *peace* *n.* offers various senses which fill out the meaning of 'the Peace of God' here: public order of a state (1b); amity, concord, esp. between an individual and God (2); freedom from anxiety and disturbance (3) (with which cf. the Epicurean peace enjoyed by the gods: see Lucretius, *De Rerum Natura* ii 645–7); freedom from external disturbance (4); freedom from war (6).

¹⁰¹ *PL* iii 77–9.

¹⁰² *OED*³ *s.v.* *prospect* *n.* 1d and 1a respectively.

¹⁰³ *PL* vii 205–10.

¹⁰⁴ At *PL* vii 566 Milton refers to the 'living dores' of Heaven.

With incense, where the Golden Altar fum'd,
 By thir great Intercessor, came in sight
 Before the Fathers Throne.¹⁰⁵

The physical and the abstract qualify each other: the prayers pass through the doors of Heaven, yet are 'Dimensionless';¹⁰⁶ the prayers are 'clad', but with incense not with clothes. Milton's language makes prayer almost substantial, and Heaven accessible to human thought, to human prayer.



The presentation of God within *Paradise Lost* involves the creation of a conceptual and narrative relationship between the Father, the Son, and the Spirit. Milton was not a believer in the orthodox doctrine of the Trinity¹⁰⁷ (probably because it has no explicit scriptural foundation) and in *Paradise Lost* he maps an understanding of the Deity in ways which draw on traditional Christian language while showing affinities with some of the Arian tenets condemned at the First Council of Nicaea.¹⁰⁸ Milton's imagination seeks to configure this relationship in various ways in *Paradise Lost*, notably through dialogue, and the result is both theologically idiosyncratic and poetically daring. Sometimes his expression is such that an orthodox theologian would have no cause to demur: in the passage just quoted, for instance, it is the Trinity of Father ('The King of Glorie'¹⁰⁹), Son ('his powerful Word'), and 'Spirit' which is about to create these new worlds.¹¹⁰ It seems that gates have to

¹⁰⁵ *PL* xi 14–20.

¹⁰⁶ 'Dimensionless' is apparently Milton's coinage (*OED s.v. dimensionless adj.*).

¹⁰⁷ This may be true of his thinking in *PL* and *De Doctrina*, but in *Of Reformation* (1641) he had written of 'one *Tri-personall* GODHEAD' (*Works* iii 76). Cf. Lieb, *Poetics of the Holy*, pp. 358–9, n. 19.

¹⁰⁸ For the Council's texts see Denzinger §§125–6, 130. I do not propose to reopen the question of the orthodoxy or otherwise of the theology of *PL*, but will seek instead to elucidate Milton's poetic presentation of God in the poem. Milton's rejection of traditional Trinitarian doctrine emerges quite clearly in *De Doctrina* (esp. Book I, ch. 5: *OCW* viii 126–229). For a careful discussion of the Arian tendency of Milton's theology see Michael Bauman, *Milton's Arianism* (Frankfurt am Main, 1987). I am grateful to Professor Bauman for generously supplying me with a copy of his book, which is hard to obtain. Different conclusions are reached by Lieb, *Theological Milton*, chs 7–8, without citing Bauman's work; he observes differences between Milton's theology and some of the views attributed to Arius, while accepting that Milton's theology is eclectic. See also John P. Rumrich, 'Milton's Arianism: Why It Matters', in *Milton and Heresy*, edited by Stephen B. Dobranski and John P. Rumrich (Cambridge, 1998), pp. 75–92; and Campbell et al., *Milton and the Manuscript of 'De Doctrina Christiana'*, pp. 98–106; and for a clarification of God's arguments about predestination, the elect, and divine foreknowledge see Deborah Shuger, 'Milton Über Alles: The School Divinity of *Paradise Lost* 3.183–202', *Studies in Philology* 107 (2010) 401–15. For an account of seventeenth-century debates over the Trinity see Paul C. H. Lim, *Mystery Unveiled: The Crisis of the Trinity in Early Modern England* (Oxford, 2012).

¹⁰⁹ The title derives from Psalm xxiv 7.

¹¹⁰ Cf. *PL* vii 163–76:

my Word, begotten Son, by thee
 This I perform, speak thou, and be it don:
 My overshadowing Spirit and might with thee
 I send along.
 ...
 So spake th' Almighty, and to what he spake
 His Word, the filial Godhead, gave effect.

open to enable them to move out, and 'On heavenly ground they stood'.¹¹¹ Such evocations of the physical along with negations of any literal-minded imagination recur in this passage:

Thus when in Orbes
Of circuit inexpressible they stood,
Orb within Orb, the Father infinite,
By whom in bliss imbosm'd sat the Son,
Amidst as from a flaming Mount, whose top
Brightness had made invisible, thus spake.¹¹²

Physical space and location are suggested in the phrases 'in Orbes... they stood', 'Orb within Orb', 'sat', and 'Amidst'; and these indications are countered or complicated by 'Of circuit inexpressible', the paradox of the Son sitting 'By' the Father when the Father is 'infinite', unless 'By' indicates agency rather than proximity: is the Son 'imbosm'd' in bliss next to the Father, or has he been 'imbosm'd' in bliss by some act of the Father? Moreover, 'imbosm'd' carries enough of a visual image to suggest close physical contact with the Father as well as the metaphorical sense of being enfolded in bliss. Then the preposition 'Amidst' seems to float without any precise referent: amidst the angels? amidst the orbs? The closest appropriate noun seems to be 'Mount', but the poetry does not say 'Amidst a flaming Mount' but 'Amidst *as from* a flaming Mount', so conceptual precision is again evoked only to be blurred.

Creation is entrusted to the Son, who

now appeer'd,
Girt with Omnipotence, with Radiance crown'd
Of Majestie Divine, Sapience and Love
Immense, and all his Father in him shon.¹¹³

'Girt with Omnipotence, with Radiance crown'd' once again brings together the physical and the metaphysical, but the passage hovers between affirming that the Son has divine majesty and the statement that 'all his Father in him shon', which suggests that the Son's radiance is (only) derived from the Father. Then when Milton tells how the Son circumscribed the universe with the divine compasses he says, 'Thus God the Heav'n created, thus the Earth';¹¹⁴ we might read this as an acknowledgement that the Son, being God, created the world, or that God the Father created the world through the agency of the Son: we do not quite know whether 'Son' and 'God' are synonymous here. Besides, the Father is everywhere present, as Milton explains at moments when he is also charting a distinction between the Father and the Son:

therefore the Omnipotent
Eternal Father (For where is not hee
Present) thus to his Son audibly spake.¹¹⁵

¹¹¹ An orthodox Trinitarian might, however, object to the plural pronoun 'they'.

¹¹² *PL* v 594–9.

¹¹³ *PL* vii 193–6.

¹¹⁴ *PL* vii 232.

¹¹⁵ *PL* vii 516–18.

So must the Father be present in the Son? Again:

when at the holy mount
Of Heav'n's high-seated top, th' Impereal Throne
Of Godhead, fixt for ever firm and sure,
The Filial Power arriv'd, and sate him down
With his great Father (for he also went
Invisible, yet staid (such priviledge
Hath Omnipresence) and the work ordain'd,
Author and end of all things.¹¹⁶

Such passages both maintain the conceptual difference between the Father and the Son and remind us of their unity.

An important part of the configuration of Father and Son is their dialogue.¹¹⁷ This may seem strange, and yet St Augustine says, 'What the Son speaks, the Father speaks, because in the speech of the Father, the Word, who is the Son, is uttered according to God's eternal way'.¹¹⁸ In orthodox theology one could even say that the Trinitarian God converses with himself.¹¹⁹ In Milton's Heaven, the Father and the Son converse about the Fall of man in a dialogue which seems to bear the traces of a debate between personifications of Justice and of Mercy which formed part of Milton's original conception of *Paradise Lost*.¹²⁰ But Milton does not simply configure the Father as Judgement and the Son as Mercy, because it is the Father who announces that as man was deceived by Satan,

Man therefore shall find grace,
The other none: in Mercy and Justice both,
Through Heav'n and Earth, so shall my glorie excel,
But Mercy first and last shall brightest shine.¹²¹

And when the Son asks—rhetorically, because he does not need to know the answer, though we do—whether the Father will allow man, his creation, to be completely lost, the Father replies:

Son who art alone
My word, my wisdom, and effectual might,

¹¹⁶ *PL* vii 584–91.

¹¹⁷ For a summary of the critical arguments about the kind of language which Milton uses for God's speeches see Leonard, *Faithful Labourers*, pp. 479, 482, 504; and see particularly Irene Samuel, 'The Dialogue in Heaven: A Reconsideration of *Paradise Lost*, III 1–417', *PMLA* 72 (1957) 601–11; Isabel Gamble MacCaffrey, 'The Theme of *Paradise Lost*, Book III', in *New Essays on 'Paradise Lost'*, edited by Thomas Kranidas (Berkeley, Calif., 1969), pp. 58–85; Fish, *Surprised by Sin*, ch. 2; John K. Hale, *Milton as Multilingual: Selected Essays, 1982–2004* (Otago, 2005), pp. 210–21; William Pallister, *Between Worlds: The Rhetorical Universe of 'Paradise Lost'* (Toronto, 2008), ch. 6.

¹¹⁸ *Quod autem Filius loquitur, Pater loquitur, quia Patre loquente dicitur Verbum, quod Filius est, aeterno more, si more dicendum est, loquente Deo Verbum coaeternum* (Augustine, *De Genesi ad Litteram Libri Duodecim* I v 11; *Patrologia Latina* xxxiv 250; translated by John Hammond Taylor as *The Literal Meaning of Genesis*, 2 vols (New York, 1982), i 24).

¹¹⁹ Ratzinger, *Introduction to Christianity*, p. 182.

¹²⁰ In his notes for an early, dramatic version of the story of *Paradise Lost* Milton envisaged 'Justice [and] Mercie debating what should become of man if he fall' (Trinity MS, p. 35). J. M. Evans draws a parallel with mediaeval and Renaissance accounts of a debate between Mercy and Justice over the fate of fallen man: see *'Paradise Lost' and the Genesis Tradition* (Oxford, 1968), pp. 232ff.

¹²¹ *PL* iii 131–4.

All hast thou spok'n as my thoughts are, all
As my Eternal purpose hath decreed.¹²²

The Son, as the Word of God (λόγος), speaks what the Father has purposed. There is, therefore, no argument or debate between Father and Son, but the expression of different aspects of a single will. What we perceive as different attitudes or dispositions of God are in reality, as Donne explained, different ways in which man experiences the divine goodness:

That which we cal the anger of God, the wrath of God, the fury of God, is the goodnesse of God... We call God, Just, and we call him Mercifull, according to our present taste of God, and use of God... when as God hath but one affection in himself, that is, goodness, nor but one purpose upon us, that is, to doe us good.¹²³

So when the narrator says:

And now without redemption all mankind
Must have bin lost, adjudg'd to Death and Hell
By doom severe, had not the Son of God,
In whom the fulness dwels of love divine,
His dearest mediation thus renewd.¹²⁴

the Son speaks from 'the fulness... of love divine', expressing rather than contradicting the Father. Preparing to do battle with the rebel angels, the Son says:

But whom thou hat'st, I hate, and can put on
Thy terrors, as I put thy mildness on,
Image of thee in all things.¹²⁵

Both terror and mildness belong to both Father and Son, and the Son when he manifests the Father in speech or action can show whichever face is required.

When Adam and Eve are to be judged after the Fall, 'the voice of God they heard | Now walking in the Garden':¹²⁶ at the narrative level this is the voice of the Son, but theologically it is the voice of God because the Son is his Word. Then 'So judg'd he Man, both Judge and Saviour'.¹²⁷ The Son shows fatherly kindness when 'As Father of his Familie he clad | Thir nakedness with Skins of Beasts', and also clothed their 'inward nakedness, much more | Opprobrious, with his Robe of righteousness, | Araying cover'd from his Fathers sight'.¹²⁸ Here he acts as a father, while also covering the penitent couple from the Father's sight. Though wrath and judgement, mercy and love are all aspects of the Deity, they are not at variance with one another but different facets of the divine in its relation with mankind. Afterwards, God tells the Son, 'All thy request for Man, accepted Son, | Obtain, all thy request was my Decree'.¹²⁹ The Son is referred to by God as 'My word, my

¹²² *PL* iii 169–72.

¹²³ *The Sermons of John Donne*, edited by Evelyn M. Simpson and George R. Potter, 10 vols (Berkeley, Calif., 1953–62), vi 238.

¹²⁴ *PL* iii 222–6. This time Milton uses the appropriate tense in 'dwells'.

¹²⁵ *PL* vi 734–6. ¹²⁶ *PL* x 97–8. ¹²⁷ *PL* x 209.

¹²⁸ *PL* x 209, 216–17, 221–3. *Opprobrious*: involving shame or disgrace (*OED*³ 2a).

¹²⁹ *PL* xi 46–7.

wisdom, and effectual might',¹³⁰ and is therefore the outward and visible manifestation of a *deus absconditus*.

It is nevertheless the case that Milton the anti-Trinitarian tends to think of the Son as subordinate, as we see when 'as a sacrifice | Glad to be offer'd, he attends the will | Of his great Father'.¹³¹ The Father replies in terms which mark out the Son as 'Equal to God, and equally enjoying | God-like fruition';¹³² but entities which are equal, and which enjoy equal fruition, cannot be consubstantial, which is how the Nicene Creed defines the Father and the Son.¹³³ However, another passage implies that Father and Son are indeed consubstantial:

Beyond compare the Son of God was seen
Most glorious, in him all his Father shon
Substantially express'd, and in his face
Divine compassion visibly appeerd,
Love without end, and without measure Grace.¹³⁴

'Substantially express'd' appears to make the Son consubstantial with the Father, as well as making him the means by which divine compassion, love, and grace are made manifest. Even so, the Son says that the Father has 'all Regal Power | Giv'n me',¹³⁵ and if this power is given it cannot be innate. Later the Father tells the angels, 'Adore the Son, and honour him as mee',¹³⁶ 'as' implying difference. Moreover, the Father addresses the Son as

Effulgence of my Glorie, Son belov'd,
Son in whose face invisible is beheld
Visibly, what by Deitie I am,
And in whose hand what by Decree I doe,
Second Omnipotence,
...
Into thee such Vertue and Grace
Immense I have transfus'd, that all may know
In Heav'n and Hell thy Power above compare,
And this perverse Commotion governd thus,
To manifest thee worthiest to be Heir
Of all things, to be Heir and to be King
By Sacred Unction, thy deserved right.

¹³⁰ *PL* iii 170.

¹³¹ *PL* iii 266–71. For brief accounts of this subordinationist element in Milton's theology see John T. Shawcross, *John Milton: The Self and the World* (Lexington, Ky., 1993), pp. 252–3, and Campbell et al., *Milton and the Manuscript of 'De Doctrina Christiana'*, pp. 105–6. Milton devotes a substantial chapter (i 5) of *De Doctrina* to an elaboration of his understanding of the Son of God.

¹³² *PL* iii 306–7. Cf. Chapter 10 EQUAL, p. 96.

¹³³ Nicaea defined the Son as ἐκ τῆς οὐσίας τοῦ Πατρὸς (Denzinger §125), translated in the Nicene Creed used in the 1662 Book of Common Prayer as 'Being of one substance with the Father' (*The Book of Common Prayer: The Texts of 1549, 1559, and 1662*, edited by Brian Cummings (Oxford, 2011), p. 392). In *De Doctrina* Milton says that the Son is of the same substance with the Father but not the same essence (*OCW* viii 132). See further C. A. Patrides, 'Milton on the Trinity: The Use of Antecedents', in W. B. Hunter, C. A. Patrides, and J. H. Adamson, *Bright Essence: Studies in Milton's Theology* (Salt Lake City, 1973), pp. 3–13. Cf. Chapter 19 IDOL AND IMAGE, p. 274 n. 19.

¹³⁴ *PL* iii 138–42.

¹³⁵ *PL* v 739–40.

¹³⁶ *PL* iii 343.

Go then thou Mightiest in thy Fathers might,
Ascend my Chariot.¹³⁷

The first part of this passage defines the Son as the visible face of the invisible God, and as the mode of agency of the divine will, whereas the second part of the speech implies that the Son is a separate entity into whom God has 'transfus'd' power and grace, and who will act 'in thy Fathers might', not his own. The subordination of the Son to the Father becomes particularly clear when the rebel angels are defeated and the Son says:

Then shall thy Saints unmixt, and from th' impure
Farr separate, circling thy holy Mount
Unfeigned *Halleluiahs* to thee sing,
Hymns of high praise, and I among them chief.¹³⁸

So the Son will be among the angels hymning the Father. This is exemplary, for as Milton says in *De Doctrina Christiana*, *Quemadmodum enim filius patrem solum passim adorat ac veneratur, ita et nos docet*.¹³⁹

Exemplary too is a recurring feature of Milton's representation of the Son which emerges from the passages just quoted, the prevalence of abstract nouns. He presents the Son as a manifestation of God's 'Omnipotence...| Majestie Divine, Sapience and Love',¹⁴⁰ his 'wisdom, and effectual might',¹⁴¹ the 'fulness...of love divine',¹⁴² 'immortal love',¹⁴³ 'Divine compassion...| Love without end, and without measure Grace'.¹⁴⁴ All these abstractions tend towards assigning to the Son some of the functions of the personifications of Mercy and Justice which figure in the early notes for the poem in the Trinity manuscript,¹⁴⁵ though these qualities are not in debate one with another but singly and cumulatively gesture towards an understanding of the Son as exemplifying in humanly comprehensible ways the divine attributes. In as much as love, wisdom, and compassion are also human ideals, they are purified and transfigured in the Son, redefined for the reader's enlightenment.



How does God see his relationship with man? In the following passage he addresses the central theological question of the poem, man's responsibility for his own Fall as a result of listening to the seductive words of Satan, and the associated question of the relationship between divine foreknowledge and man's free will:

For man will hark'n to his glozing lyes,
And easily transgress the sole Command,
Sole pledge of his obedience: So will fall,
Hee and his faithless Progenie: whose fault?
Whose but his own? ingrate, he had of mee

¹³⁷ PL vi 680–4, 703–11.

¹³⁸ PL vi 742–5.

¹³⁹ 'for just as the son everywhere adores and venerates the father alone, so he teaches us also to do' (*De Doctrina: OCW viii 160–1*).

¹⁴⁰ PL vii 194–5.

¹⁴¹ PL iii 170.

¹⁴² PL iii 225.

¹⁴³ PL iii 267.

¹⁴⁴ PL iii 141–2.

¹⁴⁵ See n. 120.

All he could have; I made him just and right,
 Sufficient to have stood, though free to fall.
 Such I created all th' Ethereal Powers
 And Spirits, both them who stood and them who faild;
 Freely they stood who stood, and fell who fell.
 Not free, what proof could they have givn sincere
 Of true allegiance, constant Faith or Love,
 Where onely what they needs must do, appeard,
 Not what they would? what praise could they receive?
 What pleasure I from such obedience paid,
 When Will and Reason (Reason also is choice)
 Useless and vain, of freedom both despoild,
 Made passive both, had servd necessitie,
 Not mee. They therefore as to right belongd,
 So were created, nor can justly accuse
 Thir maker, or thir making, or thir Fate,
 As if predestination over-rul'd
 Thir will, dispos'd by absolute Decree
 Or high foreknowledge; they themselves decreed
 Thir own revolt, not I: if I foreknew,
 Foreknowledge had no influence on their fault,
 Which had no less prov'd certain unforeknown.
 So without least impulse or shadow of Fate,
 Or aught by me immutable foreseen,
 They trespass, Authors to themselves in all
 Both what they judge and what they choose; for so
 I formd them free, and free they must remain,
 Till they enthrall themselves: I else must change
 Thir nature, and revoke the high Decree
 Unchangeable, Eternal, which ordain'd
 Thir freedom, they themselves ordain'd thir fall.
 The first sort by thir own suggestion fell,
 Self-tempted, self-deprav'd: Man falls deceiv'd
 By the other first: Man therefore shall find grace,
 The other none: in Mercy and Justice both,
 Through Heav'n and Earth, so shall my glorie excel,
 But Mercy first and last shall brightest shine.¹⁴⁶

Formally God is addressing the Son, though effectually he is addressing the reader, and the four questions which he asks are rhetorical questions: he does not need to find the answer, nor is the Son expected to reply. These are more like the questions of a catechist who seeks to draw out from his hearer the appropriate answer: 'whose fault? | Whose but his own?'. As G. B. Caird says of the God of the Old Testament, 'God never speaks simply to convey information, but always to achieve results . . . The word which came to the prophets was always a statement of God's intentions, combined with a demand for man's co-operation.'¹⁴⁷

¹⁴⁶ *PL* iii 93–133.

¹⁴⁷ G. B. Caird, *A Commentary on the Revelation of St. John the Divine* (London, 1966), pp. 11–12, citing Psalm xxxiii 9; Isaiah lv 11.

God is a skilled but not—like Satan—a specious rhetorician.¹⁴⁸ The repetition of ‘sole’ underlines the fact that there was only one commandment given to Adam and Eve which was in turn the one ‘pledge’¹⁴⁹ of their obedience. But man, instead of being obedient, was ‘ingrate’ (ungrateful), one of the words in this passage which has prompted some critics to hear God’s speech as ‘exasperated’, ‘angry’, or even ‘violent’.¹⁵⁰ But one could equally well hear this as the tone of a deeply disappointed benefactor, one who has lovingly created man and has given him ‘All he could have’—the emphatic position of ‘All’ at the beginning of the line loads that word with meaning—only for the ‘sole’ pledge of loyalty in return to be broken so quickly. In the divine exposition of the question of freedom and necessity some readers have heard harshness or even clumsy pedantry where others hear exactly that clarity which the reader needs at this point in the poem:¹⁵¹ the rhetorical figure of *parison* in the line ‘Sufficient to have stood, though free to fall’ and again in ‘Freely they stood who stood, and fell who fell’ contrasts the pre- and postlapsarian state while making man’s own responsibility for his own Fall amply clear. The Fall is not predestined, nor in any way determined by God’s foreknowledge; foreknowledge is intransitive.¹⁵² Emphatic caesuras point up the true agency:

Or high foreknowledge; *they* themselves decreed
Thir own revolt, *not I*.¹⁵³

Then God says, ‘if I foreknew’ (meaning, ‘even though I knew, granted that I knew’¹⁵⁴)

Foreknowledge had no influence on their fault,
Which had no less prov’d certain unforeknown.

‘Unforeknown’ is apparently Milton’s coinage,¹⁵⁵ and this novel word at the end of the line clinches the point through emphatic *polyptoton*.

The central argument of the speech is that nothing abridges human freedom: neither fate, nor necessity, nor divine foreknowledge in any way curtail or determine man’s actions, the free use of his will and of his reason, for without freedom there can be no will, there can be no use of reason—for ‘Reason also is choice’, as God says, and if there is no choice to be made, there is no work for reason to do—and without freedom there can be no love: no love from man towards God if all that man does is done from necessity, and no love from God towards man if he has

¹⁴⁸ ‘God’s eloquence is not eloquence at all, but the natural persuasiveness that is inseparable from wisdom’ (Fish, *Surprised by Sin*, p. 76).

¹⁴⁹ *OED*³ *s.v.* pledge *n.* 4a: guarantee of loyalty. God tells Adam that the prohibition on the Tree of Knowledge is ‘The Pledge of thy Obedience and thy Faith’ (*PL* viii 325).

¹⁵⁰ These are all terms used by John Hardy, ‘“Distance and Distaste” in Milton’s God’s “Ingrate”’, *Notes and Queries* 26 (1979) 422; cf. Fowler *ad PL* iii 95–8 and Fish, *Surprised by Sin*, p. 64 for different interpretations of the tone here.

¹⁵¹ One of Milton’s early readers, Patrick Hume, called this ‘the excellent Discourse of *Free-will*, the reasons of which are plainly and very convincingly laid down’ (p. 102). Hume’s notes to this passage provide an admirably clear and sympathetic account of the argument of the speech.

¹⁵² *De Doctrina* i 3: *OCW* viii 64–5.

¹⁵³ Italics added.

¹⁵⁴ *OED s.v.* if *conj.* 4a. Some readers have (absurdly) construed ‘if’ to indicate doubt on God’s part (see Leonard, *Faithful Labourers*, pp. 485, 488).

¹⁵⁵ *OED s.v.* unforeknown *adj.*

created a mere puppet. For, as Milton said in *Areopagitica*, 'when God gave him reason, he gave him freedom to choose, for reason is but choosing; he had bin else a meer artificial *Adam*, such an *Adam* as he is in the motions.'¹⁵⁶ The speech ends with God promising that man will receive grace, mercy, and justice. Justice punishes man for his transgression, for his ingratitude, but this justice is more than the imposition of a punishment, it is the disclosure to man of the consequences of breaking his 'pledge': you cannot break the bond of love and gratitude and continue as before.¹⁵⁷ Mercy will be shown along with justice when the Son clothes Adam and Eve with the skins of wild animals, an act of paternal care which symbolizes the gift of grace, that is, the capacity for mankind to do God's will despite his fallen condition.



How do Adam and Eve see their relationship with God? When the newly created Adam addresses God, he, like Milton, hesitates as to what name he should use:

O by what Name, for thou above all these,
Above mankinde, or aught then mankinde higher,
Surpassest farr my naming, how may I
Adore thee, Author of this Universe.¹⁵⁸

Before the Fall, and before he is instructed by Raphael, Adam expresses a form of natural theology in deducing from the world around him that he and it must have some Creator, and that this Creator should be revered:

Thou Sun, said I, faire Light,
And thou enlight'nd Earth, so fresh and gay,
Ye Hills and Dales, ye Rivers, Woods, and Plaines,
And ye that live and move, fair Creatures, tell,
Tell, if ye saw, how came I thus, how here?
Not of my self; by some great Maker then,
In goodness and in power præminent;
Tell me, how may I know him, how adore,
From whom I have that thus I move and live.¹⁵⁹

In the canticle of praise which Adam and Eve offer in Book V there is a comparable approach to the Deity through his works; God may be

Unspeakable, who sitst above these Heavens
To us invisible or dimly seen
In these thy lowest works, yet these declare
Thy goodness beyond thought, and Power Divine:
Speak yee who best can tell, ye Sons of light,
Angels, for yee behold him, and with songs

¹⁵⁶ *Works* iv 319. *motions*: puppet shows (*OED*³ *s.v.* motion *n.* 8a).

¹⁵⁷ This is an example of what Tillich called creative or transforming justice (Paul Tillich, *Love, Power, and Justice: Ontological Analyses and Ethical Applications* (London, 1954)).

¹⁵⁸ *PL* viii 357–60.

¹⁵⁹ *PL* viii 273–81; cf. iv 412–30.

And choral symphonies, Day without Night,
Circle his Throne rejoicing.¹⁶⁰

The pair move beyond what they can see of the physical world to what they imagine of the heavenly realms, while also interpreting the visible in mystical terms when they call upon the sun and the fixed stars to praise their Creator, and invoke

five other wandering Fires that move
In mystic Dance not without Song, resound
His praise, who out of Darkness call'd up Light.¹⁶¹

The refrain 'his praise' echoes through the hymn, and all is expressed in what Milton, with his dislike of ritual and liturgical formulae, commends as pure and 'unmeditated'.¹⁶² It is, says Adam to Raphael, in order to praise God better that he seeks to know more.¹⁶³

The prelapsarian Adam knows clearly that there is one single prohibition; he also knows that (as God himself explained in Book III) man's reason is free. He tells Eve that 'God left free the Will, for what obeyes | Reason, is free, and Reason he made right'.¹⁶⁴ God said the same: 'I made him just and right . . . They therefore as to right belongd';¹⁶⁵ and as Patrick Hume points out, the word 'right' here is used in the sense of its Latin cognate *rectus*, 'Straight, Upright, the Character of GOD himself'.¹⁶⁶ Prelapsarian Adam is at this point speaking virtually the same language as God. But postlapsarian Adam speaks differently, and even in the speech which he makes before taking the fruit himself he begins to speculate—as Eve had done—about the divinity which he himself might attain after the example of the serpent's supposed elevation, which he sees as 'Proportional ascent, which cannot be | But to be Gods, or Angels Demi-gods'.¹⁶⁷ Then he guesses how God might react:

Nor can I think that God, Creator wise,
Though threatning, will in earnest so destroy
Us his prime Creatures, dignifi'd so high,
Set over all his Works.¹⁶⁸

This is uncomfortably close to the words of the serpent to Eve: 'ye shall not Die: | How should ye? . . . By the Threatner[?]'¹⁶⁹ The fallen Adam realizes that he will no longer be able to behold the face of God, which will now be 'Insufferably bright'.¹⁷⁰ But soon he degenerates into resentment, complaining that he did not ask to be created, that he would have rejected the conditions under which he was placed in paradise had he really known what they entailed, and that the conditions were

¹⁶⁰ *PL* v 156–61. ¹⁶¹ *PL* v 177–9.

¹⁶² *PL* v 149; cf. 'other Rites | Observing none, but adoration pure | Which God likes best' (*PL* iv 736–8).

¹⁶³ *PL* vii 95–7. ¹⁶⁴ *PL* ix 351–2. ¹⁶⁵ *PL* iii 98, 111.

¹⁶⁶ Hume, p. 102; cf. *OED*³ *s.v.* *right adj.* 4: 'upright, righteous', citing *PL* ix 352.

¹⁶⁷ *PL* ix 936–7. ¹⁶⁸ *PL* ix 938–41. ¹⁶⁹ *PL* ix 685–7. ¹⁷⁰ *PL* ix 1084.

impossible to fulfil.¹⁷¹ Then, from blaming God for the conditions of his creation, Adam proceeds to blame God for creating woman.¹⁷²

What, then, of Eve, and of Eve's God? Eve initially acknowledges her place in the divine hierarchy, saying to Adam,

what thou bidst
Unargu'd I obey; so God ordains,
God is thy Law, thou mine: to know no more
Is womans happiest knowledge and her praise.¹⁷³

and she addresses him as 'Adam, earths hallowd mould, | Of God inspir'd'.¹⁷⁴ But as she draws near to the moment of the Fall, she begins to question this God-given order. In her dream the voice of the serpent (the voice perhaps of her unspoken desires) tells her that by tasting the fruit she can

be henceforth among the Gods
Thy self a Goddess, not to Earth confind,
But sometimes in the Air, as wee, sometimes
Ascend to Heav'n, by merit thine, and see
What life the Gods live there, and such live thou.¹⁷⁵

And when Satan does actually approach Eve he makes a similar invitation:

Who sees thee? (and what is one?) who shouldst be seen
A Goddess among Gods, ador'd and serv'd
By Angels numberless, thy daily Train.¹⁷⁶

The plural form 'Gods' has several meanings in the poem: angels, the Graeco-Roman gods, and other pagan divinities or heroes.¹⁷⁷ God himself addresses the

¹⁷¹ PL x 750–7. Adam ought to have listened to St Leo the Great, who said that 'God who justly imposes the order comes timely to our aid, and he who leads us to glory kindly incites us to obedience': *Iuste enim nobis instat praecepto qui praecurrit auxilio, et benigne incitat ad obedientiam qui ducit ad gloriam* (*Sermo LXVII De Passione Domini XVI: Patrologia Latina* liv 371; my translation). St Basil the Great similarly told his monks that we have already received from God the ability to fulfil all his commands, and have no reason to resent them as if something beyond our capacity were being asked of us (*Regulae Fusius Tractatae: Patrologia Graeca* xxxi 910).

¹⁷² PL x 888–95.

¹⁷³ PL iv 635–8.

¹⁷⁴ PL v 321–2.

¹⁷⁵ PL v 77–81.

¹⁷⁶ PL ix 546–8.

¹⁷⁷ See Theodore H. Banks, 'The Meanings of "Gods" in *Paradise Lost*', *Modern Language Notes* 54 (1939) 450–4; and Fowler *ad* PL iii 339–41. *OED*³ seems not to recognize 'god' as meaning 'angel'. Milton says in *De Doctrina* that the name of God is not infrequently bestowed on angels and even humans (*OCW* viii 164–5); indeed, in the postlapsarian world conquerors will be called 'Gods, and Sons of Gods, | Destroyers rightlier call'd and Plagues of men' (PL xi 696–7). Milton also notes that men deify nature, fate, and fortune (*De Doctrina: OCW* viii 24).

We might also consider Milton's use of the adjective 'godlike', which has significantly distinct meanings: (i) 'like God': Satan appears in 'God-like imitated State' (PL ii 511); (ii) 'like a classical god or hero': Michael and Satan in their struggle show 'Godlike Power: for likest Gods they seemd' (PL vi 301); (iii) 'godly, divine, with divine power': the Son enjoys 'God-like fruition' (PL iii 307); (iv) 'angelic': the fallen angels have 'Godlike shapes and forms' (PL i 358), and Raphael is Adam's 'god-like Guest' (PL v 351). Some usages fuse more than one meaning: Adam and Eve, 'Godlike erect' (PL iv 289), are like classical heroes but also, in their unfallen state, still manifest the divine image; Raphael is a 'Godlike Power' (PL viii 249) because he is an angel and also the divinely mandated messenger of God; the crucifixion is a 'God-like act' (PL xii 427) in that it is a divine act and shows what God is like; it also transcends any acts of classical heroes.

heavenly angels as 'Gods',¹⁷⁸ and although when Satan calls his followers 'Gods'¹⁷⁹ the word may likewise just mean 'angels' it also often drifts towards implying divine power, and in his own case what he imagines to be an equivalence between himself and God as equally matched antagonists. The fallen angels frequently think of themselves as 'Gods', asserting their angelic status and their quasi-divine power, and casting themselves as classical heroes,

glorying to have scap't the *Stygian* flood
As Gods, and by thir own recover'd strength,
Not by the sufferance of supernal Power.¹⁸⁰

By imagining themselves as 'Gods'—or 'Deities of Heav'n', as Satan calls them¹⁸¹—the fallen angels attribute to themselves a power which they do not actually have. In fact, we see that they are falsely worshipped as gods by fallen man.¹⁸² Satan, when planning the corruption of Adam and Eve, envisages that he

will excite thir minds
With more desire to know, and to reject
Envious commands, invented with designe
To keep them low whom knowledge might exalt
Equal with Gods; aspiring to be such,
They taste and die: what likelier can ensue?¹⁸³

At first Eve reflects that God is the creator of Eden,¹⁸⁴ and she reminds herself of the divine prohibition on the Tree of Knowledge, even quoting God's words:

But of the Fruit of this fair Tree amidst
The Garden, God hath said, Ye shall not eate
Thereof, nor shall ye touch it, least ye die.¹⁸⁵

In reply, Satan speaks of God as 'the Threatner',¹⁸⁶ but also as one who should not be feared.¹⁸⁷ Satan's God, at this point, is one who will praise Eve's 'dauntless vertue'¹⁸⁸ for risking death in order to attain knowledge (in effect, this is a God in Satan's own self-image, one who admires heroic transgression). He is also one who wishes to keep his creatures 'low and ignorant'.¹⁸⁹ Soon, in promising that Eve will become one of the gods, Satan holds out to her a vision of pagan gods, the one God now forgotten:

ye shall be as Gods,
Knowing both Good and Evil as they know.

...

And what are Gods that Man may not become
As they, participating God-like food?¹⁹⁰

¹⁷⁸ *PL* iii 341.

¹⁸¹ *PL* ii 11.

¹⁸⁴ *PL* ix 556.

¹⁸⁷ Cf. the discussion on pp. 447–9, Chapter 30 ?.

¹⁸⁸ *PL* ix 694.

¹⁷⁹ *PL* i 116.

¹⁸² *PL* i 364ff.

¹⁸⁵ *PL* ix 661–3.

¹⁸⁹ *PL* ix 704.

¹⁸⁰ *PL* i 239–41.

¹⁸³ *PL* iv 522–7.

¹⁸⁶ *PL* ix 687.

¹⁹⁰ *PL* ix 708–9, 716–17.

Addressing the Tree, Eve does not mention 'God', preferring the periphrasis 'hee...who forbids thy use',¹⁹¹ which suggests that she is developing a distance from her Creator, and subsequently the name of God is quickly bundled together with other terms:

What fear I then, rather what know to feare
Under this ignorance of good and Evil,
Of God or Death, of Law or Penaltie?¹⁹²

She is not, of course, ignorant of God, death, law, and penalty, for as a result of what she has heard from Adam and from Raphael she has knowledge of all these—at least, sufficient knowledge—as she has already demonstrated in telling the serpent of the divine prohibition on the Tree. When Eve takes the fruit we are told, 'nor was God-head from her thought',¹⁹³ and afterwards she addresses the Tree as if it were a divinity which will henceforth be the object of her cult,¹⁹⁴ credits it with the power to make her one of the gods,¹⁹⁵ and when taking her leave bows low 'as to the power | That dwelt therein'.¹⁹⁶ In pursuit of godhead for herself she has entered a world of tree-worship, a pagan world of plural gods. By contrast, God has become for her 'Our great Forbidder'.¹⁹⁷ She tells Adam that the Tree is 'of Divine effect | To open Eyes, and make them Gods who taste',¹⁹⁸ and that she is now 'growing up to Godhead; which for thee | Chiefly I sought'¹⁹⁹ (which is a lie). Eve urges him to eat too,

Least thou not tasting, different degree
Disjoyne us, and I then too late renounce
Deitie for thee, when Fate will not permit.²⁰⁰

Her deployment of the term 'Fate' as a replacement for 'God' sufficiently indicates how far she has fallen.

Eve's repentance entails a return to her proper place in the divine hierarchy, as she acknowledges to Adam that 'both have sin'd, but thou | Against God onely, I against God and thee'.²⁰¹ Eventually Adam returns to regarding God as their merciful and benevolent parent who 'Cloath'd us unworthie, pitying while he judg'd',²⁰² and it is before such a God that Adam and Eve

forthwith to the place
Repairing where he judg'd them prostrate fell
Before him reverent, and both confess'd
Humbly thir faults, and pardon beg'd, with tears
Watering the ground, and with thir sighs the Air
Frequenting, sent from hearts contrite, in sign
Of sorrow unfeign'd, and humiliation meek.²⁰³

¹⁹¹ *PL* ix 750.

¹⁹⁴ *PL* ix 795–801.

¹⁹⁷ *PL* ix 815.

²⁰⁰ *PL* ix 883–5.

²⁰² *PL* x 1059.

¹⁹² *PL* ix 773–5.

¹⁹⁵ *PL* ix 803–4.

¹⁹⁸ *PL* ix 865–6.

²⁰¹ *PL* x 930–1.

²⁰³ *PL* x 1098–104.

¹⁹³ *PL* ix 790.

¹⁹⁶ *PL* ix 835–6.

¹⁹⁹ *PL* ix 877–8.

The couple fall to their knees on the spot where they were judged, and Adam later tells Michael how painful it is for them to leave the place where they had encountered God, albeit as Judge as well as Creator. Once Adam had tried to hide from the face of God, but now, he says,

This most afflicts me, that departing hence,
 As from his face I shall be hid, deprivd
 His blessed count'nance; here I could frequent,
 With worship, place by place where he voutsaf'd
 Presence Divine, and to my Sons relate;
 On this Mount he appeerd, under this Tree
 Stood visible, among these Pines his voice
 I heard, here with him at this Fountain talk'd:
 ...

In yonder nether World where shall I seek
 His bright appearances, or foot step trace?
 For though I fled him angrie, yet recall'd
 To life prolongd and promis'd Race, I now
 Gladly behold though but his utmost skirts
 Of glory, and farr off his steps adore.²⁰⁴

Adam recalls his meetings with God in Eden as unmediated encounters when he could see the face of God and hear his voice. These are not metaphors which speak of the metaphysical through images of the physical, but are instead recollections of a lost unity of being. Now that Adam is, as he thinks, to be exiled altogether from the presence of God, he would be content, if left in Eden, to see even the distant traces of that divine glory which he once saw face to face. But Adam is, albeit in quite a different spirit, making the same mistake as the fallen angels who clung to a material understanding of Heaven, and Michael replies to him with reassurance:

Adam, thou know'st Heav'n his, and all the Earth,
 Not this Rock onely; his Omnipresence fills
 Land, Sea, and Aire, and every kinde that lives,
 ...

surmise not then
 His presence to these narrow bounds confin'd
 Of Paradise or *Eden*:
 ...

Yet doubt not but in Vallie and in plaine
 God is as here, and will be found alike
 Present, and of his presence many a signe
 Still following thee, still compassing thee round

²⁰⁴ *PL* xi 315–22, 328–33.

With goodness and paternal Love, his Face
Express, and of his steps the track Divine.²⁰⁵

Adam, and the reader, will no longer see God face to face, but will nevertheless not be deprived of him; for God is omnipresent, and the world outside Eden is replete with signs and traces of the divine presence.²⁰⁶

²⁰⁵ *PL* xi 335–7, 340–2, 349–54.

²⁰⁶ For the idea of the presence of God see Lieb, *Poetics of the Holy*, ch. 10.

16

Grace

How all his malice serv'd but to bring forth
Infinite goodness, grace and mercy shewn
On Man by him seduc't, but on himself
Treble confusion, wrath and vengeance pour'd.

Paradise Lost i 217–20



There are two forms of grace in *Paradise Lost*, one spiritual and the other physical.

Theologically, grace is the gift which God bestows upon man by which he is enabled to perform God's will; it is 'the free and eternall favour and good will of God, which is the Well-spring of all the benefits that we have', and 'The work of the Spirit, renewing our souls to the Image of God, and continually guiding and strengthening them to the obedience of his Will'.¹ As the Cambridge Platonist John Smith explained, divine grace makes men '*the more to resemble that Archetypall Idea of themselves*'.² Theologians debated the relationship between divine grace and human free will, and the question of whether grace was resistible or irresistible. For Calvinists it is impossible for man to perform any good act unless compelled to it by God's grace, which cannot be resisted. Equally, those predestined to damnation do not have the free will to cooperate with divine grace and attain salvation. Milton, however, rejecting Calvinist dogma, thought that God 'rejects no one except the disobedient and the unbeliever' for he 'imparts grace—if not equal, yet sufficient—to all, by which they may be able to arrive at recognition of the truth and salvation' (*Deus neminem nisi non obedientem, non credentem reiicit, certè gratiam etsi non parem attamen sufficientem omnibus impertit, qua possint ad agnitionem veritatis et salutem pervenire*), and that 'God excludes no one from access to penitence and eternal salvation except after grace—and that sufficient—has been spurned and scorned' (*Deus neminem nisi post gratiam, eamque sufficientem, repudiatam ac spretam... paenitentiae ac salutis aeternae aditu excludit*).³

¹ Wilson, pp. 274–5. For a substantial analysis of the concept see *Encyclopedia of Theology: The Concise 'Sacramentum Mundi'*, edited by Karl Rahner (London, 1975), s.v. Cf. ST1, qq. 109–14; CCC §§1996–2005. For Milton's understanding of grace in *PL* see C. A. Patrides, *Milton and the Christian Tradition* (Oxford, 1966), ch. 7, and Benjamin Myers, *Milton's Theology of Freedom* (Berlin, 2006), ch. 6.

² John Smith, 'Deductions and Inferences from the Consideration of the Divine Nature and Attributes', in *Select Discourses* (London, 1660), p. 142, translating Proclus.

³ *De Doctrina*: OCW viii 100–1, 104–5.

Moreover, grace restores in man that free will which was lost at the Fall,⁴ and enables him to enjoy 'a far more excellent state of grace and glory than that from which he had fallen' (*ad statum gratiae et gloriae longè praestantiorẽ quàm unde exciderat evectus est*).⁵

For Milton grace is particularly associated with mercy.⁶ Mercy forgives transgression, and grace enables repentance. The narrator explains that Satan's malice directed against mankind

serv'd but to bring forth
Infinite goodness, grace and mercy shewn
On Man by him seduc't.⁷

and God himself says:

Man falls deceiv'd
By the other first: Man therefore shall find grace,
The other none: in Mercy and Justice both,
Through Heav'n and Earth, so shall my glorie excel,
But Mercy first and last shall brightest shine.⁸

The angels likewise hymn the 'Father of Mercie and Grace'.⁹ The grace which comes to mankind after the Fall is *gratia Christi*,¹⁰ the grace which comes through the sacrificial death of Christ, and Milton associates the operation of grace with the Son, in whose face

Divine compassion visibly appeerd,
Love without end, and without measure Grace,
Which uttering thus he to his Father spake.
O Father, gracious was that word which clos'd
Thy sovran sentence, that Man should find grace.¹¹

⁴ *Sanè ad asserendam iustitiam Dei praesertim vocantis, multo convenientius est, ut aliquid liberi arbitrii vel ex primo statu residuum, vel gratiae vocantis restitutum, concedatur homini in operibus vel saltem conatibus bonis potius, quam in adiaphoris* ('Surely, in order to vindicate the justice of God, especially God who calls us, it is much more appropriate that some element of free will—either as a relic from man's first state or as a restoration of the caller's grace—be allowed to man in good works, or at least attempts, rather than in things indifferent') (*De Doctrina*: OCW viii 436–7).

⁵ *De Doctrina*: OCW viii 468–9.

⁶ For 'mercy' as one of the meanings of 'grace' cf. *OED*³ s.v. *grace* n. 5.

⁷ *PL* i 217–19.

⁸ *PL* iii 130–4.

⁹ *PL* iii 401.

¹⁰ 'All grace after the fall of Adam is the *grace of Christ* as distinct from the *grace of God* which the Angels and Adam enjoyed... uncreated grace, God Himself' (Roy J. Deferrari and Sister M. Inviolata Barry, *A Lexicon of Saint Thomas Aquinas* (Fitzwilliam, N.H., 2004; first edition 1948), p. 469). However, Milton the anti-Trinitarian makes it clear that the grace of Christ (or 'the Son' as he prefers to call him) has its origin in God, for God tells the Son:

Into thee such Vertue and Grace
Immense I have transfus'd, that all may know
In Heav'n and Hell thy Power above compare.

(*PL* vi 703–5)

¹¹ *PL* iii 141–5.

Grace comes from God the Father, but is made manifest to mankind by and through the Son. Such grace is freely bestowed, and God explains that in the world after the Fall,

Man shall not quite be lost, but sav'd who will,
Yet not of will in him, but grace in me
Freely voutsaft; once more I will renew
His lapsed powers, though forfeit and enthralld
By sin to foul exorbitant desires.¹²

Grace is therefore 'Freely' (that is, both (i) of God's free will, and (ii) liberally, generously) bestowed ('voutsaft') on postlapsarian man to renew his fallen nature ('His lapsed powers') and to enable his salvation, his acceptance of the divine will and consequent union with God; anyone who so wills may be saved, but this will to salvation is not mere human will but rather grace acting in man. Grace may be accepted or resisted.

However, some have been chosen to receive a 'peculiar grace', that is, a special form of grace:

Some I have chosen of peculiar grace
Elect above the rest; so is my will:
The rest shall hear me call, and oft be warn'd
Thir sinful state, and to appease betimes
Th' incensed Deitie, while offerd grace
Invites; for I will cleer thir senses dark,
What may suffice, and soft'n stonie hearts
To pray, repent, and bring obedience due.
To Prayer, repentance, and obedience due,
Though but endevord with sincere intent,
Mine ear shall not be slow, mine eye not shut.
And I will place within them as a guide
My Umpire *Conscience*, whom if they will hear,
Light after light well us'd they shall attain,
And to the end persisting, safe arrive.
This my long sufferance and my day of grace
They who neglect and scorn, shall never taste;
But hard be hard'nd, blind be blinded more,
That they may stumble on, and deeper fall;
And none but such from mercy I exclude.¹³

Whereas Calvin had distinguished between the elect who are predestined to salvation and the reprobate who are predestined to damnation, the 'elect' in Milton's theology are those whom God has chosen to receive a special grace which

¹² *PL* iii 173–7.

¹³ *PL* iii 183–202. *peculiar*: particular, special. The word suggests an allusion to God's choice of Israel as 'a peculiar people vnto himselfe, aboue all the nations that are vpon the earth' (Deuteronomy xiv 2).

(though Milton does not spell this out) will enable them to remain faithful;¹⁴ the rest will be encouraged by the operation of grace in them to seek God through prayer, repentance, and obedience, and even if these are only intermittent God will accept their efforts if they are sincere.¹⁵ The illumination granted to this lesser group is nevertheless sufficient to enable them to attain salvation ('for I will clear thir senses dark, | What may suffice'). Grace will guide them by means of conscience, and if they heed conscience they will 'to the end persisting, safe arrive'. Only those who 'neglect and scorn' God's grace will not 'taste' it: only those who, in effect, make themselves reprobate will be excluded from mercy because they exclude themselves. Grace is sufficient, but also resistible.

Grace, as the Son says, comes to man as an unsought and unmerited gift,¹⁶ for man in his sinful postlapsarian state is in no position to seek the assistance of grace on his own initiative:

Father, thy word is past, man shall find grace;
And shall grace not find means, that finds her way,
The speediest of thy winged messengers,
To visit all thy creatures, and to all
Comes unprevented, unimplor'd, unsought,
Happie for man, so coming; he her aide
Can never seek, once dead in sins and lost.¹⁷

Since sinful man can offer nothing himself, the Son offers in his stead

So dearly to redeem what Hellish hate
So easily destroy'd, and still destroys
In those who, when they may, accept not grace.¹⁸

It is, then 'Hellish hate' which leads fallen man to refuse grace when it is offered to him, and we see a paradigm of this when Satan himself maintains to Beelzebub

¹⁴ This is presumably the group referred to in these lines on the bridge between Earth and Hell,

by which the Spirits perverse
With easie intercourse pass to and fro
To tempt or punish mortals, except whom
God and good Angels guard by special grace.

(PL ii 1030–3)

¹⁵ Cf. *De Doctrina*: *Quaedam enim in homine reliquiae sunt imaginis divinae... quarum ex concursu hic illo ad regnum Dei fit aptior et quasi dispositior. Cur itaque hanc gratiam alii amplectantur, alii reiiciunt, in ipsa hominis natura (neque enim stipites planè sumus) quaerenda saltem aliqua causa est* ('For in man there are certain remnants of the divine image... out of whose combination this person becomes more fit and, as it were, more ordered for the kingdom of God than that one. As to why, then, some people embrace and others rebuff this grace, some cause at least is to be sought in man's very nature (for indeed we are clearly not pawns)' (OCW viii 92–3).

¹⁶ The traditional scholastic formulation is that grace is 'a *donum indebitum et superadditum naturae* (an unowed gift added over and above nature)' (Joseph Cardinal Ratzinger, *Introduction to Christianity*, translated by J. R. Foster (San Francisco, 2004), p. 313).

¹⁷ PL iii 227–33. *unprevented*: unanticipated, therefore unasked (Fowler *ad loc.*). The three terms in this line are virtually synonymous, and emphasize that grace is offered to man without him having to ask for it.

¹⁸ PL iii 300–2.

that he will never 'bow and sue for grace | With suppliant knee'.¹⁹ In the privacy of soliloquy he is not so brash, but nevertheless recognizes his reluctance to repent and accept grace:

But say I could repent and could obtaine
By Act of Grace my former state; how soon
Would high recall high thoughts, how soon unsay
What feign'd submission swore.²⁰

Mammon too cannot really envisage accepting grace, which he likewise construes as the acceptance of subjection to a resented power:

Suppose he should relent
And publish Grace to all, on promise made
Of new Subjection; with what eyes could we
Stand in his presence humble, and receive
Strict Laws impos'd.²¹

That Satan and Mammon regard obedience to God as 'feign'd submission' and resentful 'Subjection' indicates that they have not understood the meaning of 'grace': both envisage God bestowing grace as if he were a monarch publishing an 'Act of Grace' that would in effect be a royal pardon or amnesty²² which would forgive their revolt without requiring any inner movement of repentance on their part: the outward appearance of acquiescence, 'feign'd submission', would be enough. But true grace works within, and requires the individual to embrace it.

Adam, by contrast, shows more understanding of grace. Before the Fall he is sustained by a grace which joins him to his Creator,²³ receiving from God himself an account of his 'gracious purpose',²⁴ and from Raphael 'words with Grace Divine | Imbu'd'.²⁵ After the Fall Adam tells himself that

God made thee of choice his own, and of his own
To serve him, thy reward was of his grace,
Thy punishment then justly is at his Will.²⁶

That is, Adam's reward for serving God—his life in prelapsarian Eden—was entirely God's gracious free gift, unmerited by Adam. After he has counselled Eve against her despairing recourse to suicide, Adam reminds her that the Son had addressed them as a 'gracious Judge':²⁷

Remember with what mild
And gracious temper he both heard and judg'd
Without wrauth or reviling.²⁸

¹⁹ *PL* i 111–12. ²⁰ *PL* iv 93–6. ²¹ *PL* ii 237–41.

²² *OED*³ *s.v.* grace *n.* 3b, 5. ²³ See *n.* 10.

²⁴ *PL* viii 337. ²⁵ *PL* viii 215–16.

²⁶ *PL* x 766–8. *of his grace*: In the sense 'by divine favour' (*OED*³ *s.v.* grace *n.* 2).

²⁷ *PL* x 118. ²⁸ *PL* x 1046–8.

and he reflects that in prayer they may find grace which will open to them the way forward:

what may else be remedie or cure
To evils which our own misdeeds have wrought,
Hee will instruct us praying, and of Grace
Beseeching him.²⁹

Adam trusts, then, that if they seek God with

sorrow unfeign'd, and humiliation meek.
Undoubtedly he will relent and turn
From his displeasure; in whose look serene,
When angry most he seem'd and most severe,
What else but favor, grace, and mercie shon?³⁰

And so:

THUS they in lowliest plight repentant stood
Praying, for from the Mercie-seat above
Prevenient Grace descending had remov'd
The stonie from thir hearts, & made new flesh
Regenerate grow instead, that sighs now breath'd
Unutterable, which the Spirit of prayer
Inspir'd, and wing'd for Heav'n with speedier flight
Then loudest Oratorie.³¹

It is 'Prevenient Grace'—the grace which precedes and enables repentance and good works—which has drawn Adam and Eve towards this prayer of repentance, and it is the 'Spirit of prayer' which speaks through their prayer.³² The Son presents these prayers to God as the fruits of his grace (namely, repentance for the taking of the forbidden fruit), saying,

See Father, what first fruits on Earth are sprung
From thy implanted Grace in Man, these Sighs
And Prayers.³³

Michael then reassures Adam that

thy Prayers are heard, and Death,
Then due by sentence when thou didst transgress,

²⁹ *PL* x 1079–82.

³⁰ *PL* x 1092–6.

³¹ *PL* xi 1–8. *Oratorie*: rhetorical or eloquent language (*OED*³ *s.v.* oratory *n.*² 1b), recalling also the origin of the word in the Latin *orare*, 'to pray'.

³² Cf. 'Likewise the spirit also helpeth our infirmities: for we know not what wee should pray for as wee ought: but the spirit it selfe maketh intercession for vs with groanings, which cannot be vttered' (Romans viii 26).

³³ *PL* xi 22–4. The idea that these fruits spring from grace implanted in man also recalls Christ's parable of himself as the true vine: 'Abide in me, and I in you: As the branch cannot beare fruit of it selfe, except it abide in the vine: no more can ye, except ye abide in me. I am the vine, ye are the branches: He that abideth in me, and I in him, the same bringeth forth much fruit: for without me ye can doe nothing' (John xv 4–5).

Defeated of his seisure many dayes
Giv'n thee of Grace, wherein thou may'st repent.³⁴

'Grace' here has two meanings: it refers to the pardon³⁵ by which the sentence of immediate death is lifted, and also to the operation of the spirit of repentance within the couple. Eve then understands that through pardon and grace she is now 'grac't | The source of life'.³⁶ It is by grace that Eve has turned away from that despair which had prompted her to consider suicide,³⁷ which would have pre-empted any descendants, and now she is 'grac't' as the mother of mankind and, ultimately, of Christ whose incarnation will bring grace to man, heralded by the angel's greeting to Mary, *gratia plena*.³⁸

When Michael lays out before Adam the course of human history he warns him that it will be a story of 'supernal Grace contending | With sinfulness of Men',³⁹ and to Adam it seems a revelation of 'gracious things'.⁴⁰ In the days of Noah God sees

The whole Earth fill'd with violence, and all flesh
Corrupting each thir way; yet those remoov'd,
Such grace shall one just Man find in his sight,
That he relents, not to blot out mankind.⁴¹

Into such a world grace comes through divine messengers:

for God will deigne
To visit oft the dwellings of just Men
Delighted, and with frequent intercourse
Thither will send his winged Messengers
On errands of supernal Grace.⁴²

The story is one of a movement

Up to a better Cov'nant, disciplin'd
From shadowie Types to Truth, from Flesh to Spirit,
From imposition of strict Laws, to free
Acceptance of large Grace, from servil fear
To filial, works of Law to works of Faith.⁴³

Man moves from the Old Testament dispensation in which his relations with God were guided by law, to the world of the New Testament in which man may freely accept the grace conferred through Christ, and the freedom which it brings.⁴⁴

³⁴ *PL* xi 252–5.

³⁵ *OED*³ 5; also in sense 10, 'temporary reprieve'.

³⁶ *PL* xi 168–9.

³⁷ *PL* x 967–1006.

³⁸ Luke i 28; Vulgate.

³⁹ *PL* xi 359–60.

⁴⁰ *PL* xii 271.

⁴¹ *PL* xi 888–91. Here 'grace' means 'divine favour' (*OED*³ 2a).

⁴² *PL* vii 569–72.

⁴³ *PL* xii 302–6. *large*: *OED*³ s.v. *large adj.* cites this example as an instance of its sense 7a: 'wide in range or scope; comprehensive, extensive; substantial', but other senses may be appropriate here: 'liberal in giving, generous' (1), implicitly qualifying God as the giver of grace; 'allowing considerable freedom' (16a). Grace is abundant and liberating.

⁴⁴ By contrast with the covenants of the OT and NT, classical philosophy did not understand man's dependence upon grace (*PR* iv 312).

In this new dispensation 'over wrauth grace shall abound',⁴⁵ but this will not prevent some men (amongst whom Milton would no doubt include the Anglican bishops whom he had excoriated in his anti-prelatical tracts of 1641–2) from constraining others into the bondage of forms and ceremonies and structures which Milton thought restricted the workings of grace:

What will they then
But force the Spirit of Grace it self, and binde
His consort Libertie; what, but unbuild
His living Temples, built by Faith to stand.⁴⁶

Liberty, then, is the consort of Grace: it is the freedom which comes from man's acceptance of the divine will which supersedes any human constructs.

Nations as well as individuals may be the recipients of grace, for, said Milton in 1641, England in the time of the Reformation had 'this *grace* and *honour* from GOD to bee the first that should set up a Standard for the recovery of *lost Truth*'.⁴⁷ Replying in 1641 to one of the defenders of episcopacy who had argued 'from the light of Nature, and rules of just policie, for the continuance of those things which long use and many lawes have firmly establish't as necessary and beneficiall', Milton retorted, 'Open your eyes to the light of grace, a better guide then Nature'.⁴⁸ But when grace is offered to a nation, it has to be seized promptly:

The doore of grace turnes upon smooth hinges wide opening to send out, but soon shutting to recall the precious offers of mercy to a nation: which unlesse Watchfulnesse and Zeale two quick-sighted and ready-handed Virgins be there in our behalfe to receave, we loose: and still the offer we loose, the straiter the doore opens, and the lesse is offer'd. This is all we get by demurring in Gods service.⁴⁹

England did indeed demur, and in 1660 the door of grace seemed firmly shut.



The second kind of grace which Milton considers in *Paradise Lost* is physical beauty.⁵⁰ This is often deceptive. Sin reminds Satan that she

with attractive graces won
The most averse, thee chiefly, who full oft
Thy self in me thy perfect image viewing
Becam'st enamour'd.⁵¹

Such graces are the physical allurements which lead Satan to become 'enamour'd' of her because he sees in her his own image: thus these graces draw Satan into

⁴⁵ *PL* xii 478.

⁴⁶ *PL* xii 524–7. Denouncing the mediaeval church's attitude to the Eucharist, Milton says that this 'feast of free grace, and adoption to which *Christ* invited his Disciples to sit as Brethren, and coheires of the happy Covenant... the Seale of filiall grace became the Subject of horror, and glouting adoration, pageanted about, like a deadfull Idol', and the clergy would 'prostitute every induement of grace, every holy thing to sale' (*Reformation: Works* iii 4, 26). *glouting*: sullen, frowning (*OED* s.v. *glouting* *adj.*).

⁴⁷ *Reformation: Works* iii 5.

⁴⁸ *Animadversions: Works* iii 141–2.

⁴⁹ *Reason: Works* iii 225.

⁵⁰ *OED*³ 13: 'pleasing or attractive quality, gracefulness'.

⁵¹ *PL* ii 762–5.

narcissistic self-love, which is one way in which Milton defines sin. Amongst the fallen angels Belial appears after Moloc 'in act more graceful and humane; | A fairer person lost not Heav'n',⁵² but the pun warns us that there is nothing theologically graceful about him, despite his attractive appearance. Satan is able to appear like a 'stripling Cherube',

such as in his face
Youth smil'd Celestial, and to every Limb
Sutable grace diffus'd, so well he feign'd.⁵³

Physical grace can be used by the deceitful to feign spiritual grace, but in the truthful grace and grace are joined: the unfallen cherub Zephon combines physical beauty and spiritual strength:

So spake the Cherube, and his grave rebuke
Severe in youthful beautie, added grace
Invincible: abasht the Devil stood,
And felt how awful goodness is, and saw
Vertue in her shape how lovely, saw, and pin'd
His loss.⁵⁴

Grace appears graceful; virtue has a lovely shape. The combination is also seen by Satan when he gazes upon Adam and Eve and tells himself that he could love them,

so lively shines
In them Divine resemblance, and such grace
The hand that form'd them on thir shape hath pour'd.⁵⁵

Though in the last line he seems to be admiring only the physical grace which their Creator has lavished on their 'shape', he also recognizes in them the 'Divine resemblance', which is a sure sign of their spiritual grace. Later, gazing at Eve alone, Satan admires

her Heav'nly forme
Angelic, but more soft, and Feminine,
Her graceful Innocence.⁵⁶

Eve's 'graceful Innocence' is both physical and spiritual; in unfallen Adam and Eve the two forms of grace are united.

But the two protoplasts have different kinds of outward grace, being differently fashioned, 'For contemplation hee and valour form'd, | For softness shee and sweet attractive Grace'.⁵⁷ Eve, however, sees 'How beauty is excell'd by manly grace | And wisdom, which alone is truly fair',⁵⁸ so there is a specifically masculine form of grace, which is not just physical attractiveness but is also associated with valour,

⁵² *PL* ii 109–10. *humane*: courteous (*OED*³ *s.v.* *humane adj.* 1a).

⁵³ *PL* iii 636–9. When Satan says to Uriel that he wishes to observe man 'On whom the great Creator hath bestow'd | Worlds, and on whom hath all these graces powrd' (*PL* iii 673–4) he is proposing to admire the purely external beauties of man and Eden.

⁵⁴ *PL* iv 844–9. *awful*: awesome. ⁵⁵ *PL* iv 363–5.

⁵⁶ *PL* ix 457–9.

⁵⁷ *PL* iv 297–8.

⁵⁸ *PL* iv 490–1.

contemplation, and wisdom. Raphael also assures Adam of his combination of inward and outward grace:

God on thee
Abundantly his gifts hath also pour'd
Inward and outward both, his image faire:
Speaking or mute all comeliness and grace
Attends thee, and each word, each motion formes.⁵⁹

In his prelapsarian state, then, Adam manifests comeliness and grace both spiritual and physical in all that he does. Adam in turn is responsive to Eve's beauty, 'which whether waking or asleep, | Shot forth peculiar graces'.⁶⁰ Nor is he alone in this, for two passages imply the presence of other appreciative spectators when she leaves the meal which she has shared with Adam and Raphael, rising

With lowliness Majestic from her seat,
And Grace that won who saw to wish her stay.

...

With Goddess-like demeanour forth she went;
Not unattended, for on her as Queen
A pomp of winning Graces waited still,
And from about her shot Darts of desire
Into all Eyes to wish her still in sight.⁶¹

She is attended allegorically by an entourage of the classical Graces,⁶² as well as, implicitly, the admiring eyes of Milton's readers. But in such passages the attention is solely on Eve's physical gracefulness without any suggestion that she combines the two types of grace as Adam does.

After Eve's disturbing dream she lets fall some tears which Adam 'Kiss'd as the gracious signs of sweet remorse | And pious awe, that feard to have offended'.⁶³ The tears are taken as gracious signs⁶⁴ in two respects, in that they are beautiful and are also signs of an inner recognition of the evil which the dream depicted, and therefore evidence of the movement of divine grace within her, since only by grace may one distinguish good from evil. However, when Adam explains to Raphael that on first seeing Eve he thought that 'Grace was in all her steps, Heav'n in her Eye',⁶⁵ there is a warning in this wording. Readers steeped in the Petrarchan tradition of extravagant praise for a woman's beauty may find nothing untoward in such words, but as Adam elaborates on his passionate devotion to Eve we may wonder whether he is allowing himself to define 'grace' only as 'beauty', and to see Heaven only in the eyes of Eve. Having been admonished by Raphael not to enslave himself to sexual passion, Adam finds himself compelled to make some qualifications:

⁵⁹ *PL* viii 219–23.

⁶⁰ *PL* v 14–15.

⁶¹ *PL* viii 42–3, 59–63.

⁶² *OED*³ 16a: 'Agliaia, Thalia, and Euphrosyne, the attendants of Aphrodite, who were regarded as the givers of beauty and charm'.

⁶³ *PL* v 134–5.

⁶⁴ Adam interprets them 'as' gracious signs: they are not so called by the narrator.

⁶⁵ *PL* viii 488.

Neither her out-side formd so fair, nor aught
 In procreation common to all kindes
 (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 mixt with Love.⁶⁶

Adam is trying to reassure Raphael that he is less delighted by Eve's beauty, and by the pleasures of sex with her, than he is by her 'graceful acts' which he calls 'decencies',⁶⁷ but his notion of the graceful is not quite rescued from his infatuation with her physical allure.

What happens to the physical graces of Eden after the Fall? Originally

aires, vernal aires,
 Breathing the smell of field and grove, attune
 The trembling leaves, while Universal *Pan*
 Knit with the *Graces* and the *Hours* in dance
 Led on th' Eternal Spring⁶⁸

but now all of nature is disturbed, and 'the Winds | Blow moist and keen, shattering the graceful locks | Of these fair spreading Trees'.⁶⁹ Nature as well as man has fallen from grace.

⁶⁶ *PL* viii 596–602.

⁶⁷ *decencies*: 'Decent or becoming acts or observances; the established observances of decent life or decorum; proprieties' (*OED* s.v. *decency* n. 4a; first example). This is an odd word for Adam to use here, since it refers to what is accepted as decent behaviour by society, and they live in a society of two.

⁶⁸ *PL* iv 264–8.

⁶⁹ *PL* x 1065–7.

17

Hope

All hope excluded thus, behold in stead
Of us out-cast, exil'd, his new delight,
Mankind created, and for him this World.
So farwel Hope, and with Hope farwel Fear,
Farwel Remorse: all Good to me is lost;
Evil be thou my Good.

Paradise Lost iv 103–10



Hope is a theological virtue, specifically the virtue by which man desires the kingdom of Heaven, and while the commonplace meanings of ‘hope’—‘expectation of something desired; feeling of trust or confidence’¹—also run through the poem, these lesser senses are repeatedly shadowed, and in effect judged, by the overarching idea of hope as eschatological trust.² Hope, says the theologian Ferdinand Kerstiens,

is elevation of the will, made possible by grace, by which man expects eternal life and the means to attain it, confident of the omnipotent aid of God. Hope is *the* great virtue of man in his *status viatoris*. It comes after faith, from which it receives its object... The sins against hope are despair, as anticipated failure, and presumption, as anticipated fulfilment. In both these cases man seeks to break out of his pilgrim existence and have his life otherwise than from the hand of God.³

Such a definition helps the Christian reader to understand the respects in which Satan and his followers do not possess true hope: there is no elevation of the will, rather a downward movement, both figuratively in the Fall from Heaven and in as much as the Satanic will is directed to base ends; there is a refusal of grace; there is a revolt against divine omnipotence which is facilitated by a fallacious assumption that the power of God is of a kind which might be overcome by determined military effort; and Satan is the opposite of *homo viator*, the pilgrim, for he journeys to

¹ *OED* s.v. hope n.² 1a, 2.

² For definitions of hope as a theological virtue see CCC §§1817–21, 2090–2; *ST* II-II, qq. 17–22; Benedict XVI, *Spes Salvi: Encyclical Letter of the Supreme Pontiff Benedict XVI... on Christian Hope* (London, 2007). Cf. the definition by Thomas Wilson: ‘Hope... is a certain and undoubted expectation... of heavenly blessedness... Hope in common use of speech, signifieth, a likelihood of things to come; but in Scripture, and in things of Salvation, it noteth an undoubted certainty’ (Wilson, p. 310).

³ *Encyclopedia of Theology: The Concise ‘Sacramentum Mundi’*, edited by Karl Rahner (London, 1975), p. 650.

alleviate the pains of Hell and to corrupt mankind. It is a journey away from God. His self-communings are marked by both despair and presumption.

Hell, says Milton, is a region

where peace
And rest can never dwell, hope never comes
That comes to all.⁴

No doubt Milton recalled that over the gate of Dante's Hell is inscribed, 'Lasciate ogne speranza, voi ch'intrate'.⁵ Hope in the full, Christian sense never comes here, but Satan and the rebel angels frequently use the word. It appears for the first time when Satan says to Beelzebub that 'equal hope | And hazard in the Glorious Enterprize'⁶ united them, but the link here of 'hope' and 'hazard' betrays Satan's debased understanding, for there could be nothing hazardous about a truly grounded hope—and there is nothing 'Glorious' in their enterprise. These are parodies of hope and glory. Likewise when Satan asserts that 'We may with more successful hope resolve | To wage by force or guile eternal Warr'⁷ his association of 'hope' with 'force' and 'guile' contaminates the word. Satan also places hope and despair in parallel, as if they had the potential to be equally productive, when he says that they should seek 'What reinforcement we may gain from Hope, | If not what resolution from despare'.⁸ Actually, for Satan and the fallen angels hope and despair have become almost synonymous⁹ ever since their denial of true hope through their refusal of obedience to the divine will, because the kinds of hope which remain to them are desperate assertions of their own will, or a groundless trust that time and chance may create new opportunities for them—forms of presumption.

Despair (etymologically from *de*, 'lacking' + *spero*, 'I hope') is frequently presented as a characteristic of Hell and its denizens; indeed it is really the defining existential characteristic of the devils, in as much as Hell is the refusal of God.¹⁰ Satan's first speech comes from one 'rackt with deep despare';¹¹ Moloc is 'now fiercer by despair',¹² and pronounces 'Desperate revenge';¹³ Belial sees that he 'grounds his courage on despair'.¹⁴ In Hell 'Peace is despaired'.¹⁵ Satan finds that his delight in the prospect of Eden 'to the heart inspires | Vernal delight and joy,

⁴ *PL* i 65–7.

⁵ Dante Alighieri, *Commedia: I: Inferno*, edited by Anna Maria Chiavacci Leonardi (Milan, 1991), iii 9: 'Abandon all hope, you who enter'. There is no hope in the damned, notes Aquinas: *ST* II-II, q. 18, a. 3.

⁶ *PL* i 88–9.

⁷ *PL* i 120–1.

⁸ *PL* i 190–1.

⁹ Stanley Fish says, 'It really doesn't matter, hope or despair... since the words signify nothing in the Satanic perspective' (Stanley Eugene Fish, *Surprised by Sin: The Reader in 'Paradise Lost'* (Berkeley, Calif., 1967), p. 97); but it does matter, because although the words have lost their true significance, they retain the rhetorical power to deceive.

¹⁰ 'Despair as a sin consists in the relinquishing of present or possible hope. It is, therefore, the voluntary rejection of a consciously recognized dependence of man upon his fellowmen and upon God' (Waldemar Molinski in Rahner, *Encyclopedia of Theology*, p. 340).

¹¹ *PL* i 126.

¹² *PL* ii 45.

¹³ *PL* ii 107.

¹⁴ *PL* ii 126.

¹⁵ *PL* i 660.

able to drive | All sadness but despair'.¹⁶ When Satan sits enthroned at the beginning of Book II, he

from despair
Thus high uplifted beyond hope, aspires
Beyond thus high, insatiate to pursue
Vain Warr with Heav'n, and by success untaught
His proud imaginations thus displaid.¹⁷

His elevation raises him from despair and beyond hope; but in what sense 'beyond hope'? His elevation is beyond what he could have hoped for when in despair at the beginning of Book I, though he had hoped for a much greater status as the outcome of the war in Heaven; ironically, he is also beyond hope in the sense that there is now no hope for him. With this darker meaning the phrase 'beyond hope' sits strangely between the words 'uplifted' and 'aspires', reminding us that such upward movement is illusory. Far from being uplifted away from despair, his idea of aspiration is itself a form of despair, since it stems from presumption and is a refusal of divine grace. In that sense he is indeed uplifted from despair, buoyed up by an energy which comes from desperation.

Among the fallen angels, 'hope' forms part of their self-deluding rhetoric. Moloc first, arguing for a resumption of the war, seeks something better than Hell,

Where pain of unextinguishable fire
Must exercise us without hope of end.¹⁸

He implies that renewed war would bring hope of an end to their punishment, but to escape the fire in a second revolt would only be to escape one manifestation of that Hell which is now their eternal condition. Belial, in reply, fears that after a second armed revolt defeat would be inevitable, and then 'our final hope | Is flat despair'.¹⁹ He is talking about a hypothetical future, but his use of the present tense betrays the fact that their final hope is already, as he speaks, flat despair. Better to accept Hell as it is, he says, than risk eternal punishment for a second rebellion, 'Unrespited, unpitied, unrepreevd, | Ages of hopeless end'.²⁰ Perhaps, he thinks,

This horror will grow milde, this darkness light,
Besides what hope the never-ending flight
Of future dayes may bring, what chance, what change
Worth waiting.²¹

But the hope which places its trust simply in the passage of time and the operation of chance is no hope: the fallen angels do not inhabit a world in which time and chance have mastery. Mammon is sufficiently realistic to understand that Moloc's appeal for a renewed war is as futile as Belial's reliance on chance, for

him to unthroned we then
May hope when everlasting Fate shall yeild

¹⁶ *PL* iv 154–6.

¹⁷ *PL* ii 6–10. *success*: outcome (*OED* *s.v.* *success* *n.* 1).

¹⁸ *PL* ii 88–9.

¹⁹ *PL* ii 142–3.

²⁰ *PL* ii 185–6.

²¹ *PL* ii 220–3.

To fickle Chance, and *Chaos* judge the strife:
The former vain to hope argues as vain
The latter.²²

All that the debate in Pandaemonium produces is 'false presumptuous hope'²³ (presumption, as the theologians explain, being a denial of true hope²⁴) and the 'Fallacious hope' generated by the 'false Philosophie' of their specious arguments.²⁵

Satan himself continues to juggle with the idea of hope. The possibility or impossibility of hope clearly has a deep hold on him as he recalls what might have been, and asks himself what still might be:

Now conscience wakes despair
That slumberd, wakes the bitter memorie
Of what he was, what is, and what must be
Worse.²⁶

and he asks himself 'which way shall I flie | Infinite wrauth, and infinite despair?',²⁷ itself a cry of despair. Blaming God for his ambition, he exclaims:

O had his powerful Destiny ordaind
Me some inferiour Angel, I had stood
Then happie; no unbounded hope had rais'd
Ambition.²⁸

Such hope was unbounded (like Milton's *Chaos*²⁹), a limitless personal ambition rather than a longing for God. But, says Satan, suppose 'I could repent and could obtaine | By Act of Grace my former state',³⁰ the same ambitious thoughts would recur:

This knows my punisher; therefore as farr
From granting hee, as I from begging peace:
All hope excluded thus, behold in stead
Of us out-cast, exil'd, his new delight,
Mankind created, and for him this World.
So farwel Hope, and with Hope farwel Fear,
Farwel Remorse: all Good to me is lost;
Evil be thou my Good.³¹

The final abandonment of hope is Satan's own choice, though he blames it on God. His argument is specious. First, the designation of God as 'my punisher' and nothing more pre-empts any notion of God's mercy. Next, the word 'therefore' asserts that because God knows that Satan's ambitious thoughts would recur if he were forgiven, God is therefore far from granting Satan peace. But this is merely Satan's supposition, and another despairing denial of the possibility of forgiveness.

²² *PL* ii 231–5.

²³ *PL* ii 522.

²⁴ *CCC* §§2091–2. Aquinas explains that there are two forms of presumption, (i) immoderate reliance upon the power of God, e.g. by hoping to obtain pardon without repentance; (ii) immoderate reliance upon man's own power (*ST* II-II, q. 21, a. 1).

²⁵ *PL* ii 568, 565.

²⁶ *PL* iv 23–6.

²⁷ *PL* iv 73–4.

²⁸ *PL* iv 58–61.

²⁹ *PL* ii 892.

³⁰ *PL* iv 93–4.

³¹ *PL* iv 103–10.

Since, in this sentence, God's not granting syntactically precedes Satan's not begging in the second line, the implication is that it temporally and causally precedes it: because God will not forgive, it would be futile for Satan to seek forgiveness. There is a significant absence of finite verbs here, and therefore of tense—not 'he is far from granting' or 'he *will be* far from granting'—which has the effect of blurring the imagined time scheme, the sequence of cause and effect, and therefore evades the question of who carries responsibility for Satan's exclusion from forgiveness. The phrasing of 'All hope excluded thus' is a Latinate construction (a version of the ablative absolute) which avoids specifying agency: exactly who has excluded hope? Then the conjunction 'So' in 'So farewell Hope' blames this loss of hope on God's delight in his new creation, man, who—Satan imagines—has displaced him and his associates. 'So' rests upon another unfounded assumption about God's intentions which serves to shift responsibility for what is to come. As Satan bids farewell to hope, he also bids farewell to fear and remorse. 'Fear' could mean both terror and reverence;³² in its latter sense we know that 'The feare of the LORD *is* the beginning of wisdom'.³³ The abandonment of hope, and with it both fear and wisdom, is the first step which leads to the declaration, 'Evil be thou my Good'.³⁴

It is characteristic of Satan that if he has abandoned hope he has nevertheless not given up thinking about hope and using that word in his own way, deceiving both himself and others. In his confrontation with Gabriel, Satan tells him that he would act likewise were he in the same position,

And boldly venture to whatever place
Farthest from pain, where thou mightest hope to change
Torment with ease.³⁵

Satan assumes here that the change of place would alleviate his torment,³⁶ though earlier he had shown that he understood that he carried Hell with him; it seems as if he cannot quite relinquish the hope of ameliorated circumstances, or cannot admit the fallacy of that hope to Gabriel. Satan's hope is reduced to his aim of accomplishing the destruction of mankind, though there is a muted recognition by Satan of the hopelessness of his actions when he contemplates Eden and reflects:

But neither here seek I, no nor in Heav'n
To dwell, unless by maistring Heav'n's Supream;
Nor hope to be my self less miserable
By what I seek.³⁷

³² *OED* s.v. *fear* n. 2, 3d.

³³ Proverbs ix 10; cf. Satan's instruction to his followers, 'Abandon fear' (*PL* vi 494). The fear of the Lord is one of the seven gifts of the Holy Spirit (*CCC* §1831). Aquinas discusses the relation of fear to hope in *ST* II-II, q. 19. Filial fear of God and hope cling together and perfect each other, he says (*ST* II-II, q. 19, a. 9, r. 1).

³⁴ Cf. the speech of despair in *PR* iii 203ff.

³⁵ *PL* iv 891–3.

³⁶ Though 'mightest' suggests a degree of tentativeness.

³⁷ *PL* ix 124–7.

Even were he to achieve his goal of seducing mankind, he has no hope of thereby being less wretched.

When Satan seeks out Adam and Eve he

wish'd his hap might find
Eve separate, he wish'd, but not with hope
 Of what so seldom chanc'd, when to his wish,
 Beyond his hope, *Eve* separate he spies.³⁸

Presented with this unhoped-for opportunity, Satan momentarily admires the beauty of paradise and of Eve, then, recollecting himself, he reflects that his journey is not inspired by hope, even the reduced hope of enjoying the pleasures of paradise:

Thoughts, whither have ye led me, with what sweet
 Compulsion thus transported to forget
 What hither brought us, hate, not love, nor hope
 Of Paradise for Hell, hope here to taste
 Of pleasure, but all pleasure to destroy,
 Save what is in destroying, other joy
 To me is lost.³⁹

Transformed into the shape of a serpent, 'Hope elevates, and joy | Bright'ns his Crest',⁴⁰ but such hope and joy lie only in pursuit of destruction.

Before the Fall, Adam and Eve perhaps have little need of hope, though Raphael imparts to Adam a brief lesson about hope, which is that he should only seek

knowledge within bounds; beyond abstain
 To ask, nor let thine own inventions hope
 Things not reveal'd, which th' invisible King,
 Onely Omniscient, hath suppress in Night.⁴¹

Hope, therefore, should not be a form of ambition driven by his 'own inventions', his own reasonings,⁴² seeking presumptuously for things which God has withheld. Adam's imagination is sufficiently informed for him to intuit the psychology of their likely enemy, and this understanding includes an understanding of hope and despair:

what malicious Foe
 Envyng our happiness, and of his own
 Despairing, seeks to work us woe and shame
 By sly assault; and somewhere nigh at hand
 Watches, no doubt, with greedy hope to find
 His wish and best advantage, us asunder,
 Hopeless to circumvent us joynd.⁴³

³⁸ *PL* ix 421–4.

³⁹ *PL* ix 473–9.

⁴⁰ *PL* ix 633–4.

⁴¹ *PL* vii 120–3.

⁴² Fowler glosses 'inventions' as 'reasonings'; cf. 'the action of devising, contriving, or making up; contrivance, fabrication' (*OED* s.v. *invention* n. 2).

⁴³ *PL* ix 253–9.

The scenario which Adam analyses here is one driven by Satanic hope which, grounded in despair of his own happiness, seeks to destroy that of mankind, a 'greedy hope' which will, ironically, succeed precisely because of Eve's greed for the fruit and for the power which she thinks it will grant. (She does not take to heart Raphael's lesson about refraining from what their own 'inventions hope'.)

After the Fall, the word 'hope' is drawn into the web of argument and specious rhetoric in which first Eve entangles herself, and then the couple embroil themselves. After Adam has decided to take the fruit, Eve reassures him that although she had feared that death would result from her transgression,

I feel
Farr otherwise th' event, not Death, but Life
Augmented, op'nd Eyes, new Hopes, new Joies,
Taste so Divine, that what of sweet before
Hath toucht my sense, flat seems to this, and harsh.⁴⁴

Significantly, 'Hopes' is plural, and is implicitly defined by the following words as being equivalent now to sensual pleasures;⁴⁵ thus is 'hope' debased. (Eve's casual use of the adjective 'Divine' applied to 'Taste' itself signals her Fall.) Soon, such hopes give way to 'shame, and perturbation, and despaire, | Anger, and obstinacie, and hate, and guile'.⁴⁶ Later, when Adam soliloquizes bitterly about the state which he has brought upon himself, he says:

Thus what thou desir'st,
And what thou fearst, alike destroyes all hope
Of refuge, and concludes thee miserable
Beyond all past example and future.⁴⁷

This is the perspective of despair,⁴⁸ 'out of which | I find no way, from deep to deeper plung'd!'.⁴⁹ What is it now that destroys hope? It seems that what Adam desires is extinction, and that his punishment might be confined to himself alone and not entailed to his descendants; what he fears is that this will not happen because his sin is so great that he cannot carry the burden of it alone, or even share it with Eve. Such desire and fear destroy hope because Adam sees no prospect of what he calls 'refuge'—shelter and protection from the consequences of his sin. Milton would have known that 'refuge' has its etymological origins in the Latin *refugium*, a place or means of shelter; in post-classical Latin it was also the action of avoiding punishment (in the fourth century), and a way out (in the fifth century, found for example in Augustine); the root of *refugium* is *refugere*, to turn back.⁵⁰ There is no hope of turning back. The Psalmist would have told Adam that 'God is our refuge and strength',⁵¹ but that is a voice which he is not ready to hear.

⁴⁴ PL ix 983–7.

⁴⁵ Cf. the plural when Satan tries to arouse in Eve while she sleeps 'Vaine hopes, vaine aimes, inordinate desires | Blown up with high conceits ingendring pride' (PL iv 808–9).

⁴⁶ PL x 113–14.

⁴⁷ PL x 837–40.

⁴⁸ As Fowler notes, *ad loc.*

⁴⁹ PL x 843–4.

⁵⁰ OED³ *s.v.* *refuge* *n.*

⁵¹ Psalm xli 1.

However, the next time that ‘hope’ occurs in the poem, it is newly defined, and there is now genuine hope because hope has been linked with love. Eve says to Adam that she has been

Restor’d by thee, vile as I am, to place
Of new acceptance, hopeful to regain
Thy Love, the sole contentment of my heart.⁵²

Yet forms of despair still shadow the couple when they contemplate the future. Seeking to remove the suffering of their descendants by ensuring that they have no descendants, they contemplate abstaining altogether from sex, and Eve says to Adam that if that prospect seems intolerable to him—

Conversing, looking, loving, to abstain
From Loves due Rites, Nuptial imbraces sweet,
And with desire to languish without hope⁵³

—then they should seek death. Hope here is simply the prospect of sexual pleasure, and its impossibility leads to a scenario of despair:

She ended heer, or vehement despaire
Broke off the rest; so much of Death her thoughts
Had entertaind, as di’d her Cheeks with pale.
But *Adam* with such counsel nothing sway’d,
To better hopes his more attentive minde
Labouring had rais’d, and thus to *Eve* repli’d.⁵⁴

It is Adam’s ‘attentive minde’ which leads him to ‘better hopes’. These turn out to be his recollection of the promise that their seed will bruise the serpent’s head, and so in making this turn Adam prepares the way for the Incarnation and thus the prospect of redemption for all his descendants: true hope. So he tells Eve,

No more be mention’d then of violence
Against our selves, and wilful barrenness,
That cuts us off from hope, and savours onely
Rancor and pride, impatience and despite,
Reluctance against God and his just yoke
Laid on our Necks.⁵⁵

Both suicide and ‘wilful barrenness’ would be sins against hope, at once despairing and presumptuous because they pre-empt the will of God, which at this point Adam can only see as a ‘just yoke’ laid upon him, but which will emerge later as redemption.

When, and only when, the couple turn to God in prayer (for prayer is an expression of hope, says Aquinas⁵⁶), despair is transformed into hope, for they find ‘Strength added from above, new hope to spring | Out of despaire, joy, but with

⁵² *PL* x 971–3.

⁵³ *PL* x 993–5.

⁵⁴ *PL* x 1007–12.

⁵⁵ *PL* x 1041–6.

⁵⁶ *ST* II-II, q. 17, a. 2, r. 2.

fear yet linkt'.⁵⁷ Hope, but also fear: perhaps fear at this point is the fear of the Lord; perhaps it is also fearful apprehension about what their future will be. When told that they must leave paradise, Adam exclaims that he

had hope to spend,
Quiet though sad, the respite of that day
That must be mortal to us both.⁵⁸

This was a false hope, one which did not take account of the depth of his transgression; it was the counterpart, in effect, of that earlier despair which had seen only the depths. When shown the future sufferings of his race, Adam sees many who regard death as their 'final hope';⁵⁹ he himself hopes that violence would cease and be replaced by peace, but acknowledges that 'I was farr deceav'd'.⁶⁰ As his understanding is clarified under the tutelage of Michael, so too is his hope, until Michael's account of the Messiah prompts Adam to exclaim:

O Prophet of glad tidings, finisher
Of utmost hope! now clear I understand
What oft my steddiest thoughts have searcht in vain,
Why our great expectation should be call'd
The seed of Woman.⁶¹

All the partial and false hopes which have driven the narrative up to this point are completed here in the 'utmost hope' which Michael reveals. Adam acknowledges the Son as 'my Redeemer ever blest',⁶² and in reply Michael counsels him:

This having learnt, thou hast attained the summe
Of wisdom; hope no higher, though all the Starrs
Thou knewst by name.⁶³

The Son of God, then, is the true end of hope, its goal and its consummation.⁶⁴

⁵⁷ *PL* xi 138–9.

⁵⁸ *PL* xi 271–3.

⁵⁹ *PL* xi 493.

⁶⁰ *PL* xi 783.

⁶¹ *PL* xii 375–9.

⁶² *PL* xii 573.

⁶³ *PL* xii 575–7.

⁶⁴ The motifs of hope and hopelessness are also prominent in *SA*, with recurring complaints from Samson that he is 'Without all hope', 'As one past hope', 'Nor am I in the list of them that hope', and 'Hopeless are all my evils, all remediless' (*SA* ll. 82, 120, 647–8). It is difficult not to associate this anguish with what must have been Milton's own struggles to retain his hope after what was for him the catastrophe (at once personal, religious, and political) of the Restoration.

18

I

Me miserable! which way shall I flie
 Infinite wrauth, and infinite despaire?
 Which way I flie is Hell; my self am Hell;
 And in the lowest deep a lower deep
 Still threatning to devour me opens wide,
 To which the Hell I suffer seems a Heav'n.

Paradise Lost iv 73–8



Milton's theology and moral thought seem to be focused primarily on the individual: on the Lady imprisoned by Comus, on Abdiel resisting Satan, on Samson struggling inwardly with his betrayal of his vocation, and with the Son turning aside each of Satan's temptations. For all his interest in England's own vocation as a godly nation, Milton seems rarely to consider the bonds between individuals which shape a community.¹ In this respect he is quite unlike Donne, who told his congregation in his inaugural sermon at St Dunstan's in 1624 that 'From the beginning God intimated a detestation, a dislike of *singularity*; of beeing *Alone*', an idea which he reiterated at St Paul's on Christmas Day 1627, saying:

God loves not singularity: God bindes us to nothing, that was never said but by one: As God loves Sympathy, God loves Symphony; God loves a compassion and fellow-feeling of others miseries, that is Sympathy; and God loves Harmony, and fellow-beleeving of others Doctrines, that is Symphony: No man alone makes a Church; no one Church alone makes a Catholique Church.²

Moreover, at the very moment of what seemed his own impending death Donne reflected that

No Man is an *Iland*, intire of it selfe; every man is a peece of the *Continent*, a part of the *maine*; if a *Clod* bee washed away by the *Sea*, *Europe* is the lesse, as well as if a *Promontorie* were, as well as if a *Mannor* of thy *friends*, or of *thine owne* were; Any Mans *death* diminishes *me*, because I am involved in *Mankinde*.³

¹ I explore Marvell's seeming preference for a community of one in 'Marvell's Pronouns', *Essays in Criticism* 53 (2003) 225–40.

² *The Sermons of John Donne*, edited by Evelyn M. Simpson and George R. Potter, 10 vols (Berkeley, Calif., 1953–62), vi 81, viii 155. See Jeffrey Johnson, *The Theology of John Donne* (Cambridge, 1999), pp. 2, 32–6.

³ John Donne, *Devotions upon Emergent Occasions*, edited by Anthony Raspa (Montreal, 1973), p. 87.

Milton, by contrast, if he did not prize singularity per se, was nevertheless committed to the idea that the enlightened individual, by prayer and scriptural study, might stand heroically *contra mundum* as a witness to the truth.⁴ As no lover of churches, he would not have been impressed by the dictum 'No man alone makes a Church', and it would certainly not have troubled him that 'no one Church alone makes a Catholique Church': for him, catholicity—that is, universality—would reside in Scripture not in institutions. Like Abdiel, Milton was convinced that 'few somtimes may know, when thousands err'.⁵

At the outset of *Paradise Lost* Milton places his own poetic 'I' in subordination to the heavenly Muse and the Spirit who inspire his work, and the subsequent proems to Books III, VII, and IX develop this configuration of the individual in ways which seek to avoid *hubris*. Book IX begins with a meditation on Milton's own role as the poet of *Paradise Lost*:

No more of talk where God or Angel Guest
With Man, as with his Friend, familiar us'd
To sit indulgent, and with him partake
Rural repast, permitting him the while
Venial discourse unblam'd: I now must change
Those Notes to Tragic.⁶

Milton reflects first on a form of speech which is now already lost: the intimate discourse between man and the angels, or between man and God. What is already lost now, to us as readers, and is about to be lost in the poem's narrative, is the familiar association and discourse which man once held with God and his angels. Such discourse is called 'unblam'd' and 'venial', that is, 'permissible, blameless'.⁷ Once before Milton had associated speech with the adjective 'unblam'd', for in the induction to Book III he says:

HAIL holy Light, ofspring of Heav'n first-born,
Or of th' Eternal Coeternal beam
May I express thee unblam'd?⁸

Blame, and the freedom from blame, seem intricately associated in Milton's mind with speech about or speech with God, for human speech may err and trespass when it speaks of the divine and so always needs indulgence, or even proleptic forgiveness. Poetry, which itself partakes of fallen language,⁹ requires divine forgiveness as it approaches the narrative of the Fall. Yet although unfallen speech, unmediated contact with God or the angels, is about to be lost, a verbal echo

⁴ This ideal of the isolated enlightened individual is seen quite early in Milton's writing: see my *Milton and the People* (Oxford, 2014), pp. 21–6.

⁵ *PL* vi 148.

⁶ *PL* ix 1–6.

⁷ *OED s.v. venial adj.* 3, a 'rare' use. Milton is drawing on the semantic field of its Latin root in *uenia*: a favour consisting of permission to do something, especially in a religious context; allowance made for shortcomings (*OLD s.v. uenia* 1, 2).

⁸ *PL* iii 1–3.

⁹ The Fall of man entailed the fall of language: man lost the originary language of Eden, and language was fractured into mutually incomprehensible tongues at the Tower of Babel (*PL* xii 43–62).

reminds us that later in biblical history there will be another such encounter, when we will be told that 'the LORD spake vnto Moses, face to face, as a man speaketh vnto his friend'.¹⁰ The allusion to this episode in Exodus gently reassures us that there will be some form of recovery from this Fall of language, and this loss of direct contact between man and God; but not yet.

Such reflections upon human speech preface Milton's account of his own speech when the 'I' who is the narrator reflects upon the composition of his poem.¹¹ The point which the narrative has now reached presents him with a 'Sad task, yet argument | Not less but more Heroic'¹² than the subjects of the *Iliad* and the *Aeneid*, for other poets have left 'the better fortitude | Of Patience and Heroic Martyrdom | Unsung'.¹³ Not only his subject matter but the poetic task itself is more heroic than that of his predecessors. Poetry, it seems, is a form of heroism, of 'Patience and Heroic Martyrdom'. One of the ways in which poetry adds depth—and often strangeness—to language is by exploiting the resonances of words through exfoliating the history which is enfolded into our vocabulary. Here etymology gives depth and breadth to the word 'Martyrdom': while the word had come to denote suffering for one's faith, it still carries the primary sense of its Greek root, for originally *μαρτυρέω* meant 'to be a witness, to bear witness, to testify, to declare', and in early Christian texts it came to mean more specifically bearing witness to the truth of the gospel, a witness which might entail persecution and death.¹⁴ Although after the Restoration Milton may have feared for his life because of his defence of the regicide, heroic martyrdom need not be a grisly death; rather, it may take the form of heroic witness, heroic utterance through poetry, heroic singularity. And it may require 'Patience', which includes the patience of the poet preparing himself to embark on this subject, 'long choosing, and beginning late'.¹⁵ Again the etymology is important, for 'patience' has its root in the Latin *patior*, to suffer or endure. It is endurance, passive rather than active heroism, which this induction to Book IX celebrates, and this form of heroism includes the writing of poetry. For poetry is a martyrdom, a form of witness.

What may impede either poem or poet from bearing witness, or suffering patiently, may be 'an age too late';¹⁶ Milton himself began late, but the age in which he lives may also be too late, too degenerate, for the cultural achievement of epic in the 'cold | Climat'¹⁷ of Restoration England. This sense of alienation from the contemporary world is explicable from Milton's own religious and political viewpoint, though at the same time Dryden was also expressing the fear that he was beginning his literary career too late in history to compose valuable work, and that the resources of his culture had already been used up by previous

¹⁰ Exodus xxxiii 11 (AV). The marginal gloss in the Geneva Bible says: 'Moste plainly & familiarly of all others', so this may be the source for Milton's 'familiar'.

¹¹ For Milton's self-presentation in his works see John S. Diekhoff, *Milton on Himself: Milton's Utterances upon Himself and His Works*, second edition (London, 1965), and Stephen M. Fallon, *Milton's Peculiar Grace: Self-Representation and Authority* (Ithaca, N.Y., 2007).

¹² PL ix 13–14.

¹³ PL ix 31–3.

¹⁴ LSJ, Chantraine, and Bauer, *s.v.*

¹⁵ PL ix 26.

¹⁶ PL ix 44.

¹⁷ PL ix 44–5.

generations.¹⁸ He too was looking for a way of composing which was not in the traditional mould. Milton's own advancing years may damp his wing 'if all be mine, | Not Hers who brings it nightly to my Ear':¹⁹ his frailty may inhibit the poem, but only if it is he who composes the poem rather than she, the heavenly spirit of inspiration. The creative spirit which shapes the poem is carefully, reverently, distinguished here from the physically damaged Milton who inhabits a morally damaged Restoration culture.

The induction to Book IX has been preceded by another passage at the opening of Book III in which Milton also meditates on himself as poet, on what authenticates his utterance, and his role as author of this poem.²⁰ This passage too is fraught with a sense of loss, in this case, his loss of sight. The blind poets and prophets of classical times with whom he associates (but not quite compares) himself—Thamyris, Homer, Tiresias, and Phineus—include transgressors. Thamyris, who had composed a poem on the generation of the world and the war of the Titans against the Olympian gods, had challenged the Muses and was punished with blindness: the implication of this story seems to be that poetry should not be egoistical, self-aggrandizing. Thamyris was also punished with the loss of his lyre, and (according to Plato²¹) his soul passed into a nightingale: in this way his own song, the individual utterance, was lost. Tiresias lost his sight as a punishment for speaking something which offended the gods (his testimony that women received more pleasure in sexual intercourse than men offended the goddess Hera); while Phineas lost his sight because he was too good at prophesying, and published the gods' secret counsels.²² Such are the dangers of poetic and prophetic speech when it trespasses upon the territory of the divine. Loss is also brought more subtly into this passage: the invocation to 'holy Light' includes several words with the prefix 're-': 'Thee I revisit now', says Milton, but although he may revisit the realms of holy light in his capacity as the narrator, this is not a light in which he is able to dwell as a man:

thee I revisit safe,
And feel thy sovran vital Lamp; but thou
Revisit'st not these eyes, that rowle in vain
To find thy piercing ray, and find no dawn.²³

It seems that there are two forms of light here, and two forms of the 'I': Milton the narrator, the poetic imagination, may move safely into the realms of holy light, but Milton the man may not recover his sight: the gap between the two uses of 'revisit'—between 'revisit safe' in the imagination and 'Revisit'st not' in the body—is tragic.

¹⁸ In *Of Dramatick Poesie, An Essay* (London, 1668), p. 65. The *Essay* was composed in 1667, the year in which *PL* was published; see further my *Dryden and the Traces of Classical Rome* (Oxford, 1999), pp. 57–8.

¹⁹ *PL* ix 46–7.

²⁰ *PL* iii 1–55.

²¹ *Republic* 620a.

²² Fowler and Miner, *ad loc.*

²³ *PL* iii 21–4.

Nevertheless, there is a significant passage later in Book III when Milton reports the celestial hymn of the angelic orders, which begins in narrative mode with the poet saying:

Then Crown'd again thir gold'n Harps they took,
Harps ever tun'd, that glittering by thir side
Like Quivers hung, and with Præamble sweet
Of charming symphonie they introduce
Thir sacred Song, and waken raptures high;
No voice exempt, no voice but well could joine
Melodious part, such concord is in Heav'n.²⁴

But when Milton relates the substance of the angelic song, this is recorded in a form which is grammatically addressed to God, first to the Father ('Thee Father first they sung Omnipotent') and next to the Son ('Thee next they sang of all Creation first, | Begotten Son'), so that Milton himself uses the angels' words as his own hymn of praise, and at the end of the passage the Miltonic 'I' is drawn into the voice of the angelic host as he refers to 'my Harp':

Hail Son of God, Saviour of Men, thy Name
Shall be the copious matter of my Song
Henceforth, and never shall my Harp thy praise
Forget, nor from thy Fathers praise disjoine.²⁵

Thus Milton's poetic 'I' is at once elevated and submerged into the angelic chorus.

At the opening of Book IX the composition of the poem is represented not as the work of Milton himself, but as something which proceeds from

my Celestial Patroness, who deignes
Her nightly visitation unimplor'd,
And dictates to me slumbring, or inspires
Easie my unpremeditated Verse.²⁶

Poetry comes 'unimplor'd' and 'unpremeditated'. The two 'un-' prefixes ward off inappropriate assumptions by the reader about Milton's creative process, about the nature and the purpose of this poetry. Not calculated, nor produced by laborious effort, it comes into being unasked, unplanned, from a celestial source. Such a model of poetic composition contrasts with the prevailing seventeenth-century tropes of poetic creativity which we see in the contemporary myths about Shakespeare (that his work was composed easily, without revision, as the outpouring of natural genius) and Jonson (that his work was composed laboriously):²⁷ Milton's poetry comes from a different source from theirs. The verse is also 'Easie'. There is no effort, not even the effort of prayer, on Milton's part. This is more than the commonplace modesty topos, for it distances the ambition of the poem from

²⁴ *PL* iii 365–71.

²⁵ *PL* iii 372, 383–4, 412–15.

²⁶ *PL* ix 21–4.

²⁷ See Chapter 13 *FANCY AND REASON*, p. 152 n. 24.

the will of the poet, and makes an important acknowledgement on the threshold of a book in which the Fall will be conceived in terms of ambition, of egoism, of the will. We are about to be led through the intricate poetry of the 'I', invited to witness the Fall of man as a fall into a deformed version of selfhood. Here the reverently passive martyrdom of Milton's 'I', subordinated to his 'Celestial Patroness' (the heavenly Muse Urania²⁸) as he prepares to give voice to the narrative of Book IX, is in marked contrast to the forms of egoism which the poem reveals to us, the various modes of being 'I' which it presents in Satan's revolt, in Eve as she is seduced by the serpent, and in Adam as he bends his intelligence and spiritual insight down to align himself with Eve after her Fall. Book IX leads the reader through the assertion of individual judgement and desire, so that we understand—both intellectually and sympathetically—how the human will is exercised in defiance of the divine will through the deformation of reason, of argument, and of key words. It is the poetry which maps for us these wanderings of the reason and the will, and it is partly by means of the poem's pronouns that its work of moral exploration and moral definition is enacted. To say 'I' or to say 'we' is a moral act, fraught with that significance which comes from an assertion of autonomy or an acknowledgement of dependence.



Before we reach Book IX Milton has already shown us a transgressive will and an assertive self through the figure of Satan, so that we are primed to understand the difference between assertion of self and attentiveness to God. The Satanic 'I' emerges in Book I when 'th' Apostate Angel'²⁹ asserts his unchanging resolution despite a change in his appearance and fortune:

Nor...
do I repent or change,
Though chang'd in outward lustre; that fixt mind
And high disdain, from sence of injur'd merit,
That with the mightiest rais'd me to contend.³⁰

The Satanic 'I' is ostentatiously 'fixt', grounded on a refusal to repent or change, an overinsistent grounding of himself within himself. One of the ways in which Milton's poetry moulds our understanding of varied forms of selfhood is through the use of pronouns. When Satan speaks of the fallen angels' programme to bring evil out of good, he describes this through first-person plural pronouns as 'our task', 'our sole delight', 'Our labour',³¹ but this creation of a first-person plural—a form of community—is a sleight of hand, for already the Satanic 'I' is emerging as the principal agent in this design: 'if I fail not', he says.³² Satan may acknowledge that the fallen angels share collectively the miseries of Hell, 'the seat | That we must change for Heav'n',³³ but this plural significantly shifts into the singular as Satanic

²⁸ *PL* vii 1.

²⁹ *PL* i 125. *Apostate*: see Chapter 12 FALL, p. 138.

³⁰ *PL* i 95–9.

³¹ *PL* i 159, 160, 164.

³² *PL* i 167.

³³ *PL* i 243–4.

individualism takes possession and appropriates power through emphatic first-person pronouns:

thou profoundest Hell
 Receive thy new Possessor: One who brings
 A mind not to be chang'd by Place or Time.
 The mind is its own place, and in it self
 Can make a Heav'n of Hell, a Hell of Heav'n.
 What matter where, if I be still the same,
 And what I should be, all but less then he
 Whom Thunder hath made greater?³⁴

In this prosopopeia Satan confidently addresses Hell as its owner and overlord; later, he will admit that Hell really possesses him, as he carries Hell with him,³⁵ but at this point he is asserting a possessive individualism which seeks to use everyone and everything to its own material advantage. This assertion of defensive independence against adverse circumstances might seem to run parallel with Milton's reflection in the proem to Book IX on the disparity between the mind of the poet and the world which surrounds him: would it not be laudable for Milton, also, to say that he is 'One who brings | A mind not to be chang'd by Place or Time', and to claim that for such exceptional spirits as he, 'The mind is its own place, and in it self | Can make a Heav'n of Hell'? The difference lies in Satan's insistence on his self: 'in it self | Can make' runs counter to Milton's self-abnegation in those 'un-' words, 'unimplor'd' and 'unpremeditated', his nightly surrender of his own agency to the celestial patroness. And yet the voice of Satan is being tried out as a potential voice for Milton and his reader; this first-person singular presents a form of subjectivity which undoubtedly has its attractions, and is indeed a form of heroism. Miltonic ambition and Satanic ambition speak nearly the same language: but it is not quite the same. The poetry draws the reader into distinguishing 'I' from 'I', the true from the deformed. 'When God gave him [Adam] reason, he gave him freedom to choose, for reason is but choosing';³⁶ and Milton's poetry educates us in the process of choosing by first leading us into temptation as we temporarily inhabit these different forms of subjectivity.³⁷ Such discrimination is no easy matter, for the poetry engages deeply with Satan's heroic despair and Eve's naïve aspirations: these are to be felt inwardly by the reader, not just condemned.

So what is it that makes Satanic selfhood Satanic? To use Martin Buber's terms,³⁸ it is the refusal to formulate the 'I' in relation to a 'Thou': Satan sees the world as an 'It', not as an actual or even a potential 'Thou'; the world lies all before him only as an instrument for his own use to be possessed and manipulated, not as the

³⁴ *PL* i 251–8.

³⁵ *PL* iv 75.

³⁶ *Areopagitica: Works* iv 319.

³⁷ This is amply demonstrated in Stanley Eugene Fish, *Surprised by Sin: The Reader in 'Paradise Lost'* (Berkeley, Calif., 1967).

³⁸ Martin Buber, *I and Thou*, translated by Walter Kaufmann (Edinburgh, 1970); originally published as *Ich und Du* (1923).

object of wonder or reverence.³⁹ Even the first-person plural into which his speech to Beelzebub briefly modulates is a sleight of hand:

What matter where, if I be still the same,
 And what I should be, all but less than he
 Whom Thunder hath made greater? Here at least
 We shall be free; th' Almighty hath not built
 Here for his envy, will not drive us hence:
 Here we may reign secure, and in my choice
 To reign is worth ambition though in Hell:
 Better to reign in Hell, than serve in Heav'n.⁴⁰

The caesura in the fourth line draws attention to that word 'free', a crucial idea in Milton's poetry and prose which is here left glibly unexamined by Satan.⁴¹ The pause which follows the word invites the reader's questioning response: "free"? But in what sense? Free from God? Free from your own passions? Free to tyrannize over others? The claim that 'We' shall be free is immediately compromised by the idea that what drives Satan is power, the ambition to reign, and if the 'We' in 'We shall be free' denotes the community of the fallen angels, the 'we' in 'Here we may reign' sounds more like the royal plural. Because Satan confines himself to 'I-It' relationships, he also sees God himself solely in terms of power, one 'Whom Thunder hath made greater', as if God too related to creation only in the manipulative terms of the 'I-It' mode. Word and world are alike for Satan merely instrumental, and Satan's selfhood displays none of that reverential submission which Milton's own

³⁹ By contrast, the dawning self-consciousness of Dryden's Adam begins with a Cartesian self-awareness which modulates into a reverence for his unknown author through a natural theology, and this leads to the total subordination of himself to his Creator when he says 'what I am is thine!':

Adam. What am I? or from whence? For that I am [*Rising*]
 I know, because I think; but whence I came,
 Or how this Frame of mine began to be,
 What other Being can disclose to me?
 I move, I see; I speak, discourse, and know,
 Though now I am, I was not always so.
 Then that from which I was, must be before:
 Whom, as my Spring of Being, I adore.
 ...
 O goodly order'd Work! O Pow'r Divine,
 Of thee I am; and what I am is thine!

Eve's dawning consciousness, however, leads her to narcissistic pride as she congratulates herself on her beauty:

Eve. Tell me ye Hills and Dales, and thou fair Sun,
 Who shin'st above, what am I? whence begun?
 Like my self, I see nothing: from each Tree
 The feather'd kind peep down, to look on me;
 And Beasts, with up-cast eyes, forsake their shade,
 And gaze, as if I were to be obey'd.
 Sure I am somewhat which they wish to be,
 And cannot: I my self am proud of me.

(John Dryden, *The State of Innocence, and Fall of Man: An Opera* (London, 1677), pp. 8, 13).

⁴⁰ *PL* i 256–63.

⁴¹ Two lines later another caesura similarly italicizes 'secure', which in this period means 'without care or anxiety' as well as 'in safety' (*OED*); in neither sense is Satan 'secure'. Cf. Chapter 14 *FREE*, pp. 106–7.

approach to speech exhibits at the opening of Book IX, or which the Son shows in Book III as he offers himself as the redeemer of mankind's transgressions.

In this speech 'I' is the subject of verbs which tell of submission and sacrifice, and 'me' is the object of such sacrifice, as the Son says to the Father:

Behold mee then, mee for him, life for life
I offer, on mee let thine anger fall;
Account mee man; I for his sake will leave
Thy bosom, and this glorie next to thee
Freely put off, and for him lastly dye
Well pleas'd, on me let Death wreck all his rage.⁴²

Because the Son subordinates himself totally to the Father's will, the verbs begin to be triumphant, but the triumph of the 'I' is the triumph of the Father's power:

Under his gloomie power I shall not long
Lie vanquisht; thou hast givn me to possess
Life in my self for ever, by thee I live,
Though now to Death I yield, and am his due
All that of me can die, yet that debt paid,
Thou wilt not leave me in the loathsom grave
...
But I shall rise Victorious, and subdue
My Vanquisher, spoild of his vanted spoile;
...
I through the ample Air in Triumph high
Shall lead Hell Captive maugre Hell, and show
The powers of darkness bound. Thou at the sight
Pleas'd, out of Heaven shalt look down and smile,
While by thee rais'd I ruin all my Foes.⁴³

Contrasted with Satan's ambitious self-assertion, this is the true triumph of the 'I' because it depends upon the divine will rather than being an assertion of the individual ego. That the link between the Son and the Father is the ideal or archetypal form of the link between 'I' and 'Thou' is clear from a passage in Book VI where the Son says:

O Father, O Supream of heav'nly Thrones,
First, Highest, Holiest, Best, thou alwayes seekst
To glorifie thy Son, I alwayes thee,
As is most just; this I my Glorie account,
My exaltation, and my whole delight,
That thou in me well pleas'd, declarst thy will
Fulfill'd, which to fulfil is all my bliss.
Scepter and Power, thy giving, I assume,
And gladlier shall resign, when in the end
Thou shalt be All in All, and I in thee
For ever, and in mee all whom thou lov'st:
But whom thou hat'st, I hate, and can put on
Thy terrors, as I put thy mildness on,
Image of thee in all things.⁴⁴

⁴² PL iii 236–41.

⁴³ PL iii 242–58.

⁴⁴ PL vi 723–36.

The Son's 'I' is constituted through this repeated attentiveness to the 'Thou', and the intricate interweaving of 'I' and 'Thou' becomes a model for man's own dependence on God, his *telos* to be the 'Image of thee in all things'. The Son's 'I' is in every respect the opposite of the Satanic 'I'.

We hear the Satanic 'I' deeply troubled in his soliloquy on Mount Niphates in Book IV, for now the pronouns mark out a trajectory of loss, beginning with a verb of hatred and a recognition of his Fall:

O Sun . . . I hate thy beams
That bring to my remembrance from what state
I fell.⁴⁵

But Satan is still not quite able to admit his agency, his responsibility, because even as he acknowledges that 'Pride and worse Ambition threw me down',⁴⁶ the phrasing creates an allegorical pair who throw him down, as if these were autonomous figures over whom he had no control. Similarly, he distances himself from his own will by referring to it in the third person, as if this were not quite his: 'against his thy will | Chose freely what it now so justly rues'.⁴⁷ Another apparently autonomous agent is Disdain, for Satan claims that '*Disdain* forbids me' to repent.⁴⁸ Then, confessing that God created him, he says 'yet all his good prov'd ill in me, | And wrought but malice',⁴⁹ so it is God's goodness that 'prov'd ill' and 'wrought . . . malice', without Satan seemingly having any part in this except as the recipient of this action. Eventually Satan admits that his 'I' cannot escape Hell:

Me miserable! which way shall I flie
Infinite wrauth, and infinite despaire?
Which way I flie is Hell; my self am Hell;
And in the lowest deep a lower deep
Still threatning to devour me opens wide,
To which the Hell I suffer seems a Heav'n.⁵⁰

Now the 'I' is synonymous with Hell, which might be said to constitute Satan were it not that Hell is at the same time a lower deep within the lowest deep which threatens to devour him: he is always on the point, then, of devouring himself, of being devoured by his willed alienation from God, which is his willed refusal of his own *telos*; but he is never granted the solace of annihilation. After telling himself that there is no prospect of repentance, he asserts:

Evil be thou my Good; by thee at least
Divided Empire with Heav'n's King I hold
By thee, and more then half perhaps will reign.⁵¹

But in this kingdom of shadows this 'I' can hold nothing.



Satan the egoist preys on the egoism in Eve, initially investing her with terms which seduce her into a form of selfhood which is self-regarding and self-seeking.

⁴⁵ *PL* iv 37–9.

⁴⁶ *PL* iv 40.

⁴⁷ *PL* iv 71–2.

⁴⁸ *PL* iv 82; italics original.

⁴⁹ *PL* iv 48–9.

⁵⁰ *PL* iv 73–8.

⁵¹ *PL* iv 110–12.

He approaches her with flattery. His modes of address, such as 'sovrán Mistress', 'sole Wonder', 'the Heav'n of mildness', 'Celestial Beautie',⁵² may seem only to be compliments culled from the Petrarchan tradition of love poetry, but each contains within it a subtle displacement of God through the misapplication of 'sovrán', 'Heav'n', and 'Celestial'; her acceptance of any of these terms, however innocent their flattery may seem, is a momentary alienation from God, a miniature version of Satan's own self-love, ambition, and Fall. Eve's speech of reflection—or self-deception—before she takes the fruit repeatedly uses the plural pronouns 'we' and 'us', so that she seems to be thinking as part of a couple, not as an individual; but whereas at first she had confidently aligned the couple with God's command, saying 'we may not taste nor touch',⁵³ she soon redefines herself and Adam as a couple who are victims of an unfair prohibition: 'Forbids us good, forbids us to be wise?'; 'For us alone | Was death invented?'⁵⁴ These uses of 'us' are impelled by resentment of, and opposition to, God's commands, so that the ontology of the couple—like that of Satan—is now grounded in rebellion and alienation. (Soon God will be no more to her than 'Our great Forbidder'.⁵⁵) When she then slips into the first-person singular with 'What fear I then',⁵⁶ the reader should be able to identify the true character of this individualism by recalling again the Biblical injunction which is the implicit answer to Eve's rhetorical question: 'The feare of the LORD *is* the beginning of wisdom'.⁵⁷

Eve's first speech after taking the fruit includes several examples of an 'I' which insists upon its own agency, a repeated 'I' which inaugurates a new form of self-hood, one which is conscious now of herself as a being separate from Adam, even constituting herself over against him as one who has separate and perhaps conflicting interests, and she ponders whether to deploy this new identity as part of a couple or as a separate person who might be equal or even superior to him. She wonders whether or not to share the fruit with Adam, but what finally prompts her decision to do so is not a loving desire to share benefits with him but a wholly solipsistic fear of her possible punishment and extinction, the prospect that

I shall be no more,
And *Adam* wedded to another *Eve*,
Shall live with her enjoying, I extinct;
A death to think. Confirm'd then I resolve,
Adam shall share with me in bliss or woe:
So dear I love him, that with him all deaths
I could endure, without him live no life.⁵⁸

This repeated 'I', which imagines its extinction and its replacement by a second Eve, solidifies its existence and its autonomy by resolving that Adam will be bound to her as part of a couple which *shall* share the consequences of her action. (Her verb 'shall' in '*Adam* shall share with me in bliss or woe' is the coercive, prescriptive 'shall' rather than the neutral future tense 'will'.) The speech ends with an apparently simple phrase—"So dear I love him"—into which Milton has packed self-deception

⁵² *PL* ix 532–4, 540.

⁵³ *PL* ix 651.

⁵⁴ *PL* ix 759, 766–7.

⁵⁵ *PL* ix 815.

⁵⁶ *PL* ix 773.

⁵⁷ Psalm cxi 10.

⁵⁸ *PL* ix 827–33.

(this is manifestly not 'love' for Adam) and a deadly pun: her 'love' will indeed cost Adam 'dear'.

This 'So dear I love him' is a form of lie, perhaps a lie to herself, but Eve soon lies outright to Adam when she approaches him with a branch of the Tree of Knowledge and describes its effects which, she says, 'for thee | Chiefly I sought, without thee can despise'.⁵⁹ We know that this is not true. This is not what happened. Continuing her deceit, she invokes the unity of the couple:

For bliss, as thou hast part, to me is bliss,
Tedious, unshar'd with thee, and odious soon.
Thou therefore also taste, that equal Lot
May joyne us, equal Joy, as equal Love;
Least thou not tasting, different degree
Disjoyne us, and I then too late renounce
Deitie for thee, when Fate will not permit.⁶⁰

After the Fall Eve has become a skilfully devious rhetorician. Her definition of 'bliss' (life shared with Adam) is at variance with the notion of bliss which inspired her to take the fruit and then to share it with him: 'Adam shall share with me in bliss or woe',⁶¹ she had said to herself. 'Equal Lot' is rapidly defined as 'equal Joy, as equal Love', warding off the thought that their lot is now death. The idea that if Adam fails to eat the fruit they will be separated in 'different degree' is also carefully defined: Adam would fail to share the 'Deitie' which Eve thinks she now enjoys.

Adam's speeches in reply also consider the unity of the couple, but show an altogether different form of selfhood, and conduct a different form of inner reflection. Adam does not use any of the specious rhetoric deployed by Eve, though Milton does use various rhetorical figures to convey his emotion and his recognition: Adam clearly sees things as they are, names them as they are to be named. When he exclaims,

O fairest of Creation, last and best
Of all Gods works, Creature in whom excell'd
Whatever can to sight or thought be formd.⁶²

there is a terrible realization in the past tense of 'excell'd' that she excels no more. He continues:

How art thou lost, how on a sudden lost,
Defac't, deflourd, and now to Death devote?
Rather how hast thou yeilded to transgress
The strict forbiddance, how to violate
The sacred Fruit forbidd'n!⁶³

Though this is a soliloquy, spoken inwardly, Adam addresses Eve directly, as 'thou' (an intimate pronoun⁶⁴), whereas Eve after taking the fruit had soliloquized about

⁵⁹ *PL* ix 877–8.

⁶⁰ *PL* ix 879–85.

⁶¹ *PL* ix 831.

⁶² *PL* ix 896–8.

⁶³ *PL* ix 900–4.

⁶⁴ For the intimate 'thou' and the formal 'you' in early-modern English see Charles Barber, *Early Modern English*, second edition (Edinburgh, 1997), pp. 152–7.

Adam in the third person, already distancing herself from him. The rhetorical figure of *epistrophe* (the same word ending consecutive clauses) emphasizes the word 'lost' (which is also italicized by the caesura and the line ending) and shows that he is under no illusions, engages in no self-deception, as to the true nature of Eve's transgression. So does the *polyptoton* (repeating a word in a different form, but from the same root) in 'forbiddance...forbidd'n'. The emphatic 'de-' words bring to mind the beauty and innocence which are now destroyed, and they are arranged in the order of increasing seriousness (the rhetorical figure of *auxesis*): Eve is defaced, for she has lost her beauty; deflowered, for she has lost her virginity (not physically but symbolically, self-deflowered morally through her loss of innocence); and she is 'to Death devote'. The word 'devote' is a powerful one, with meanings which have fallen out of modern usage: (i) 'set apart, dedicated solemnly, consecrated', as if she were a nun who has dedicated herself solemnly to God's service, though she is actually now set apart as one given over wholly to Death; and (ii) 'given over to the powers of evil or destruction, doomed':⁶⁵ she is given up to Death. There is a solemnity to the word's semantic field which is taken over from its Latin root in the verb *deuouere*, which means to vow as an offering or sacrifice, to give something or someone over to the gods, often in a sinister sense.⁶⁶ The question mark in early modern English printing also served in places where we would now use an exclamation mark, so Adam's words 'How art thou lost...?' are both a question ('How did this happen?') and an exclamation ('How completely you are lost!').

But Adam will not rest content with these passive verbs, which betoken no will on Eve's part, and imply that she is merely the victim of some other agent: instead, he moves to correct his description (the rhetorical figure of *epanorthosis*, where the speaker corrects what he has just said) and uses a series of active verbs which insist that Eve herself has yielded, has transgressed, has violated. His speech, like Eve's, expresses the unity of the couple, but unlike Eve he uses 'love' and 'dear' without that corrupted undertow when he speaks of their 'Love so dearly joyn'd'.⁶⁷ We are drawn to hear the different tone and purpose in his resolution, the different meaning of his love, as we hear the verbal echoes between their two speeches: Eve had said,

then I shall be no more,
And *Adam* wedded to another *Eve*,
Shall live with her enjoying, I extinct;
A death to think.⁶⁸

But Adam says:

Should God create another *Eve*, and I
Another Rib afford, yet loss of thee
Would never from my heart.⁶⁹

⁶⁵ *OED s.v.* devote *v.* 1, 3 respectively.

⁶⁷ *PL* ix 909.

⁶⁸ *PL* ix 827.

⁶⁶ *OLD s.v.* deuouere.

⁶⁹ *PL* ix 911–13.

⁷⁷ *PL* ix 1074–6.

He then moves away from this fallen first-person plural to give voice to an entirely individual anguish, a condition of existential solitude in which he cannot bear to contemplate any relationship with God, and in which Eve also has no part:

How shall I behold the face
Henceforth of God or Angel,
...
O might I here
In solitude live savage, in some glade
Obscur'd, where highest Woods impenetrable
To Starr or Sun-light, spread thir umbrage broad,
And brown as Evening: Cover me ye Pines,
Ye Cedars, with innumerable boughs
Hide me, where I may never see them more.⁷⁸

His response is to hide himself from God and from the light; and his next response is to turn to Eve and say that they should hide their genitals from each other.⁷⁹

In their subsequent speeches the pronouns 'I' and 'thou' take on a bitter edge, as a defensive, self-exculpatory 'I' and an aggressive, condemnatory 'thou' run through these passages. In early modern English 'thou'—contrasted with the polite, formal 'you'—can be either the pronoun of loving intimacy or the pronoun used to an inferior in tones of condescension, anger, or contempt,⁸⁰ and now 'thou' seems to slip from intimacy into anger as Eve blames Adam for allowing her to go:

why didst not thou the Head
Command me absolutely not to go,
Going into such danger as thou saidst?
...
Hadst thou bin firm and fixt in thy dissent,
Neither had I transgress'd, nor thou with mee.⁸¹

Adam, in a similar vein, replies, 'what could I do more? | I warn'd thee, I admonish'd thee',⁸² before depersonalizing Eve still further as merely an example of untrustworthy women.⁸³

How is paradise to be regained? How can the original 'I' and 'we' be recovered? By the gradual turning of recrimination and blame into compassion and love in Book X, which entails a reconfiguring of both 'I' and 'we', achieving thereby the restoration of the couple. We see that this restoration is grounded in a new form of selfhood when Eve acknowledges not simply her own responsibility but her precise place in the human commonwealth and the divine scheme, echoing as she does so the narrator's earlier definition of their unequal status, 'Hee for God only, shee for God in him':⁸⁴

On me exercise not
Thy hatred for this miserie befall'n,
On me alreadie lost, mee then thy self

⁷⁸ *PL* ix 1080–90.

⁸¹ *PL* ix 1155–61.

⁷⁹ *PL* ix 1091–8.

⁸² *PL* ix 1170–1.

⁸⁰ See n. 64.

⁸³ *PL* ix 1182–6.

⁸⁴ *PL* iv 299.

More miserable; both have sin'd, but thou
 Against God onely, I against God and thee,
 And to the place of judgment will return,
 There with my cries importune Heaven, that all
 The sentence from thy head remov'd may light
 On me, sole cause to thee of all this woe,
 Mee mee onely just object of his ire.⁸⁵

Here the repeated first-person pronouns emphasize Eve's acceptance of who she truly is, and at the same time speak a willingness to sacrifice that new-found self for Adam by taking upon her head all the punishment. And the penitential Psalm 51 is heard as an undertow in Eve's speech of repentance: 'Against thee, thee onely haue I sinned, and done this euill in thy sight'.⁸⁶ Such individual repentance leads to the reconciliation of the couple, and it is as a couple that they seek in one voice God's forgiveness at the end of Book X. Here it is the first-person plural pronoun that is prominent:

remedie or cure
 To evils which our own misdeeds have wrought,
 Hee will instruct us praying, and of Grace
 Beseeching him, so as we need not fear
 To pass commodiously this life, sustain'd
 By him with many comforts, till we end
 In dust, our final rest and native home.
 What better can we do, then to the place
 Repairing where he judg'd us, prostrate fall
 Before him reverent, and there confess
 Humbly our faults.⁸⁷

The 'we' of Adam and Eve is rebuilt in repentance, and an abandonment of themselves to God.



At the beginning of *Paradise Lost* Milton created a crucial first-person plural when he said that his poem would treat

OF Mans First Disobedience, and the Fruit
 Of that Forbidden Tree, whose mortal tast
 Brought Death into the World, and all our woe,
 With loss of *Eden*, till one greater Man
 Restore us.⁸⁸

If the poem is to be the story of 'our woe' 'till one greater Man | Restore us', then we as readers have to be drawn in to the various first-person utterances: to implicate ourselves in the 'I' of Satan and Eve, to wonder at the self-sacrificial 'I' of the Son, and to voice our own repentance with Adam and Eve.

⁸⁵ *PL* x 927–36.

⁸⁶ Psalm li 4.

⁸⁷ *PL* x 1079–89.

⁸⁸ *PL* i 1–5.

19

Idol and Image

By falsities and lyes the greatest part
Of Mankind they corrupted to forsake
God thir Creator, and th' invisible
Glory of him that made them, to transform
Oft to the Image of a Brute, adorn'd
With gay Religions¹ full of Pomp and Gold,
And Devils to adore for Deities:
Then were they known to men by various Names,
And various Idols through the Heathen World.

Paradise Lost i 367–75



The fallen angels seduce mankind away from their allegiance to the invisible Creator to the service of devils in the visible form of animal images—as idols. For as St Paul says in the passage from Romans which Milton follows so closely here, they ‘changed the glory of the vncorruptible God, into an image made like to corruptible man, and to birdes, and foure footed beasts, and creeping things... Who changed the trueth of God into a lye, and worshipped and serued the creature more then the Creatour.’² *Paradise Lost* frequently returns us to the question of true and false images, to the difference between an image and an idol.³ Milton himself in *De Doctrina Christiana* says of idolatry, *Illa est qua idolum cultus religiosi causa vel fabricatur, vel habetur, vel colitur; sive id veri Dei confictum simulachrum sit sive falsi*.⁴ The making and worship of ‘any grauen Image, or any likenesse of any thing that is in heauen aboue, or that is in the earth beneath, or that is in the water vnder the earth’ had been prohibited by the Ten Commandments,⁵ but what this should mean in practice had been hotly contested, first during the iconoclastic

¹ *Religions*: in the plural means ‘religious rites’ (*OED* 3a).

² Romans i 23–5.

³ For Milton’s engagement with icons and iconoclasm see Christopher Hill, *Milton and the English Revolution* (London, 1977), pp. 173ff; Ernest B. Gilman, *Iconoclasm and Poetry in the English Reformation: Down Went Dagon* (Chicago, 1986), pp. 149–77; David Loewenstein, “Casting Down Imaginations”: Milton as Iconoclast’, *Criticism* 31 (1989) 253–70; Christopher John Donato, ‘Against the Law: Milton’s (Anti?) Nomianism in *De Doctrina Christiana*’, *Harvard Theological Review* 104 (2011) 69–91; Daniel Shore, ‘Why Milton Is Not an Iconoclast’, *PMLA* 127 (2012) 22–37.

⁴ The practice ‘whereby an idol is either constructed or possessed or worshipped as a religious cult-object, whether it be a fashioned likeness of the true God or of a false god’ (*De Doctrina: OCW* viii 1010–11).

⁵ Exodus xx 4.

controversy of the eighth century,⁶ and then in the sixteenth century both between Protestants and Catholics and among the reformers themselves.⁷ Calvin said that

the glorye of God is corrupted so oft as any shape is fained to represent him ... [so] he restraineth our libertie, that we attempt not to represent him w[ith] any visible image ... And it is to be noted that a similitude is no lesse forbydden than a grauen image.⁸

Did the Decalogue prohibit only statues, or all visual images? And if images were permitted, what form of reverence could properly be accorded them? Although the Catholic Church carefully distinguished between different forms of worship—*latría* which was due to God alone, and *dulia* the reverence accorded to the saints—the worship which was prompted by the contemplation of images might easily be confused with worship of the objects themselves. And so the religious upheavals of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries were often manifested in the breaking, repairing, and breaking again of those works of art which had been crafted to turn men's minds to devotion, but which seemed to the reformers to be nothing but idols.⁹ Milton himself makes clear his detestation of the evocation of the senses in Catholic (and Laudian) ceremony, which he sees as no more than 'the new-vomited Paganisme of sensuall Idolatry' in which the eucharistic Host is 'pageanted about, like a dreadfull Idol'.¹⁰

Milton's poetry, though less polemically, is also concerned with the problem of using images when thinking about God.¹¹ The passage from Book I quoted as an epigraph includes the phrase 'invisible | Glory', and the slight hiatus created by the

⁶ For the debate see *The Oxford Dictionary of the Christian Church*, edited by F. L. Cross and E. A. Livingstone, third edition (Oxford, 1997), s.v. iconoclasm; Jaroslav Pelikan, *Imago Dei: The Byzantine Apologia for Icons* (New Haven, Conn., 1990).

⁷ See Margaret Aston, *England's Iconoclasts: Volume I: Laws against Images* (Oxford, 1988). For the pertinent questions raised by Lancelot Andrewes, William Tyndale, and others about the distinction between images, icons, and idols, see pp. 392–400.

⁸ Jean Calvin, *The Institution of Christian Religion* (London, 1561), fols 22^r, 24^r.

⁹ For the Second Council of Nicaea's defence of the veneration of images against the iconoclasts see Denzinger §§600–603; the Council quoted the classic dictum of St Basil the Great that the honour rendered to the image passes on to the original (*De Spiritu Sancto* xviii 45: *Patrologia Graeca* xxxii 149). For early-modern iconoclasm see, besides Aston's book, Eamon Duffy's splendid *The Stripping of the Altars: Traditional Religion in England c.1400–c.1580* (New Haven, Conn., 1992), and Julie Spraggon, *Puritan Iconoclasm during the English Civil War* (Woodbridge, 2003).

¹⁰ *Reformation: Works* iii 2, 4. In *True Religion* Milton maintains that the exercise of Catholicism in England 'as far as it is Idolatrous, can be tolerated neither way: not publicly, without grievous and unsufferable scandal giv'n to all conscientious Beholders; not privately, without great offence to God, declar'd against all kind of Idolatry, though secret' (*Works* vi 172). Milton also contests the Catholic idea (which has its origin with St Gregory the Great) that images are the books of the unlearned: *Male igitur idola vocantur a pontificiis libri laicorum* (*De Doctrina*: OCW viii 1016). Note that the vocabulary here is tendentious, since Milton uses *idola* not *imagines*, and *laici* (i.e. all the laity, as distinct from the clergy) not (say) *indocti*. See also Wilson, s.vv. 'idol' and 'image'. John Price called the Catholic Queen Henrietta Maria 'a wicked Idolatrous Jezabel' because she prevailed upon Charles I, like Ahab, 'to rear up Altars for the service of Baal (as he did in Somerset House, and elsewhere upon the like account) multiplying Idolatrous worship and service' (*The Cloudie Clergie, or, A Mourning Lecture for Our Morning Lecturers* (London, 1650), p. 12).

¹¹ William Franke discusses Milton's imagery in the light of the problem of representing the divine in 'Blind Prophecy: Milton's Figurative Mode in *Paradise Lost*', in *Through a Glass Darkly: Essays in the Religious Imagination*, edited by John C. Hawley (New York, 1996), pp. 87–103.

line break invites us to pause over this idea in our reading. Though God is not visible to man, and dazzles the sight of his attendant angels, the word 'invisible' sits strangely with 'glory', for amongst the meanings of the latter are:

5. In Biblical phraseology: *the glory of God*: the majesty and splendour attendant upon a manifestation of God. 6. Resplendent beauty or magnificence... An effulgence of light such as is associated with our conceptions of heaven... 7. a. The splendour and bliss of heaven... 9. a. The circle of light represented as surrounding the head, or the whole figure, of the Saviour, the Virgin, or one of the Saints... b. A representation of the heavens opening and revealing celestial beings. c. *transf.* Any circle or ring of light; a halo, corona.¹²

There is, then, in the semantic field of 'glory' the idea of light, the manifestation of resplendence, which is incompatible with invisibility. Or it would be incompatible if we confined our understanding to literal, physical terms, but 'invisible | Glory' invites us to recognize that the glory of God is not manifest in visible terms; indeed, 'by "invisible" is understood not some physical property of the divine, but the fact that God is not a this-worldly reality at all'.¹³ Human imagery for the divine needs to be held always *sous rature*, offered tentatively as a means and never an end.¹⁴ If prayer is 'the space in which our images of God are purified',¹⁵ then Milton's poetry works to similar ends, to the ends that Newman identified when he commented in his translation of St Athanasius: 'Here one image corrects another; and the accumulation of images is not, as is often thought, the restless and fruitless effect of the mind to *enter into the Mystery*, but is a *safeguard* against any one image, nay, any collection of images, being supposed *sufficient*.'¹⁶ The near oxymoron in 'invisible | Glory' is such a safeguard. It prises us away from understanding vision literally, and prepares us for that form of sight which is evoked at the opening of St John's gospel, when the evangelist says that in looking upon Jesus we see the divine glory: *καὶ ἐθεασάμεθα τὴν δόξαν αὐτοῦ, δόξαν ὡς μονογενοῦς παρὰ πατρός, πλήρης χάριτος καὶ ἀληθείας*: '(& we beheld his glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father) full of grace and truth'.¹⁷ Such beholding requires the eyes of faith.¹⁸

At several points *Paradise Lost* sets before us the unexceptional use of 'image'—indeed, its definitive form—when it is applied to the Son as the image of the Father, following the claim made in the Epistle to the Hebrews that Christ is

¹² Abridged from *OED s.v. glory n.*

¹³ *Vocabulary of the Bible*, edited by J.-J. von Allmen (London, 1958), p. 180 (entry by Christoph Senft).

¹⁴ On the problem of finding appropriate language for the Deity see Aquinas, *ST I*, q.1, a. 9. Milton discusses the language used about God in *De Doctrina*: *OCW* viii 28–35.

¹⁵ Enzo Bianchi, *Words of Spirituality: Exploring the Inner Life*, second edition, translated by Christine Landau (London, 2012), p. 42.

¹⁶ *Select Treatises of S. Athanasius, Archbishop of Alexandria, in Controversy with the Arians*, edited and translated by John Henry Newman, 2 vols (Oxford, 1842–4), i 44.

¹⁷ John i 14.

¹⁸ In the NT and other early Christian texts the verb *θεάομαι*, used here by John, means both 'see with physical eyes' and 'see with physical eyes, but in such a way that a supernatural impression is gained' (Bauer, *s.v.*).

'the express image' (χαρακτῆρ) of God.¹⁹ In most cases in the New Testament the concept of 'image' implies not 'the unreality or derivative nature of the image

¹⁹ Hebrews i 3. χαρακτῆρ (which literally means 'impression' or 'reproduction', e.g. of an image on a coin) is also used in 1 Clement xxxiii 4 when we are told that God formed man as a reproduction of his own form (Bauer, *s.v.*). See *De Doctrina*: OCW viii 49 n. vii.

Milton uses 'express' in connection with the Son's relationship to the Father:

Beyond compare the Son of God was seen
Most glorious, in him all his Father shon
Substantially express'd, and in his face
Divine compassion visibly appeerd.

(PL iii 138–41)

And he also uses it in relation to Adam and Eve as creatures made in the image of God:

in his own Image hee
Created thee, in the Image of God
Express, and thou becam'st a living Soul.

(PL vii 526–8)

In outward also her resembling less
His Image who made both, and less expressing
The character of that Dominion giv'n
O're other Creatures.

(PL viii 543–6)

That the Father is 'Substantially express'd' in the Son is a formulation which alludes to (without endorsing) the credal formula that the Son is 'of one substance with the Father' (cf. Chapter 15 GOD, p. 224 n. 133). The word 'express' is ambiguous, perhaps deliberately and productively so, for it has two principal semantic branches:

- I. To press out. 1. *a. trans.* To press, squeeze, or wring out. 2. To emit or exude, as if by pressure.
3. To press or squeeze out the contents of.
- II. To portray, represent. 5. *a.* To represent by sculpture, drawing, or painting; to portray, delineate, depict. *b.* To be an image or likeness of; to resemble [After L. *exprimere*]. 6. To represent symbolically. 7. *a.* To manifest or reveal by external tokens. (Abridged from *OED s.v. express v.*)

So Milton's 'Substantially express'd' moves between saying that (i) the substance of the Father is emitted into the Son, and (ii) that the Father is, in all significant respects, symbolically represented in the Son. In the following passage there is a similar ambiguity:

So spake the Father, and unfoulding bright
Toward the right hand his Glorie, on the Son
Blaz'd forth unclouded Deitie; he full
Resplendent all his Father manifest
Express'd.

(PL x 63–7)

But the dominant meaning of 'Express'd' here seems to be 'made apparent', as in the next example:

He said, and on his Son with Rayes direct
Shon full, he all his Father full exprest
Ineffably into his face receiv'd.

(PL vi 719–21)

In these lines:

Begotten Son, Divine Similitude,
In whose conspicuous count'nance, without cloud
Made visible, th' Almighty Father shines,
Whom else no Creature can behold; on thee
Imprest the effulgence of his Glorie abides,
Transfus'd on thee his ample Spirit rests.

(PL iii 384–9)

the key term is 'Imprest', meaning 'imprinted, stamped' (*OED s.v. impress v.* 2), though the strong physicality of the verb sits strangely with the abstract 'effulgence' which is its subject.

compared with that of the original, [but] signifies on the contrary that the image is an authentic and adequate expression of the original: in the image the thing itself is made present, manifest, visible.²⁰ The word which St Paul generally uses to indicate that Christ is the image of the Father is εἰκὼν ('icon').²¹ But some Church Fathers, including Augustine, had been wary of calling Christ the *Imago Dei* lest this imply a subordinationist view of the Son²²—a heresy with which Milton himself shows some sympathy.²³ In Book VI the Son tells the Father that he is 'Image of thee in all things',²⁴ implying that he subordinates himself to the will of the Father, but also that he is a manifestation of that will. In Book III on the right hand of God the Father 'The radiant image of his Glory sat, | His onely Son'.²⁵ Such usage redeems the word 'image' by purging it of its associations with biblically false or Platonically inadequate representations, because this image is 'radiant', shedding abroad the light of God, and therefore a true manifestation of divinity.

Man is himself made in the image of God, for at the creation 'God said, Let vs make man in our Image, after our likenesse'.²⁶ 'Image' and 'likenesse' are problematic terms. Are these distinct ideas, or an example of the Hebraic habit of parallelism? If they are distinct, what do they signify? The Old Testament scholar

In *De Doctrina* Milton explains that he has given precedence to the Son over the Holy Spirit in his discussion of God because 'the radiance of God's glory and the stamp of his subsistence are said to have been imprinted on the Son, not on the Holy Spirit': *quòd effulgentia gloriae et character subsistentiae divinae Filio, non Spiritui Sancto impressus dicatur* (OCW viii 272–3).

²⁰ Christoph Senft in von Allmen, *Vocabulary of the Bible*, p. 180.

²¹ 2 Corinthians iv 4; Colossians i 15, iii 10. For the uses of εἰκὼν in the NT see Bauer, *s.v.*, and Alan Richardson, *An Introduction to the Theology of the New Testament* (London, 1958), p. 67. Paul also speaks of 'all fulness' (πάν το πλήρωμα) of the Father dwelling in Christ (Colossians ii 9), with which cf. πλήρης in John i 14, quoted above, and Milton's 'full resplendence' (PL v 720), 'Shon full' (vi 720), and 'full | Resplendent' (x 65–6).

²² Cross and Livingstone, *The Oxford Dictionary of the Christian Church*, p. 820.

²³ For Milton's exposition of what it means for Christ to be considered the image of God see *De Doctrina*: OCW xiv, esp. 168–9, 180–3, 218–19, 270–1. For a brief clarification of Milton's approach to the complex theological problem of describing the relationship of the Son to the Father see Gordon Campbell, Thomas N. Corns, John K. Hale, and Fiona J. Tweedie, *Milton and the Manuscript of 'De Doctrina Christiana'* (Oxford, 2007), pp. 101–6.

²⁴ PL vi 736. Satan also speaks (resentfully) of the need to give reverence 'to one and to his image' (PL v 784).

²⁵ PL iii 63–4.

²⁶ Genesis i 26. Uriel tells Gabriel that a spirit (actually Satan) is eager to see 'Man | Gods latest Image' (PL iv 566–7). For Donne's eloquent meditation on this text in Genesis see his sermon preached before Charles I in 1629 (*The Sermons of John Donne*, edited by Evelyn M. Simpson and George R. Potter, 10 vols (Berkeley, Calif., 1953–62), ix 68–91), and for Donne's views on images see Jeffrey Johnson, *The Theology of John Donne* (Cambridge, 1999), pp. 64–7. For seventeenth-century understandings of this text see Arnold Williams, *The Common Expositor: An Account of the Commentaries on Genesis 1527–1633* (Chapel Hill, N.C., 1948), pp. 72ff.; C. A. Patrides, *Milton and the Christian Tradition* (Oxford, 1966), pp. 48–51, and Philip C. Almond, *Adam and Eve in Seventeenth-Century Thought* (Cambridge, 1999), pp. 9–15. One of Milton's sources for *De Doctrina*, Johannes Wollebius, explains that among the gifts which Adam received when he was made in the image of God were clarity of intellect, freedom, and rectitude of will, and conformity to reason on the part of the whole person (*Compendium Theologiae Christianae*, in *Reformed Dogmatics*, edited and translated by John W. Beardslee III (Oxford, 1965; reissued, Grand Rapids, Minn., 1977), p. 65. As a final element in his proof of the existence of God at the end of his *Méditation troisième* Descartes says that 'de cela seul que Dieu m'a créé, il est fort croyable qu'il m'a en quelque façon produit à son image et semblance, et que je conçois cette ressemblance (dans laquelle l'idée de Dieu se trouve contenue) par la même faculté par laquelle je me conçois moi-même' (Descartes, *Œuvres et Lettres*, edited by André Bridoux, Bibliothèque de la Pléiade (Paris, 1970), pp. 299–300); see further Laurence Devillairs, 'Les facultés de l'âme et l'homme comme *Imago Dei* chez Descartes', *Revue des sciences philosophiques et théologiques* 86 (2002) 51–68.

Gerhard von Rad explains that the Hebrew *selem* ('image') means an actual plastic work, a duplicate, whereas *d'mūt* ('likeness') means something abstract, 'appearance, similarity, analogy'.²⁷ The wording in the Septuagint is κατ'εἰκόνα ἡμετέραν καὶ καθ' ὁμοίωσιν, and in the Vulgate *ad imaginem et similitudinem nostram*. When Raphael narrates the story of creation to Adam in Book VII of *Paradise Lost* he recounts that God had said,

Let us make now Man in our image, Man
In our similitude, and let them rule
Over the Fish and Fowle of Sea and Aire,
Beast of the Field, and over all the Earth,
And every creeping thing that creeps the ground.
This said, he formd thee, *Adam*, thee O Man
Dust of the ground, and in thy nostrils breath'd
The breath of Life; in his own Image hee
Created thee, in the Image of God
Express, and thou becam'st a living Soul.²⁸

The repetition here is emphatic: 'in our image... In our similitude... in his own Image... in the Image of God'. The poetry is insisting that we reflect on what it means for man to be made in the image and similitude of God. We might pause over the word 'similitude'. Both the Authorised Version and the Geneva Bible use the word 'likeness', but Milton has evidently turned to a Latin text which uses *similitudinem* (both the Vulgate and Tremellius give *similitudinem*).²⁹ The turn to Latin through the use of 'similitude' connects the poem with the long theological argument about the difference between *Imago Dei* and *Similitudo Dei*.³⁰ Irenaeus had argued that *imago* referred to man's original condition, and *similitudo* to his goal: ultimately man will be restored to the divine likeness,³¹ that ὁμοίωσις θεῷ of which Plato spoke.³² Often the *imago* was construed as human free will or the power of reason, and while some Protestants maintained that the divine image in

²⁷ Gerhard von Rad, *Genesis: A Commentary*, translated by John H. Marks, second edition (London, 1963), p. 56.

²⁸ *PL* vii 519–28. The angels reiterate that man was 'Created in his Image' (*PL* vii 627).

²⁹ In *PL* Milton tends to associate 'similitude' with divinity (the Father calls the Son 'Divine Similitude', and Adam laments to Michael man's loss of the 'Divine similitude' (*PL* iii 384, xi 512)), whereas 'likeness' is used particularly in contexts where Milton is describing a diabolical parody of divinity: Death wears 'The likeness of a Kingly Crown'; Satan appears 'in likeness' of an angel, but touched by Uriel's spear returns to his 'own likeness'; and fallen men disfigure 'not Gods likeness, but thir own' (*PL* ii 673; x 327; iv 813; xi 521–2). But God does introduce Eve to Adam (perhaps ominously) as 'thy likeness' (*PL* viii 450).

³⁰ For the debate see Cross and Livingstone, *The Oxford Dictionary of the Christian Church*, s.v. 'Image of God'; David Cairns, *The Image of God in Man* (London, 1953; revised 1973); R. A. Markus, "Imago" and "similitudo" in Augustine, *Revue des Études Augustiniennes* 10 (1964) 125–43; Augustine, *De Diversis Quaestionibus Octoginta Tribus*, Corpus Christianorum Series Latina xlii (Turnhout, 1975), nos. 51 and 74.

³¹ 'It is true that man was created in the "image and likeness" of God: but whilst the divine "image" (εἰκών) is expressed in man's flesh, the divine "likeness" (ὁμοίωσις) is developed in his soul gradually and slowly, through the possession of the Spirit and fellowship with God' (Norman Powell Williams, *The Ideas of the Fall and of Original Sin: A Historical and Critical Study* (London, 1927), p. 194, summarizing Irenaeus, *Adversus Omnes Haereses* V vi 1: *Patrologia Graeca* vii 1137–8).

³² Plato, *Theaetetus* 176b.

man was utterly lost as a result of the Fall, others taught that remnants of it remained. Irenaeus thought that human reason and free will persist:

Sed frumentum quidem et paleæ, inanimalia et irrationabilia existentia, naturaliter talia facta sunt: homo vero rationalis, et secundum hoc similis Deo, liber in arbitrio factus et suæ potestatis, ipse sibi causa est, ut aliquando quidem frumentum, aliquando autem palæ fiat.³³

Milton would have agreed. He maintains that *Veruntamen restare adhuc aliquas imaginis divinæ in nobis reliquias, quæ hac spirituali morte non penitus extinguuntur, negari non potest: ... In intellectu ... In voluntate libertas non est penitus extincta*.³⁴ And so *Quaedam enim in homine reliquiae sunt imaginis divinæ ... quarum ex concursu hic illo ad regnum Dei fit aptior et quasi dispositior*.³⁵ He also thinks of regeneration as the recovery of the divine image in man, saying that *per verbum et spiritum homo interior vetere abolito rursus tota mente ad imaginem Dei veluti creatura nova ex Deo regeneratur*.³⁶ But as he is writing in *Paradise Lost* with poetic rather than theological precision, his choice of 'similitude' alludes to a theological problem rather than presenting us with its solution. The questions debated by the Church fathers as they pondered the meaning of *imago* and *similitudo* were questions which also echo through *Paradise Lost*: What does it mean for man to be made in the image of God? How was that image lost or disfigured? How could that image be regained?

The Authorised Version would have given Milton no exposition of the idea that man was created in God's image, but the Geneva Bible supplied a marginal note which offered a gloss that was perhaps particularly designed to assuage the anxieties of iconophobes:

This image and likenes of God in man is expounded Ephes 4, 24: where it is writē, y^t man was created after God in righteousness & true holines, meaning by these two wordes all perfection, as wisdom truth, innocencie, power, &c.³⁷

³³ Irenaeus, *Adversus Omnes Haereses* IV iv 3: *Patrologia Graeca* vii 983: 'The wheat and the chaff, being inanimate and irrational, have been made such by nature. But man, being endowed with reason, and in this respect like to God, having been made free in his will, and with power over himself, is himself the cause to himself, that sometimes he becomes wheat, and sometimes chaff' (translation from *The Ante-Nicene Fathers: Volume I: The Apostolic Fathers with Justin Martyr and Irenaeus*, edited by Rev. Alexander Roberts, Sir James Donaldson, and Arthur Cleveland Coxe (New York, 2007; first published 1885), p. 466).

³⁴ 'Nevertheless, it cannot be denied that there still remain in us some remnants of the divine image, which are not utterly annihilated by this spiritual death', i.e. by sin. '[They remain] in our understanding ... In the will freedom has not been utterly annihilated' (*De Doctrina: OCW* viii 434–5). Cf. *Tetrachordon: Works* iv 80.

³⁵ 'For in man there are certain remnants of the divine image ... out of whose combination this person becomes more fit and, as it were, more ordered for the kingdom of God than that one' (*De Doctrina: OCW* viii 92–3).

³⁶ 'through word and spirit the inner man is again in his whole mind regenerated out of God after God's image as if he were a new creature' (*De Doctrina: OCW* viii 558–9, emphasis original; cf. 562–3).

³⁷ Geneva Bible, gloss on Genesis i 26. In Ephesians iv 24, to which the gloss refers readers, St Paul says that believers should 'put on the new man, which after God is created in righteousness, and true holines'; the marginal gloss here reads: 'Which is created according to y^e image of God'. For St Paul the 'new man' is the one brought about through faith in Christ, and so it is possible to recover the prelapsarian divine image in man.

And Milton writes in accordance with this interpretation when he says in *De Doctrina Christiana*, *Homo ad imaginem Dei cū esset formatus, necesse est naturali quoque sapientia, sanctitate, atque iustitia fuisse praeditum*,³⁸ and in *Tetrachordon* he writes that 'this Image of God wherein man was created, is meant Wisdom, Purity, Justice, and rule over all creatures'.³⁹ Besides, *Quoniam autem homo ad imaginem Dei factus, totam naturae legem ita secum natam, et in sese insitam habuit, ut nullo ad eam praecepto indigeret*.⁴⁰ But for Milton, being made in the image of God is not a matter only of spiritual qualities, because man is created both outwardly and inwardly in the divine image, as Raphael explains: 'God on thee | Abundantly his gifts hath also pour'd | Inward and outward both, his image faire'.⁴¹ Suspended grammatically between the two parts of Raphael's sentence, 'Inward and outward' appears to refer both to the gifts and to the divine image, so Milton seems to consider that the image of God in man is apparent both in his inner qualities and in his outward form. The meaning of the divine image in man is also glossed by God himself when Adam asks for a mate so that he can propagate his own image, and God finds that this very request is itself a manifestation of Adam being made in his image,

Expressing well the spirit within thee free,
My Image, not imparted to the Brute.⁴²

And so one aspect of the image of God in man is the free spirit which understands itself and is sufficiently courageous to speak out for what it needs. Thus is man distinguished from beast.

This idea that being made in the image of God confers true freedom underpins Milton's definition of liberty in *The Tenure of Kings and Magistrates*, where he proclaims that 'all men naturally were borne free, being the image and resemblance of God himself'.⁴³ It is precisely because we are the image of God that we are born free, and it therefore follows that man, being free, cannot make himself subservient to any tyrant. Citing Jesus' comment when shown the image of Caesar on the tribute money,⁴⁴ Milton writes in his *Pro Populo Anglicano Defensio*:

non ergo Cæsari omnia. Libertas nostra non Cæsaris, verū ab ipso Deo natale nobis donum est... Si enim os hominis et vultum aspiciens, interrogaret quisquam, cujus

³⁸ 'When man had been shaped after God's image, he must also have been endowed with natural wisdom, holiness, and righteousness' (*De Doctrina*: OCW viii 308–9).

³⁹ *Tetrachordon*: Works iv 74.

⁴⁰ 'But since man, made after God's image, had the whole law of nature born with him and implanted in him in such a way that he needed no directive towards it' (*De Doctrina*: OCW viii 360–1).

⁴¹ PL viii 219–21. In *De Doctrina* Milton says that God made man in his own image, 'and not just a spiritual one, either, but an outward physical one too' (*non animo solum sed forma etiam externa*: OCW viii 30–1).

⁴² PL viii 440–1. Augustine said that man was made in the image of God in that part of his nature wherein he surpasses the animals, i.e. his reason (*De Genesi ad Litteram Libri Duodecim* III xx 30: *Patrologia Latina* xxxiv 292).

⁴³ *Tenure*: Works v 8.

⁴⁴ Matthew xxii 17–21.

ista imago esset, annon facilè quivis responderet Dei esse? Cùm igitur Dei simus, id est verè liberi, ob eamque causam soli Deo reddendi, profectò Cæsari nos, id est, homini, et præsertim injusto, improbo, tyranno in servitutem tradere, sine piaculo et quidem maximo sacrilegio non possumus.⁴⁵

The association of the image of God with freedom is extended when we first see Adam and Eve, who have something of the radiance of the divine image in them, for they

In naked Majestie seemd Lords of all,
And worthie seemd, for in thir looks Divine
The image of thir glorious Maker shon,
Truth, wisdom, Sanctitude severe and pure,
Severe but in true filial freedom plac't.⁴⁶

Like the Geneva glossators, Milton interprets the image of God in man as truth, wisdom, and holiness.⁴⁷ But it is also important to Milton's theology of the body that the naked beauty of Adam and Eve is one aspect of the image of their Maker, which shines in their 'looks', and the divine image shines in a series of moral and spiritual qualities which are visible in those looks. The last two lines act grammatically in apposition to 'image' to elaborate and define the idea: their looks shine with truth, wisdom, and sanctitude, a sanctitude that is located in 'filial freedom'. Those last two words belong essentially together: they are free, but their freedom is a form of filial obedience—a condition which St Paul calls 'the glorious libertie of the children of God'.⁴⁸

Both Adam and Eve are made in the image of God, but Eve is a secondary image. Adam calls her 'Best Image of my self':⁴⁹ she is less directly or fully God's image than Adam is, inferior in inner faculties and less godlike externally, as Adam himself explains to Raphael:

For well I understand in the prime end
Of Nature her th' inferiour, in the mind
And inward Faculties, which most excell,
In outward also her resembling less
His Image who made both.⁵⁰

⁴⁵ 'not all things are unto Caesar. Our liberty is not Caesar's, but God's own birthday gift to us... If one should look upon the countenance of a man, and inquire whose image was that, would not any one answer at once that it was God's? Being then God's own, that is, free in very truth, and consequently to be rendered to none but God, surely we cannot without the greatest sin and sacrilege deliver ourselves over in slavery to Caesar, to a man, that is, and, what is more, to an unjust man, a wicked man, a tyrant' (*Defensio: Works* vii 150–3).

⁴⁶ *PL* iv 290–4.

⁴⁷ Cp. *Tetrachordon*: 'this Image of God wherein man was created, is meant Wisdom, Purity, Justice, and rule over all creatures' (*Works* iv 74). Patrick Hume (*ad loc.*) glosses 'Sanctitude severe' thus: 'Sanctitude severe, Severa Sanctitudo, that strict Conformity to their Makers Commands, exact and conformable to the Rectitude by him implanted in their Nature, and left subordinate to the Government and Guidance of their innate Free-Will. *Sanctitudo*, Lat. Uprightness; *Severus*, Lat. strict, exact.'

⁴⁸ Romans viii 21.

⁴⁹ *PL* v 95.

⁵⁰ *PL* viii 540–4.

This understanding of a differential between man and woman in so far as they are images of God echoes *Tetrachordon* (1645), where Milton writes:

It might be doubted why he saith, *In the Image of God created he him*, not them,⁵¹ as well as *male and female* them; especially since that Image might be common to them both . . . had the Image of God bin equally common to them both, it had no doubt bin said, In the image of God created he them. But St. *Paul* ends the controversie by explaining that the woman is not primarily and immediatly the image of God, but in reference to the man. *The head of the woman*, saith he, 1 *Cor.* 11. *is the man: he the image and glory of God, she the glory of the man*: he not for her, but she for him.⁵²

As a reader of Plato,⁵³ Milton would have been cognisant of the idea that the image takes us away from the truth,⁵⁴ so if Eve is the image of Adam, and he of God, she is further removed from her Creator than he. Eve, a lesser image, is herself susceptible to the allure of false or inadequate images.⁵⁵ Initially, she is enthralled by seeing her reflection in the pool, but then the voice which she hears tells her,

follow me,
And I will bring thee where no shadow staies
Thy coming, and thy soft imbraces, hee
Whose image thou art, him thou shalt enjoy
Inseparablie thine, to him shalt beare
Multitudes like thy self.⁵⁶

She is going to be introduced to the one whose image she is—Adam, not God; one who is no ‘shadow’ (‘an unreal appearance; a delusive semblance or image; a vain and unsubstantial object of pursuit’⁵⁷), and who will not be delusive as her reflection in the water (‘that smooth watry image’⁵⁸) had been. She is Adam’s image, and it is to him that she will bear further images of herself. Even Satan, as he looks at the pair, sees that ‘so lively shines | In them Divine resemblance,’⁵⁹ but he also seems to understand that they are unequal as forms of the divine image, for this is part of his strategy to seduce Eve. When he greets Eve as ‘Fairest resemblance of thy Maker faire’,⁶⁰ Satan is implicitly offering her a new—and unwarranted—status as the ‘Fairest’ image of God, playing upon Eve’s self-absorption with her own image and preparing to develop her resentful sense of subordination to Adam. Soon she will embrace the new image of herself which Satan has fashioned for her, as she forsakes the image for the idol, and the worship of God for the cult of the Tree.

⁵¹ Though in *PL* vii 519–20 God does say, ‘Let us make now Man in our image, Man | In our similitude, and let *them* rule’ (emphasis added), which follows the AV of Genesis i 26: ‘Let us make man in our Image, after our likeness: and let them have dominion’.

⁵² *Tetrachordon: Works* iv 76; and cf. 79. Milton is not above some tendentious textual interpretation here. When the AV refers to God creating ‘man’, the Hebrew word *’ādām* is a singular collective noun, ‘mankind’, and the singular pronoun to which Milton draws attention refers back to the human not the male: though ‘man’ is ambiguous in the AV, there is no room for doubt in the Greek, which uses *ἀνθρώπος* not *ἄνθρωπος*, or in the Latin, which uses *homo* not *vir*.

⁵³ See Irene Samuel, *Plato and Milton* (Ithaca, N.Y., 1947).

⁵⁴ Plato, *Republic* 596ff.

⁵⁵ For a reading of Eve’s narcissism via echoes of Tasso see A. Bartlett Giamatti, *The Earthly Paradise and the Renaissance Epic* (Princeton, N.J., 1966), pp. 314–16. He also has a suggestive note (p. 347 n. 36) on Milton’s use of the idea of illusion across his work.

⁵⁶ *PL* iv 469–74.

⁵⁷ *OED* s.v. shadow n. 6.a.

⁵⁸ *PL* iv 480.

⁵⁹ *PL* iv 363–4.

⁶⁰ *PL* ix 538.

It is through the Fall that God's image in mankind is defaced. When Adam cries out after seeing the suffering and deformed bodies of men in the lazar house, Michael replies that much of human suffering is a result of the Fall. Adam asks:

Can thus
Th' Image of God in man created once
So goodly and erect, though faultie since,
To such unsightly sufferings be debas't
Under inhuman pains? Why should not Man,
Retaining still Divine similitude
In part, from such deformities be free,
And for his Makers Image sake exempt?
Thir Makers Image, answerd *Michael*, then
Forsook them, when themselves they villifi'd
To serve ungovern'd appetite, and took
His Image whom they serv'd, a brutish vice,
Inductive mainly to the sin of *Eve*.
Therefore so abject is thir punishment,
Disfiguring not Gods likeness, but thir own,
Or if his likeness, by themselves defac't
While they pervert pure Natures healthful rules
To loathsom sickness, worthily, since they
Gods Image did not reverence in themselves.⁶¹

It is because man has failed to reverence the image of God in him, and in the Fall has turned rather to copy Satan, that man's physical body is so afflicted. The image of God 'Forsook them', which is a strong verb to find yoked with such an abstract noun: 'refuse to have anything to do with, shun; break off from, renounce; to abandon, leave entirely, withdraw from; especially to withdraw one's presence and help or companionship from; to desert.'⁶² So the image of God in man deserts him at the point when man vilifies—that is, degrades and defiles⁶³—himself through a surrender to 'ungovern'd appetite'. Man's punishment is 'abject', both 'wretched, self-abasing, servile', and 'complete, utter',⁶⁴ with a strong resonance from its etymological origin in the Latin verb *abicerē*, to throw away or throw down, and figuratively to reduce to despair, to degrade, to give up hope.⁶⁵ Such self-degradation of the divine image in man is its own punishment.

The rebel angels also ruin God's image in them. For a while, Satan's appearance as a being made in the image of God remains undiminished during the war in Heaven, and Abdiel wonders that 'such resemblance of the Highest | Should yet remain, where faith and realtie | Remain not'.⁶⁶ But in due course Satan's own image is deformed by his fall, as Zephon reminds him:

Think not, revolted Spirit, thy shape the same,
Or undiminisht brightness, to be known
As when thou stoodst in Heav'n upright and pure;
That Glorie then, when thou no more wast good,

⁶¹ *PL* xi 507–25.

⁶² *OED* s.v. forsake v. 2b, 3b, 4.

⁶³ *OED* s.v. vilify v. 1b.

⁶⁴ *OED*³ s.v. abject adj. 2.

⁶⁵ *OLD* s.v. abicio.

⁶⁶ *PL* vi 114–16.

Departed from thee, and thou resembl'st now
Thy sin and place of doom obscure and foule.⁶⁷

To retain the image of God entails uprightness and purity; now Satan is turned from being the image of God to being the image of Hell. Image declines into imitation. Satan and Sin become a grim caricature of the Father and the Son when Satan sees in his partner Sin his own 'perfect image'.⁶⁸ His palace is built 'In imitation of that Mount whereon | *Messiah* was declar'd'.⁶⁹ Raised on his throne in Hell, Satan 'His proud imaginations thus displaid'.⁷⁰ So it is not surprising that in *Paradise Lost* Milton's uses of 'imitation' and its cognates are largely negative. Imitation has become sinful because it is predicated upon an assertion of the self rather than an acknowledgement of the divine image. Pride is a perverse imitation of God, as St Augustine said.⁷¹

As he our darkness, cannot we his Light
Imitate when we please?⁷²

asks Mammon, but of course the answer is 'no': he misunderstands the true spiritual nature of darkness and light, referring the fallen angels merely to the light of the lustrous gems around them. Mammon's notion of imitation is as misconceived as that displayed by Salmoneus, who tried to imitate Jove's thunder by driving his chariot over a brazen bridge, and waved burning torches to imitate lightning.⁷³ Satan appears in 'God-like imitated State',⁷⁴ but this imitation only serves to mark out not his likeness but his unlikeness, his irrecoverable distance from the divine origin. And during the war in Heaven,

exalted as a God
Th' Apostat in his Sun-bright Chariot sate
Idol of Majestie Divine.⁷⁵

Idol, now, not image.

The fallen angels themselves become known to mankind in the form of images—false images, idols which man worships instead of the living God, as this chapter's epigraph from Book I sets out. The 'grim Idol' of Moloch is worshipped through human sacrifice, and even Solomon is seduced into building his temple next to the temple of God.⁷⁶ The catalogue continues for another hundred lines, a list of the grotesque forms and multiple names under which man has venerated devils under the impression that they were gods: Chemos or Peor, Baalim, Ashtaroth, Astoreth or Astarte, Thammuz, Dagon, Rimmon, Osiris, Isis, Orus, and Belial. It is in part the relentless sequence of names which impresses, the multiplicity of false forms and delusive images instead of the purity of the one God. Truth is single, error is multiple.⁷⁷ After the Flood, God turned his eyes away from the sinfulness of

⁶⁷ PL iv 835–40.

⁶⁸ PL ii 764.

⁶⁹ PL v 764–5.

⁷⁰ PL ii 10. *imaginations*: delusions (OED³ s.v. *imagination* n. 4).

⁷¹ *De Genesi ad Litteram* VIII xiv 31; *Confessiones* II vi 13; *De Civitate Dei* xix 12.

⁷² PL ii 269–70.

⁷³ Virgil, *Aeneid* vi 585–94.

⁷⁴ PL ii 511.

⁷⁵ PL vi 99–101.

⁷⁶ PL i 392–405.

⁷⁷ As Spenser shows in Book I of *The Faerie Queene*, where Una, representing the true church, is confronted by multiple adversaries.

mankind and determined 'one peculiar Nation to select | From all the rest', and to lead this nation he chose Abraham, a man 'Bred up in Idol-worship' whom God called away from 'His kindred and false Gods'.⁷⁸ Michael tells Adam the story of how the children of Israel, though blessed with material prosperity, went after strange gods. A common thread which links these stories of idolatry is the defection of Israel from the true faith, which is manifest in an addiction to violence (in the case of Moloc) and lust (in the service of Peor). Even King Solomon, 'Beguil'd by fair Idolatresses, fell | To Idols foul.'⁷⁹ Solomon installed the Ark of God in a permanent temple, but his successors lapsed into 'foul Idolatries'.⁸⁰ Throughout this narrative of defection, of a preference for 'bestial Gods',⁸¹ the turn away from being the divine image to serving an idol is presented as a turn from freedom to servitude.

This is the story of the children of Israel ruled first by pious, if flawed, kings (David and Solomon), and then subjected to the Babylonian captivity, an exile which is the result of the Israelites having provoked God by their idolatry. It is also, by implication, the story of England in the mid-seventeenth century: a nation chosen by God, establishing true religion, and yet prone to idolatry (Laudian worship, the cult of the Stuart kings) and betrayed by its own political and religious leaders. In 1649 the icon of Charles I as set forth in *Eikon Basilike* was seen by Milton as a device 'to catch the worthles approbation of an inconstant, irrational, and Image-doting rabble',⁸² and to break it he wrote *Eikonoklastes*. In 1667 the politically inflected biblical narrative in *Paradise Lost* of a nation's propensity to idolatry and backsliding also acts as a refutation of the widespread association of Charles II with King David which had been a feature of poems and sermons on his Restoration.⁸³

In *Paradise Regain'd* and *Samson Agonistes*, which in some respects address the challenge of living a godly life amidst the idolatrous world of Restoration England, there is particular interest in a nation's misdevotion to idols.⁸⁴ The Son tells Satan that God has 'justly giv'n the Nations up' to their delusions because 'they fell | Idolatrous'.⁸⁵ The captive tribes of Israel deserve no sympathy because they repeated the Fall in their own fall into idolatry, for they

wrought their own captivity, fell off
From God to worship Calves, the Deities
Of Egypt, Baal next and Ashtaroth,
And all the Idolatries of Heathen round.⁸⁶

⁷⁸ *PL* xii 111–22.

⁷⁹ *PL* i 445–6.

⁸⁰ *PL* xii 337.

⁸¹ *PL* i 435.

⁸² *Eikonoklastes: Works* v 309.

⁸³ See *The Poems of John Dryden*, edited by Paul Hammond and David Hopkins, 5 vols (London, 1995–2005), i 446–8.

⁸⁴ For examples of Milton's contemporaries warning against idolatry in the Restoration period see Blair Worden, *Literature and Politics in Cromwellian England: John Milton, Andrew Marvell, Marchamont Nedham* (Oxford, 2007), p. 367.

⁸⁵ *PR* i 442–4.

⁸⁶ *PR* iii 415–18. Christoph Senft says that idolatry 'is not... a kind of first stage or infancy of religion, from which, by development or evolution, emerge the so-called "higher" forms, spiritual and monotheistic: on the contrary, it is the lowest point of a fall, a perversion of original genuine knowledge of God' (in von Allmen, *Vocabulary of the Bible*, p. 177).

Even if they were freed, they would only continue to follow their false gods, he says. Satan, when urging the Son to embrace pagan learning, suggests that without it he will be unable to argue against Greek and Roman beliefs and counter their 'Idolisms, Traditions, Paradoxes'.⁸⁷ 'Idolisms' is an unusual word, and this seems to be the first recorded use of it in the sense 'a false mental image or notion, a fallacy'.⁸⁸ Though *Paradise Regain'd* reiterates the history of Israel's idolatry,⁸⁹ it is the false mental image which is perhaps even more insidious as a form of apostasy than the physical idol. In the same poem it is after the Son's temptations in the wilderness that he is hailed by the narrator as 'True Image of the Father':⁹⁰ it is by resisting temptation, therefore, by manifesting true inward freedom, that the image of God in man is restored. *Samson Agonistes* places the protagonist in a world dominated by the cult of Dagon, the Philistines' 'Sea-Idol',⁹¹ whose temple the lone Samson, finally inspired by inner promptings from God, manages to destroy. It had long been considered by Protestants to be the duty of both rulers and individuals to reform idolatry,⁹² but in the world of Restoration England such a task might rather be the vocation of godly individuals. Milton's last heroic figure, though blind, succeeds in a final act of iconoclasm.

⁸⁷ *PR* iv 234. 'Traditions' suggests that Catholic doctrine is a form of paganism; 'Paradoxes' implies a similar charge against mediaeval scholasticism. Athens is noted for its idolatry in Acts xvii 16.

⁸⁸ *OED* s.v. idolism *n.* 3. The only earlier examples cited are from Sylvester's translation of Du Bartas, meaning 'the practice of idolatry'.

⁸⁹ *PR* ii 329, iii 418, 426, 432. ⁹⁰ *PR* iv 596.

⁹¹ *SA* l. 13. The word 'idol' and its cognates occur twelve times in the poem.

⁹² Spraggon, *Puritan Iconoclasm during the English Civil War*, p. 14.

20

If *and* Perhaps

And from these corporal nutriments perhaps
 Your bodies may at last turn all to Spirit,
 Improv'd by tract of time, and wingd ascend
 Ethereal, as wee, or may at choice
 Here or in Heav'nly Paradises dwell;
 If ye be found obedient, and retain
 Unalterably firm his love entire
 Whose progenie you are.

Paradise Lost v 496–503



The words ‘if’ and ‘perhaps’ open out alternative narrative scenarios.¹ In this epigraph Raphael holds out to Adam the prospect that human bodies may ‘perhaps’ eventually ‘turn all to Spirit’, so that man will become ethereal like the angels and dwell forever in either an earthly or a heavenly paradise.² But this will not happen, we know; there is to be no ascent, but rather its antithesis, a catastrophic Fall, one manifestation of which is the opposite of this bodily purification which Raphael envisages—a degradation of the human body into an instrument of lust which is subject to death. Since we as readers know that the narrative will be one of fall and not ascent, Raphael’s ‘perhaps’ reveals to us the unutterable loss of a potential path for humanity. This scenario is predicated upon a condition—‘If ye be found obedient’—which Adam at this point finds so strange that he repeats Raphael’s words back to him in incredulity, and as a quotation they are italicized:

But say,
 What meant that caution joind, *if ye be found*
Obedient? can we want obedience then
 To him, or possibly his love desert
 Who formd us from the dust, and plac'd us here

¹ Annabel Patterson discusses Milton’s use of ‘perhaps’ in *PL* and his prose works in *Milton’s Words* (Oxford, 2009), pp. 196–203.

² The Cambridge Platonist John Smith envisaged just such an ascent of an unfallen Adam towards God when he said: ‘it seems very reasonable to believe that if *Adam* had continued in a state of *Innocency*, he should have been raised by God to a greater fruition of him, and his nature should have been elevated to a more transcendent condition’ (‘Deductions and Inferences from the Consideration of the Divine Nature and Attributes’, in *Select Discourses* (London, 1660), p. 150).

Full to the utmost measure of what bliss
 Human desires can seek or apprehend?
 To whom the Angel. Son of Heav'n and Earth,
 Attend: That thou art happie, owe to God;
 That thou continu'st such, owe to thy self,
 That is, to thy obedience; therein stand.³

Raphael's reply makes it clear to Adam that the future lies in his own hands: it is for Adam himself to decide whether he will continue happy, which is to continue obedient. This 'if' is the most crucial of all, as Milton reiterates in *De Doctrina Christiana*:

tale procul dubio decretum ipsum erat, ut omnia quae exinde consecuta sunt mala, potuissent sequi, vel non sequi: si steteris, manebis; non steteris, eiicere: si non comederis, vives; comederis, moriere.⁴

As Touchstone knew, there is 'much vertue in if'.⁵

Throughout *Paradise Lost* 'if' and 'perhaps' accentuate man's loss by showing the reader an alternative path, a course which Adam and Eve might have taken; but these scenarios serve also to confirm man's freedom, for although all is foreknown, nothing is predetermined: the hypothetical narratives which are introduced into the poem by 'if' and 'perhaps' are genuine possibilities, but possibilities which never come to fruition because of man's sin. There are, however, several different functions which 'if' and 'perhaps' perform in the poem. The narrator's 'if' shows a reverent agnosticism as to the right mode of naming, the right disposition of the poet towards divine power and divine inspiration: Milton submits his words to correction. Satan's 'if' sometimes recognizes the path not taken, acknowledging possibilities which his revolt has closed off; but more often the Satanic 'if' is a temptation, a temptation either to his followers or to Eve to imagine possibilities which a moment's careful reflection would show to be illusory. The 'if' of Adam and Eve is initially reverent, an acknowledgement—when Adam is speaking to Raphael, for example—of the limits of knowledge and of understanding; but during Eve's self-temptation before taking the fruit, and afterwards during the exchanges between Adam and Eve, 'if' and 'perhaps' become instruments of self-deception. In these different ways, in the mouths of different speakers, 'if' and 'perhaps' are markers of freedom, showing that all still depends upon a choice which has yet to be made, or showing that there is in fact no alternative because the choice of disobedience has already closed off the future, and the narratives imagined by 'perhaps' are therefore illusory. 'If' and 'perhaps' are also pointers to the limits of knowledge and of power: characters hesitate and humbly acknowledge their ignorance,

³ *PL* v 512–22.

⁴ 'so without a doubt the decree itself was that all the evil consequents could have followed or not followed: if you stand firm, you will remain; if you do not stand firm, you will be expelled; if you do not eat, you will live; if you do eat, you will die' (*De Doctrina*: *OCW* viii 62–3).

⁵ *As You Like It* V iv 102.

or they self-assertively manufacture possibilities which would truly be possible only in a world where there was no divine power at work.



The first ‘if’ in the poem is a narratorial ‘if’, a humble submission to the Spirit:

Or if *Sion* Hill
Delight thee more, and *Siloa’s* Brook that flow’d
Fast by the Oracle of God; I thence
Invoke thy aid to my adventurous Song.⁶

The poet’s utterance is subordinated to the Spirit. This gesture of reverent agnosticism—a model for the reader’s own approach to the knowledge of divine things and the understanding of the human condition—is repeated at the beginning of Book VII, when Milton says:

DESCEND from Heav’n *Urania*, by that name
If rightly thou art call’d.⁷

and again in Book IX:

If answerable style I can obtaine
Of my Celestial Patroness.⁸

A few lines later Milton acknowledges that his aim might be defeated by private or public adversity ‘if all be mine, | Not Hers who brings it nightly to my Ear’.⁹ Such submission of his poetic art to heavenly inspiration is an acknowledgement that the poet’s language, being a fallen language, cannot truly know even the right name under which to invoke the divine power which alone can enable him to speak truly; and this leads to a further acknowledgement that man’s language cannot be sure that it is rightly describing either Heaven or Hell: ‘if Art could tell’ and ‘if great things to small may be compar’d’ are necessary gestures of humility.¹⁰ So terms which might seem to give human definition or to attribute physical substance to some aspect of Heaven or Hell may be accompanied by a gesture of hesitation:

till on dry Land
He lights, if it were Land that ever burn’d
With solid, as the Lake with liquid fire.¹¹

The other shape,
If shape it might be call’d that shape had none

⁶ *PL* i 10–13. ⁷ *PL* vii 1–2.

⁸ *PL* ix 20–1. *answerable*: suitable, fitting, proper (*OED* s.v. *answerable* adj. 2).

⁹ *PL* ix 46–7.

¹⁰ *PL* iv 236, x 306. There is also a moment in Raphael’s narrative when the speaker displays a similar hesitation as to how to narrate heavenly things in earthly terms: ‘what if Earth | Be but the shaddow of Heav’n, and things therein | Each to other like, more then on earth is thought?’ (*PL* v 574–6).

¹¹ *PL* i 227–9.

Distinguishable in member, joynt, or limb.¹²

If mettall, part seemd Gold, part Silver cleer;
If stone, Carbuncle most or Chrysolite,
Rubie or Topaz.¹³

These 'if's are gestures of demurral which stretch the reader's visual and spiritual imagination by simultaneously offering and then suspending the terms through which the landscape and inhabitants of this divine epic can be understood.

The narrator's confession of uncertainty extends also to his lack of knowledge of the divine scheme of things. Chaos is 'The Womb of nature and perhaps her Grave';¹⁴ the angelic trumpet which sounded during the war in Heaven was

heard in *Oreb* since perhaps
When God descended, and perhaps once more
To sound at general Doom.¹⁵

Perhaps; but perhaps the poet may be mistaken. When Adam sees the future of the human race,

in Spirit perhaps he also saw
Rich *Mexico* the seat of *Motezume*,
And *Cusco* in *Peru*, the richer seat
Of *Atabalipa*.¹⁶

But perhaps Adam's vision did not extend so far; the narrator's own insight is not sufficient to tell. In Eden

fruit burnisht with Golden Rinde
Hung amiable, *Hesperian* Fables true,
If true, here only, and of delicious taste.¹⁷

Are the classical fables about the golden apples of the Hesperides true?¹⁸ If they are true, they are true not as recounted by Ovid,¹⁹ but only here, here in this text and here in this garden. But the pagan fable of Atalanta, who stoops in her race against her suitors to pick up the golden apples, carries an implicit warning as expounded by Alexander Ross: 'let us take heed that the golden apples of worldly pleasure and profit, which *Hippomenes* the Devill flings in our way, may not hinder our course'.²⁰ In this sense the fable is true, for Eve, and for the reader, so here Milton's 'If' invites us to reflect on the kind of truth which the pagan story offers if read allegorically, a fable which warns of what is to come.

At certain moments the narrator's own 'if' or 'perhaps' focuses our attention on the crucial decision which Adam and Eve make to seek forbidden knowledge.

¹² *PL* ii 666–8.

¹³ *PL* iii 595–7.

¹⁴ *PL* ii 910–11.

¹⁵ *PL* xi 74–6.

¹⁶ *PL* xi 406–9.

¹⁷ *PL* iv 249–51.

¹⁸ For the classical legend and its later uses see H. David Brumble, *Classical Myths and Legends in the Middle Ages and Renaissance: A Dictionary of Allegorical Meanings* (London, 1998), pp. 39–41, 169–70.

¹⁹ Ovid, *Metamorphoses* iv 631–48, x 560–680.

²⁰ Alexander Ross, *Mystagogus Poeticus, or The Muses Interpreter* (London, 1647), p. 32.

At the opening of Book IV the poet wishes that some loud apocalyptic voice could warn our first parents of the approach of Satan:

O FOR that warning voice, which he who saw
Th' *Apocalyps*, heard cry in Heaven aloud,
...
Wo to the inhabitants on Earth! that now,
While time was, our first-Parents had bin warn'd
The coming of thir secret foe, and scap'd
Haply so scap'd his mortal snare.²¹

The addition of 'Haply' (meaning 'perhaps') adds uncertainty to what had momentarily seemed an emphatic 'scap'd': perhaps Adam and Eve might have escaped Satan's snare if they had been warned loudly enough. But perhaps not: they had been warned by the voice of God himself not to eat the fruit of the forbidden tree, and they are about to disobey him. Would a different or a louder voice have persuaded them otherwise? The opening words 'O For' imply that it is the poet himself who wishes that he could speak in such an apocalyptic voice,²² but we know that no voice could have more authority than the voice of God himself. The most poignant narratorial 'if' is perhaps this example:

Sleep on
Blest pair; and O yet happiest if ye seek
No happier state, and know to know no more.²³

The 'if' here echoes the *Georgics*, where Virgil says that the farmers are happy, if only they knew their good fortune: *O fortunatos nimium, sua si bona norint, | agricolas!*²⁴ Patrick Hume, who recognized the allusion to Virgil, paraphrased the narrator's comment in this way: 'Oh happy Couple, at the height of Happiness as yet, if you attempt and seek after no higher Happiness, and understand but to desire no more, and know your condition so well as to desire nothing above it'.²⁵ In Milton's lines 'if' seems to have two functions. First, it defines their happiness, saying that it consists precisely in not seeking additional happiness: they are most happy precisely in so far as they seek no happier state. Second, it prepares the scenario

²¹ *PL* iv 1–8.

²² For 'O for' expressing desire see *OED s.v.* for 10 a. ²³ *PL* iv 773–5.

²⁴ Virgil, *Georgics* ii 458–9: 'O farmers, happy beyond measure, could they but know their blessings!' Cf. Dryden's translation: 'Oh happy, if he knew his happy State!' (*The Works of Virgil: Containing his Pastorals, Georgics, and Aeneis*. Translated into English verse by Mr. Dryden (London, 1697), p. 90). Dryden's use of the word 'State' suggests that he may have recalled Milton's wording here. Cf. another echo of this Virgilian idea in the angels' hymn: 'Thrice happie men, | ... thrice happie if they know | Thir happiness, and persevere upright' (*PL* vii 625–32). The comparative 'happier' also recurs in God's speech in Book XI:

let him boast
His knowledge of Good lost, and Evil got,
Happier, had suffic'd him to have known
Good by it self, and Evil not at all.

(*PL* xi 86–9)

²⁵ Hume, *ad loc.*

whereby that happiness and contentment which they now have will be lost through such an attempt to grasp more. The 'if' asserts the possibility of man truly knowing his happiness, and yet we know that this 'if' opens a path which man will refuse.



The loss of Eden is brought about partly through rhetorical deception and self-deception, in which the grasping at 'if...' clauses plays an important part. Such fallacious reliance upon 'if' and 'perhaps' comes into the poem through Satan, and repeatedly invites us to reflect upon the true nature of divine power and providence each time that an 'if...' clause proffers a scenario which depends upon some erroneous understanding of how things are. Initially Satan is uncertain as to whether the figure which he sees beside him on the burning lake is indeed Beelzebub, wondering, 'If thou beest he... If he...':²⁶ as he contemplates his utterly changed companion, Satan's 'if...' clauses do not really express doubt about the identity of his comrade so much as begin to measure the gap between past and present, between aspiration and reality:

If thou beest he; But O how fall'n! how chang'd
From him, who in the happy Realms of Light
Cloth'd with transcendent brightness didst out-shine
Myriads though bright: If he whom mutual league,
United thoughts and counsels, equal hope
And hazard in the Glorious Enterprize,
Joynd with me once, now misery hath joynd
In equal ruin.²⁷

Here the repeated 'if's express the realization that the fallen Beelzebub no longer shows those glorious traits which once allowed him to be recognized as himself. Satan's 'if' marks the dawning of his understanding of divine power and of his own powerlessness, but many more 'if' and 'perhaps' clauses will characterize Satan's discourse, importing a stubborn but fallacious hope, before he is made to recognize the limits of his autonomy when forcibly metamorphosed into a serpent in Book X.

One category of the Satanic 'if' is an hypothesis about the nature and the extent of the power which the fallen angels have or might have. Addressing Beelzebub, Satan says:

since by Fate the strength of Gods
And this Empyrean substance cannot fail,
Since through experience of this great event
In Arms not worse, in foresight much advanc't,
We may with more successful hope resolve
To wage by force or guile eternal Warr
Irreconcilable, to our grand Foe,
Who now triumphs, and in th' excess of joy
Sole reigning holds the Tyranny of Heav'n.²⁸

²⁶ *PL* i 84, 87.

²⁷ *PL* i 84–91.

²⁸ *PL* i 116–24.

The reader easily sees some aspects of the fallacious argument here by registering the tendentious words 'Fate', 'Gods', and 'Tyranny', as well as 'strength' (the fallen angels have no strength other than that which God permits) and 'hope' (which in this context is a diabolical parody of the theological virtue). But also important in this passage is the little word 'may' in the fifth line: 'We may' has two possible meanings, 'we might perhaps' and 'we are allowed to', and Satan confuses the two meanings, or recognizes only the first of them. 'May' as an assumption about what is possible opens out a hypothetical narrative of a successful second military campaign, while 'may' as a sign of permission (which Satan chooses not to acknowledge) reassures the reader that providence overarches any Satanic plans. The double significance of 'may' in effect shows that Satan's activities are entirely dependent upon divine permission.²⁹ Satan's speech also betrays a mistake about the nature of time, as he assumes that the 'now' of God's triumph is a temporal state which may change, whereas for the Christian reader it is an eternal condition.³⁰

Satan's speech continues with an explicit 'if':

If then his Providence
Out of our evil seek to bring forth good,
Our labour must be to pervert that end,
And out of good still to find means of evil;
Which oft times may succeed, so as perhaps
Shall grieve him, if I fail not, and disturb
His inmost counsels from thir destined aim.³¹

'If...may...perhaps...if...': Satan's hypothetical narratives are predicated upon a number of misapprehensions, for by attaching his 'if' to the idea that God's providence may seek to bring good out of evil he fails to understand that it is virtually a definition of providence that it works to such an end. The sequence of guesses signalled by 'if' and 'perhaps' reveals a speaker who thinks that his power and God's power are, in effect, the same kind of thing, different no doubt in aim and possibly in strength, but essentially the same. But this is a category error,³² for divine power is wholly other than Satanic power, and hence the hypotheses which Satan builds upon it are ultimately without value. His error is repeated when he tells Beelzebub that God's thunder

Perhaps hath spent his shafts, and ceases now
To bellow through the vast and boundless Deep.
Let us not slip th' occasion.³³

Satan assumes that divine thunder is a physical phenomenon which can exhaust itself by natural physical means, and therefore is 'Perhaps' now spent. Moreover, Satan's 'Perhaps' is an error not only about physical forces but also about time, for in imagining that the thunder 'Perhaps...ceases now' (as in saying earlier

²⁹ Cf. *PL* i 210–13.

³⁰ See Chapter 15 *GOD*, p. 210 n. 41.

³¹ *PL* i 162–8.

³² This error is an example of Satan's would-be Manichaeism: see Chapter 11 *EVIL*, pp. 112–14.

³³ *PL* i 176–8.

that God 'now triumphs'³⁴) he again makes the mistake of thinking that God's 'now' is a temporal moment rather than the eternal *nunc stans*; and it is this misunderstanding of both time and power which then leads him to say 'Let us not slip th' occasion', for 'occasion' (from the Latin *occasio*) is the opportunity which Fortune holds out for Machiavellian man to seize,³⁵ and talk of 'occasion' is therefore predicated upon the view that events are controlled by a combination of chance and human agency, which the poem shows to be radically mistaken.

But although Satan may sound confident in his use of such rhetoric, he carries within him an underlying doubt about his own condition which is evident when he says:

There rest, if any rest can harbour there,
And reassembling our afflicted Powers,
Consult
...
What reinforcement we may gain from Hope,
If not what resolution from despair.³⁶

He is uncertain as to whether true rest can be theirs, and whether they have any true hope. There is also a telling, if brief, instance of an 'if' which opens up an important question about who Satan is, when he says:

What matter where, if I be still the same,
And what I should be, all but less then he
Whom Thunder hath made greater?³⁷

Satan's 'if' expresses his resolve to be still the same, to exercise a self-determination which might indeed be possible if he were, as he claims, 'all but less then he | Whom Thunder hath made greater'. But Satan and God are not beings on the same scale, albeit differing in greatness. Nor is God's greatness brought about by thunder, for the thunder is only a manifestation of a divinity which is wholly other than Satan, and which at this moment eludes Satan's comprehension. Nor can Satan 'be still the same' after his Fall.

Such self-deception is also characteristic of Satan's associates. During the debate in Hell, Belial imagines various forms of divine punishment through a series of clauses which begin 'What if...?':

What if the breath that kind'd those grim fires
Awak'd should blow them into sevenfold rage
And plunge us in the flames?
...

³⁴ *PL* i 123.

³⁵ *OED* s.v. occasion n.¹ 6b; see *Nicholas Machiavel's Prince*... Translated out of Italian into English by E. D. (London, 1640), pp. 202–9; cf. *The Spenser Encyclopedia*, edited by A. C. Hamilton (Toronto, 1990), s.v. Fortune.

³⁶ *PL* i 185–91.

³⁷ *PL* i 256–8. This is also one of Satan's rhetorical questions, for which see Chapter 30 ?.

what if all
 Her stores were open'd, and this Firmament
 Of Hell should spout her Cataracts of Fire
 ...
 while we perhaps
 Designing or exhorting glorious warr,
 Caught in a fierie Tempest shall be hurl'd.³⁸

His alternative, inaction, is likewise grounded upon a series of hypotheses:

This is now
 Our doom; which if we can sustain and bear,
 Our Supream Foe in time may much remit
 His anger, and perhaps thus farr remov'd
 Not mind us not offending, satisf'd
 With what is punish't; whence these raging fires
 Will slack'n, if his breath stir not thir flames.
 Our purer essence then will overcome
 Thir noxious vapour, or enur'd not feel,
 Or chang'd at length, and to the place conform'd
 In temper and in nature, will receive
 Familiar the fierce heat, and void of pain;
 This horror will grow milde, this darkness light,
 Besides what hope the never-ending flight
 Of future dayes may bring.³⁹

Belial's further speculation multiplies not only 'if' and 'perhaps' but also 'or... Or...' as he imagines God not minding about them, still measuring God by his own perspective. Conditionals such as 'may' then harden into future indicative verbs ('will'), attempting to consolidate and substantiate the scenario before his final 'may' in 'what hope the never-ending flight | Of future dayes may bring'.⁴⁰ But the problem with his last hypothesis is that it rests upon a mistaken understanding of hope. Grammatically it is 'the never-ending flight | Of future dayes' which may bring hope, and once again we encounter a misunderstanding of time amongst the fallen angels: Belial assumes that hope may emerge from the very passage of time, that time will generate some opportunity, some 'occasion' as Satan called it; but hope, which in *Paradise Lost* is understood as a theological virtue, is properly a dimension of faith, of trust in divine providence and grace. Belial's condition, however, his choice of alienation from God, places him outside true hope, simply wishing that something may perhaps turn up. Because of his rebellion, the time scheme imagined by his 'if...perhaps...may' does not and cannot exist.

Beelzebub is another of those whose misapprehensions are evident in their use of 'if' and 'perhaps'. His mistake relates to divine power and to the nature of place,

³⁸ *PL* ii 170–2, 174–6, 178–80.

³⁹ *PL* ii 208–22.

⁴⁰ So too at *PL* ii 274–8 Mammon's wishful thinking hardens 'may' into 'must': 'Our torments also may in length of time | Become our Elements... | ...which must needs remove | The sensible of pain'.

for he suggests an attack upon Earth as an outlying area of God's creation which God perhaps has left inadequately defended:

this place may lye expos'd
The utmost border of his Kingdom, left
To their defence who hold it: here perhaps
Som advantagious act may be achiev'd
By sudden onset.⁴¹

It 'may... perhaps', but perhaps it may not. 'May' and 'might' inhabit the devils' thinking as readily as 'if' and 'perhaps'.⁴² The wishful thinking in that vague 'Som' is extended as the speech continues with a series of alternative scenarios, 'either... or... or... May... would',⁴³ each of them nugatory. Beelzebub makes Satan's mistake in imagining divine power in demonic terms, and he also makes the same mistake that Eve will make in imagining that an area which is geographically remote from Heaven is therefore remote from God's sight or care.⁴⁴ He is thinking in military terms which are not appropriate to divine power. Another optimistic 'perhaps' inflects his subsequent speech when he applauds the devils' decision

which from the lowest deep
Will once more lift us up, in spight of Fate,
Neerer our ancient Seat; perhaps in view
Of those bright confines, whence with neighbouring Arms
And opportune excursion we may chance
Re-enter Heav'n.⁴⁵

The confident 'Will' is undermined by the uncertain 'perhaps' and 'may chance', and the collocation of 'chance' and 'Heav'n' indicates clearly enough Beelzebub's mistaken view of power, place, and causality. Such an assumption about place is seen again when the narrator says that the fallen angels range through Hell to see 'if any Clime perhaps | Might yield them easier habitation'.⁴⁶

Satan's misapprehension is most clearly seen when he invokes evil and says,

by thee at least
Divided Empire with Heav'ns King I hold
By thee, and more then half perhaps will reigne;
As Man ere long, and this new World shall know.⁴⁷

⁴¹ *PL* ii 360–4.

⁴² Cf. the rebel angels' desire

To found this nether Empire, which **might** rise
By pollicy, and long process of time,
In emulation opposite to Heav'n.

(*PL* ii 296–8; emphasis added)

⁴³ *PL* ii 364–70.

⁴⁴ *PL* ix 811–13.

⁴⁵ *PL* ii 392–3.

⁴⁶ *PL* ii 572–3.

⁴⁷ *PL* iv 110–13.

Typically Satan imagines a power which the word 'perhaps' shows us to be fallacious; nor can the emphatic 'shall' make his statement true, because although in this case what he foresees will indeed happen (man will know Satan's rule) this is an incomplete narrative because Satan has no concept of the redemption which will come to man through Christ. Satan's 'if' and 'or' devise scenarios with which he is comfortable, scenarios which envisage conflict with God in terms that serve to glorify himself as an heroic antagonist:

If I must contend, said he,
Best with the best, the Sender not the sent,
Or all at once; more glorie will be wonn,
Or less be lost.⁴⁸

And in addressing his followers during the war in Heaven he says:

Of evil then so small as easie think
The remedie; perhaps more valid Armes,
Weapons more violent, when next we meet,
May serve to better us, and worse our foes,
Or equal what between us made the odds,
In Nature none: if other hidden cause
Left them Superiour, while we can preserve
Unhurt our mindes, and understanding sound,
Due search and consultation will disclose.⁴⁹

'Think...perhaps...May...Or...if...': Satanic confidence is undercut by the grammatical signs of uncertainty which undermine his concept of power, while the optimistic assertion in 'will' has no basis in the world that the poem depicts. When he tells his followers that

If your joynt power prevailes, th' affaires of Hell
No detriment need feare, goe and be strong.⁵⁰

the 'If' is meant to sound confident and encouraging, but we know that Hell will not prevail, as the biblical echo in that word reassures us.⁵¹ Later, with more self-knowledge and a clearer recognition of his true state, Satan will briefly use an 'if...' clause to acknowledge his loss of joy when the short phrase 'If I could joy in aught' opens a potential within him for joy which is unrealized, and now forever unrealizable.⁵²



⁴⁸ *PL* iv 851–4. Cf. 'He trusted to have equal'd the most High, | If he oppos'd' (*PL* i 40–1).

⁴⁹ *PL* vi 437–45. ⁵⁰ *PL* x 408–9.

⁵¹ Matthew xvi 18: 'thou art Peter, and vpon this rocke I will build my Church: and the gates of hell shall not preuaile against it'.

⁵² *PL* ix 115.

Satan's mastery over others through 'if...' and 'perhaps...' clauses is seen particularly in his seduction of Eve.⁵³ Initially he uses 'if perhaps' as part of his extravagant compliment to her:

Wonder not, sovran Mistress, if perhaps
Thou canst, who art sole Wonder.⁵⁴

His next use is ostensibly benign and innocuous, and yet it conceals a darker element when he says, with apparent courtesy, 'if thou accept | My conduct',⁵⁵ for what Eve fails to ask herself at any point in this scene is whether she should accept the serpent's 'conduct' not simply in guiding her to the Tree but in guiding her to eat from it. Then he moves to a crucial question,⁵⁶ saying that if the fruit of the Tree imparts knowledge of good and evil, then it must be good to take it, for if it gives knowledge

Of good, how just? of evil, if what is evil
Be real, why not known, since easier shunn'd?⁵⁷

'If what is evil | Be real': a simple phrase, but one which touches on the profound question as to whether evil is some active power or rather the privation of good,⁵⁸ and in context it suggests to Eve that evil might not be real. Eve is given no time to reflect upon that, for Satan presses on through a series of *erotemata* and comes to the question of what death may be; perhaps, he says, death is the transformation of the human into the divine,

So ye shall die perhaps, by putting off
Human, to put on Gods, death to be wisht.⁵⁹

Perhaps; but in fact not. Another question, again posed so glibly that Eve has no chance to analyse it, raises the consequences of that knowledge which might be gained by eating the fruit:

What can your knowledge hurt him, or this Tree
Impart against his will if all be his?⁶⁰

If Eve had had time and resources to muster a reply to this question, she might have said something like this: 'All of creation does indeed belong to God, and nothing can happen against his will; but that will allows us a certain arena of freedom, and what he *allows* to happen as a result of that freedom is not to be construed as being what he *wishes* to happen. As for what he wishes to happen, that is clear in his commandment: we are not to eat this fruit, though we are indeed able to do so.' In effect, 'if all be his' invites the Christian reader to step back from Satan's argument and consider just how it is that all is indeed his, that all creation

⁵³ Commentators on Genesis debated whether Eve's *forte* ('perhaps') in Genesis iii 3 (Vulgate) was or was not a correct translation of the Hebrew; the word is not translated in the AV. See Arnold Williams, *The Common Expositor: An Account of the Commentaries on Genesis 1527–1633* (Chapel Hill, N.C., 1948), pp. 120–1.

⁵⁴ *PL* ix 532–3.

⁵⁵ *PL* ix 629–30.

⁵⁶ For Satan's use of rhetorical questions in his seduction of Eve see Chapter 30 ?, pp. 445–8.

⁵⁷ *PL* ix 698–9.

⁵⁸ See Chapter 11 *EVIL*, pp. 106–11.

⁵⁹ *PL* ix 713–14.

⁶⁰ *PL* ix 727–8.

belongs to God, is subject to his will and providence, whilst mankind nevertheless retains free will.

The 'if's used by Adam and Eve initially mark a reverently hesitant seeking for knowledge; only in the passages leading up to the Fall of Eve does 'if' betray a sinfully egoistic stance. Adam's morning prayer asks for any evil which may have gathered during the night to be dispersed:

Hail universal Lord, be bounteous still
To give us onely good; and if the night
Have gathered aught of evil or conceald,
Disperse it, as now light dispels the dark.⁶¹

He does not know enough about evil to be sure whether it had been present during the night, so his 'if' places that question and its consequences into the hands of God. Adam's requests to Raphael for knowledge are likewise qualified with 'if's which submit to divine authority: 'if thou consent', 'if unforbid thou maist unfold'.⁶² In return, Raphael uses the formula 'what if...' in order to show Adam that certain kinds of knowledge are unnecessary for his happiness:

What if the Sun
Be Center to the World, and other Starrs
By his attractive vertue and thir own
Incited, dance about him various rounds?
Thir wandring course now high, now low, then hid,
Progressive, retrograde, or standing still,
In six thou seest, and what if sev'nth to these
The Planet Earth, so stedfast though she seem,
Insensibly three different Motions move?⁶³

Adam does not need to know whether they do or not; nor does he need to know

If Earth industrious of her self fetch Day
Travelling East, and with her part averse
From the Suns beam meet Night, her other part
Still luminous by his ray. What if that light
Sent from her through the wide transpicious aire,
To the terrestrial Moon be as a Starr
Enlightning her by Day, as she by Night
This Earth? reciprocal, if Land be there,
Feilds and Inhabitants: Her spots thou seest
As Clouds, and Clouds may rain, and Rain produce
Fruits in her soft'nd Soile, for some to eat
Allotted there; and other Suns perhaps
With thir attendant Moons thou wilt descric.⁶⁴

These uses of 'if' and 'perhaps' mark out the limitations of man's proper inquiry.

When Eve wishes to separate herself from Adam in order to work alone, 'if' clauses reveal the different wishes of the two, the differing narratives of themselves

⁶¹ *PL* v 205–8.

⁶² *PL* v 555, vii 94.

⁶³ *PL* viii 122–30.

⁶⁴ *PL* viii 137–49.

which they are beginning to entertain. Eve's first 'if' seems innocuous enough as she argues that their physical proximity distracts them from work, for 'what wonder if so near | Looks intervene and smiles'.⁶⁵ Adam's reply darkens the tone a little, using an 'if' clause to create an interpretation of Eve's wishes which suggests through the word 'sate' that she has become overfull of their talk, an image of gorging greedily: 'But if much converse perhaps | Thee sate, to short absence I could yield'.⁶⁷ Adam himself, however, regards her presence as a source to him both of virtue and of strength, 'if need were | Of outward strength',⁶⁸ his qualification there showing that he is aware of the different kinds of strength which they will need in order to meet a challenge from the foe about whom they have been warned. Eve's 'if', however, is becoming an increasingly petulant 'if' as she defines what she perceives to be their condition:

If this be our condition, thus to dwell
In narrow circuit strait'nd by a Foe,
Suttle or violent, we not endu'd
Single with like defence, wherever met,
How are we happie, still in fear of harm?⁶⁹

For the reader, this 'if' invites a rejoinder which would counter Eve's sullen view of her state as a state of narrow, restricted enclosure: her question 'How are we happie' has already been answered by Raphael when he explained that happiness lies in obedience and in not seeking knowledge beyond the bounds which God has ordained. It will be Eve's resentment at what she perceives to be the 'narrow circuit' of Eden (it is not just a geographical constriction but also an hierarchical one against which she chafes) that will result in the pair being expelled into the unbounded but unwelcoming terrain outside paradise.

Adam's final agreement that she go is also couched in 'if' clauses:

Seek not temptation then, which to avoide
Were better, and most likelie if from mee
Thou sever not: Trial will come unsought.
...
But if thou think, trial unsought may finde
Us both securer then thus warnd thou seemst,
Go; for thy stay, not free, absents thee more.⁷⁰

The two 'if's here work differently. The first 'if' restates Adam's view that temptation will be easier to avoid if she does not separate herself from him: here the 'if' marks a course of action—not to separate from Adam—which at this point in the narrative

⁶⁵ *PL* ix 221–2.

⁶⁶ *sate*: 'To gratify beyond one's natural desire; to weary or disgust by repletion; to glut, cloy, surfeit' (*OED* *s.v.* *sate* *v.* 2a).

⁶⁷ *PL* ix 247–8.

⁶⁸ *PL* ix 311–12.

⁶⁹ *PL* ix 322–6.

⁷⁰ *PL* ix 364–6, 370–2. *securer*: more 'free from care, apprehension, or anxiety; carefree, untroubled... in negative sense: overconfident; careless; complacent' (*OED* *s.v.* *secure* *adj.* 1a). The latter is the sense here: 'complacent, overconfident of our own safety, and therefore careless about danger'. See further Chapter 14 *FREE*, p. 167 n. 3.

is still possible for Eve to take, though we know that she will not do so. The second 'if' is a particularly important one, for when Adam gives her permission to go it is couched grammatically as part of an 'if' clause which places the responsibility on her: 'But if thou think, trial unsought may finde | Us both securer then thus warnd thou seemst, | Go'. That is, if she thinks that a trial which they do not seek would be more dangerous, because they would be less aware of danger than Eve is now that she has been warned, then she may go. (But this paraphrase is not quite accurate, for Eve *seems*, not *is*, aware of danger, and when she meets the serpent she does not even realize that this encounter is indeed a trial.) Adam's 'if' makes his agreement conditional upon what Eve thinks, and therefore makes her responsible for their separation, though the reader may consider that Adam's rhetoric is itself a denial of a responsibility which is properly his. At any rate, the singular pronouns mark this point as a moment of two independent decisions, not an agreement of the couple. Eve says that 'our trial, when least sought, | May finde us both perhaps farr less prepar'd',⁷¹ but her plural pronouns refer to what is now an insecure unity, and her 'perhaps' is simply guesswork.

Eve's temptation by Satan proves to be successful partly because she does not stop to test out the hypotheses which both of them raise. When admiring the serpent's faculty of speech, which the serpent has attributed to the fruit of the Tree of Knowledge, Eve exclaims that it is 'Wondrous indeed, if cause of such effects',⁷² but she does not pause to pursue this doubt, does not ask herself whether the serpent is telling the truth about the effects of the fruit. It is characteristic of Eve at this point in the poem that she often asks the right questions but fails to think them through: so she rightly asks herself,

But if Death
Bind us with after-bands, what profits then
Our inward freedom?⁷³

The 'if' here is, however, not quite the right word, for it makes death hypothetical whereas divine command has instituted death as the necessary consequence of disobedience: the right word would be 'since' rather than 'if'. Eve's 'if' entertains the beguiling but false possibility that death might not bind them. And it is such a penchant for the consolations provided by groundless speculation that leads her to say, after her Fall,

I perhaps am secret; Heav'n is high,
High and remote to see from thence distinct
Each thing on Earth; and other care perhaps
May have diverted from continual watch
Our great Forbidder, safe with all his Spies
About him. But to *Adam* in what sort
Shall I appeer? shall I to him make known
As yet my change, and give him to partake
Full happiness with mee, or rather not,

⁷¹ PL ix 380–1.

⁷² PL ix 650.

⁷³ PL ix 760–2.

But keep the odds of Knowledge in my power
 Without Copartner? so to add what wants
 In Femal Sex, the more to draw his Love,
 And render me more equal, and perhaps,
 A thing not undesirable, sometime
 Superior: for inferior who is free?⁷⁴

'I perhaps am secret': Eve thinks that she may be 'secret', that is 'secluded from observation'⁷⁵ because Heaven is a long way off and God may 'perhaps' be distracted by other concerns. Here she makes the same error that Beelzebub made in thinking that physical distance removes one from the sight of God, and so once again 'if' and 'perhaps' show us fallacious—indeed, diabolical—conceptions of time and place, causality and power. (Eve has unfortunately not read St Augustine, who wrote that God is closer to him than his inmost self and higher than his highest point, nor Benjamin Whichcote, who observed that 'We are *absent* from God; not by being *other-where*, than He is; who is everywhere; but by being *other-wise*, than He is; who is all Good: by a sensual Life, a worldly Mind, a wicked State.'⁷⁶) Eve's third 'perhaps' nurtures her feeling of inferiority by introducing the possibility that she may perhaps become superior to Adam. But since Eve's subordination to Adam is divinely inscribed in the order of things, that 'perhaps' clause also has no validity.

When Eve proffers the bough from the Tree to Adam she again relies upon speculations, though this time she uses 'or' rather than 'perhaps' in glibly passing over the question of the serpent's actions:

the Serpent wise,
 Or not restrained as wee, or not obeying,
 Hath eat'n of the fruit.⁷⁷

After Adam has decided to share the fruit and its consequences with her, he too begins to resort to Eve's rhetoric of 'perhaps' to multiply comforting hypotheses:

Perhaps thou shalt not Die, perhaps the Fact
 Is not so hainous now, foretasted Fruit,
 Profan'd first by the Serpent, by him first
 Made common and unhallowd ere our taste.⁷⁸

And Eve in her turn doubts that taking the fruit is a crime at all when she celebrates Adam's decision 'To undergoe with mee one Guilt, one Crime, | If any be, of tasting this fair Fruit'.⁷⁹ After Adam has taken the fruit, he relishes the pleasure

⁷⁴ *PL* ix 811–25.

⁷⁵ *OED* s.v. *secret* *adj.* 1c; last example.

⁷⁶ Augustine, *Confessiones* III vi (*interior intimo meo et superior summo meo*); Benjamin Whichcote, 'Moral and Religious Aphorisms', in *The Cambridge Platonists*, edited by C. A. Patrides (London, 1969; reissued Cambridge, 1980), p. 336. Michael explains God's omnipresence to Adam at *PL* xi 335–54.

⁷⁷ *PL* ix 867–70.

⁷⁸ *PL* ix 928–31. *Fact*: 'deed', but also 'crime'.

⁷⁹ *PL* ix 971–2.

which it seems to have brought him, which is also the pleasure of the forbidden, saying,

if such pleasure be
In things to us forbidden, it might be wish'd,
For this one Tree had bin forbidden ten.⁸⁰

For Adam, this 'if' really means 'because': it is because there is now such pleasure in things forbidden that he wishes that more pleasures had been forbidden; yet such momentary pleasure yields infinite pain. Though Adam uses the word 'pleasure' here rather too glibly, it will be part of his postlapsarian experience to understand the darker meaning which some terms have now acquired through the Fall of language, and along with 'pleasure' amongst these words with darker meanings one of the first is 'know':

since our Eyes
Op'nd we find indeed, and find we know
Both Good and Evil, Good lost, and Evil got,
Bad Fruit of Knowledge, if this be to know,
Which leaves us naked thus, of Honour void,
Of Innocence, of Faith, of Puritie.⁸¹

Here 'if' introduces the painful dawning of a recognition that the knowledge gained through the Tree is a knowledge of loss.

But knowledge at this point in the poem is still uncertain and often hypothetical. Eve tries to exculpate herself by creating an alternative narrative of the Fall which might have included Adam:

which who knows
But might as ill have happ'nd thou being by,
Or to thy self perhaps: hadst thou been there,
Or here th' attempt, thou couldst not have discern'd
Fraud in the Serpent, speaking as he spake.⁸²

Eve's casually optimistic 'perhaps' has now become a recriminatory 'perhaps'. When Adam takes up the word again it seems that he is acknowledging some share of guilt, but he manages to turn this into a denigration of Eve's seeming perfection:

perhaps
I also err'd in overmuch admiring
What seem'd in thee so perfect, that I thought
No evil durst attempt thee.⁸³

Later, 'if' and 'perhaps' form part of the language through which Adam and Eve, singly and as a couple, come to understand and accept what it is that they have done. Uncertainty as to the meaning or timing of death leads Eve to propose that since they may only have 'scarse one short hour perhaps, | Between us two let

⁸⁰ *PL* ix 1024–6.

⁸¹ *PL* ix 1070–5.

⁸² *PL* 1146–50.

⁸³ *PL* ix 1177–80.

there be peace'.⁸⁴ Adam's dawning understanding of death is attended by an acknowledgement of his uncertainty when he says that 'Death denounc't, if ought I see, | Will prove no sudden, but a slow-pac't evill'.⁸⁵ Then in his approach to God, Adam's 'if's recognize that divine mercy may follow their repentance:

How much more, if we pray him, will his ear
Be open, and his heart to pitie incline.⁸⁶

And he tells Michael that he will attempt to overcome evil 'By suffering, and earne rest from labour won, | If so I may attain'.⁸⁷ This 'If' now returns Adam to his proper position of reverent subordination, a posture far removed from those illusory and self-deceiving hypotheses generated through 'if' and 'perhaps' clauses by means of which the couple had cozened themselves out of obedience, and out of paradise.



Such are the human and the diabolical uses of 'if'; there is also a divine 'if' which, as befits omniscience, is not a matter of conjecture or surmise. In Book III God says that the fallen angels cannot

justly accuse
Thir maker, or thir making, or thir Fate,
As if predestination over-rul'd
Thir will, dispos'd by absolute Decree
Or high foreknowledge; they themselves decreed
Thir own revolt, not I: if I foreknew,
Foreknowledge had no influence on their fault,
Which had no less prov'd certain unforeknown.⁸⁸

The first 'if' ('As if predestination over-rul'd | Thir will') is an hypothesis, an excuse, attributed to the fallen angels which would absolve them of responsibility for their own actions; but it is a nugatory 'if' because no such predestination did constrain them. The second 'if' ('if I foreknew') does not show God hesitating but defines a proposition—'even if', 'although' he knew, foreknowledge did not constrain their actions.⁸⁹ When God speaks to the Son about the possible repentance of Adam and Eve he says:

If patiently thy bidding they obey,
Dismiss them not disconsolate.⁹⁰

We cannot suppose that God does not know whether or not they will obey; rather, this 'If' serves to mark out man's freedom and the grace which attends repentance: if man obeys, consolation will be bestowed. God holds out to Adam and his descendants a second version of what Raphael promised before the Fall, 'If ye be found obedient'.⁹¹ This is not an 'if' of hesitation or doubt, but an 'if' of invitation, an invitation which is addressed ultimately to the reader.

⁸⁴ *PL* x 923–5.

⁸⁸ *PL* iii 112–19.

⁹⁰ *PL* xi 112–13.

⁸⁵ *PL* x 962–3.

⁸⁹ See Chapter 15 *GOD*, p. 227 n. 154.

⁹¹ *PL* v 501.

⁸⁶ *PL* x 1060–1.

⁸⁷ *PL* xi 375–6.

21

Knowledge *and* Wisdom

One fatal Tree there stands of Knowledge call'd,
Forbidden them to taste: Knowledge forbidd'n?
Suspicious, reasonless. Why should thir Lord
Envie them that? can it be sin to know,
Can it be death? and do they onely stand
By Ignorance, is that thir happie state,
The proof of thir obedience and thir faith?
O fair foundation laid whereon to build
Thir ruine! Hence I will excite thir minds
With more desire to know, and to reject
Envious commands, invented with designe
To keep them low whom knowledge might exalt
Equal with Gods; aspiring to be such,
They taste and die.

Paradise Lost iv 514–27



The first instance of the word 'know' in *Paradise Lost* comes not in the context of forbidden knowledge but when the poet invokes the Spirit, saying:

And chiefly Thou O Spirit, that dost prefer
Before all Temples th' upright heart and pure,
Instruct me, for Thou know'st.¹

Milton's poetic enterprise and spiritual quest are placed here under the guidance of the Spirit in order that true knowledge may be derived in all humility from this story of forbidden knowledge and transgressive egoism.² The verb 'know'st' is absolute, without any indication of what it is that the Spirit knows, so his knowledge

¹ *PL* i 17–19. For discussions of knowledge and wisdom in *PL* see Irene Samuel, 'Milton on Learning and Wisdom', *PMLA* 64 (1949) 708–23; John Howard Schultz, *Milton and Forbidden Knowledge* (New York, 1955); and Lee A. Jacobus, *Sudden Apprehension: Aspects of Knowledge in 'Paradise Lost'* (The Hague, 1976); and for the contemporary context see Peter Harrison, 'Curiosity, Forbidden Knowledge, and the Reformation of Natural Philosophy in Early Modern England', *Isis* 92 (2001) 265–90.

² For contemporary discussions of the problem of how humans might attain knowledge of divine things, see Neil D. Graves, 'Milton and the Theory of Accommodation', *Studies in Philology* 98 (2001) 251–72; Joad Raymond, *Milton's Angels: The Early-Modern Imagination* (Oxford, 2010), esp. ch. 6.

is, apparently, total; the Spirit simply knows.³ The poet is in particular need of the Spirit who alone truly knows, and who knows all, because of his blindness, for

ever-during dark
Surrounds me, from the chearful wayes of men
Cut off, and for the Book of knowledg fair
Presented with a Universal blanc
Of Nature's works to mee expung'd and ras'd,
And wisdom at one entrance quite shut out.⁴

The book of knowledge is the created world which he can no longer read as a testimony to its Creator, and so finds 'wisdom at one entrance quite shut out'. Wisdom, then, comes from knowledge, specifically from that knowledge of God which Nature provides, though for Milton himself this will in future come not from the external world but through inner illumination.⁵ The link between knowledge and wisdom is one of the motifs of the poem, since Adam and Eve seize knowledge without wisdom—though calling it wisdom—and eventually learn wisdom through the painful recognition of the consequences of the knowledge which they have acquired, in part through bitter experience and in part through Michael's teaching.⁶



Satan may not aspire to knowledge as Eve does, but the question of what he knows and does not know is an important element in Milton's presentation of him, for the imperfection of his knowledge contributes to his self-deception. Reflecting on his Fall from Heaven he says, in an attempt at self-exculpation:

but what power of mind
Foreseeing or presaging, from the Depth
Of knowledge past or present, could have fear'd,
How such united force of Gods, how such
As stood like these, could ever know repulse?
...
Henceforth his might we know, and know our own.⁷

³ God is, of course, omniscient (*PL* x 227).

⁴ *PL* iii 45–50.

⁵ *PL* iii 51–5. However, blindness only closes off one of the entrances for wisdom; the remaining senses, one infers, continue to be conduits for wisdom by means of the apprehension of the book of Nature which they provide. There is actually little interest in *PL* in that knowledge which comes through the senses: all the knowledge which is important to Adam is given to him directly by God, Raphael, or Michael. For Milton's account of how reason and fancy derive knowledge from the senses see *PL* v 102–9, quoted in Chapter 13 *FANCY AND REASON*, p. 149. For the various ways in which the book of Nature was read by Milton and his contemporaries see Karen L. Edwards, *Milton and the Natural World: Science and Poetry in 'Paradise Lost'* (Cambridge, 1999), and Robert N. Watson, *Back to Nature: The Green and the Real in the Late Renaissance* (Philadelphia, Penn., 2006).

⁶ For the difference between knowledge and wisdom as explored later in *PR* see Barbara Kiefer Lewalski, *Milton's Brief Epic: The Genre, Meaning, and Art of 'Paradise Regained'* (Providence, R.I., 1966), pp. 288–302.

⁷ *PL* i 626–30, 643.

But such knowledge is only a practical, experiential knowledge of the quasi-military power of God; it does not extend any further. Cleaved by Michael's sword, 'then *Satan* first knew pain, | And writh'd him to and fro convolv'd'.⁸ Such is Satan's knowledge; it is a long way from wisdom, for, as Whichcote observed, '*Sublime Knowledge cannot dwell in an unquiet Spirit*'.⁹ The evil angels, says Milton, *Habent scientiam quidam magnam, sed quae eos torqueat potius quam consoletur; ita ut de salute sua plane desperent*.¹⁰ Satan's imperfect knowledge—that is, his imperfect moral understanding—is shown in his failure to recognize his own daughter Sin,¹¹ an allegorically simple comment on his moral blindness. Satan himself is recognized by Chaos,¹² showing us that Satan is part of his disordered world. *Per contra*, Satan is not recognized by Uriel in Book III or by Ithuriel and Zephon in Book IV, so changed is he from his former heavenly appearance. When he feigns a desire to know the works of God in order to praise their Maker, he draws from Uriel a commendation which also includes a warning:

Faire Angel, thy desire which tends to know
The works of God, thereby to glorifie
The great Work-Maister, leads to no excess
That reaches blame, but rather merits praise
The more it seems excess.¹³

There can be no blame attached to excessive desire for knowledge should this be a part of a desire to glorify God, but implicitly there can indeed be a danger in other forms of seeking after knowledge which do not have worship as their end.

The encounter with Ithuriel and Zephon draws from Satan scorn at the angels' apparent ignorance, but also anguish at the contrast which he perceives between himself and them:

Know ye not then said *Satan*, fill'd with scorn,
Know ye not mee? ye knew me once no mate
For you, there sitting where ye durst not soare;
Not to know mee argues your selves unknown,
The lowest of your throng.¹⁴

Satan's agitation at not being known by these angels betrays the blow to his pride which this displacing of him constitutes. For him knowledge is a recognition of power: he is incensed that they recognize him as one of the spirits from Hell, but cannot see that he is the leader of the rebel angels; he attributes to them an inferior position in the heavenly hierarchy, and a timorous reluctance to aspire, as he had, to some higher echelon. Moreover, for them not to know Satan shows 'your selves unknown', that is, having no reputation, merely occupying the lowest position within the heavenly ranks. Knowledge is power, and they lack both. But of course

⁸ *PL* vi 327–8.

⁹ Benjamin Whichcote, 'Moral and Religious Aphorisms', in *The Cambridge Platonists*, edited by C. A. Patrides (London, 1969; reissued Cambridge, 1980), p. 333.

¹⁰ 'Their knowledge is indeed great, but such as tortures rather than consoles them, so that they utterly despair of their salvation' (*De Doctrina: OCW* viii 352–3).

¹¹ *PL* ii 744.

¹² *PL* ii 988–92.

¹³ *PL* iii 694–8.

¹⁴ *PL* iv 827–31.

they are not 'unknown': as they stand in the presence of God they know and are known.¹⁵

When Satan rallies his followers in Book V he tells them that they will surely not submit servilely to God,

ye will not, if I trust
To know ye right, or if ye know your selves
Natives and Sons of Heav'n.¹⁶

Perhaps Satan does know them, but if they truly knew themselves to be 'Natives and Sons of Heav'n' then they would act as sons of God, not as truculent rebels. The ensuing argument between Satan and Abdiel in part takes the form of a debate about what they know, with Abdiel maintaining that God created 'All things, ev'n thee, and all the Spirits of Heav'n', an idea which Satan derides as 'strange point and new! | Doctrin which we would know whence learnt'.¹⁷ Abdiel testifies that

by experience taught we know how good,
And of our good, and of our dignitie
How provident he is.¹⁸

while Satan insists that

We know no time when we were not as now;
Know none before us, self-begot, self-rai'd
By our own quick'ning power.¹⁹

Abdiel knows God's goodness and provident care by experience; Satan enlists his experience negatively, to claim that since the angels have no recollection of a period when they did not exist (and it would, of course, be very strange if they did), then they must have created themselves—an obvious fallacy.²⁰ Abdiel promises Satan a different form of experiential knowledge if he persists in his revolt,

for soon expect to feel
His Thunder on thy head, devouring fire.
Then who created thee lamenting learne,
When who can uncreate thee thou shalt know.²¹

When Abdiel returns for his second skirmish with Satan he enunciates—almost with the voice of the embattled Milton himself—the claim that 'few sometimes may know, when thousands err'.²² So to know is the opposite of to err: this does not mean that the opposite of knowledge is simply a mistake, but rather it is a wandering, a turning away from the right path. To know is to be faithful; its contrary is

¹⁵ Cf. 'For now we see through a glasse, darkely: but then face to face: now I know in part, but then I shall know euen as also I am knowen' (1 Corinthians xiii 12; cf. Psalm cxxxix). The idea of being known by God is a prominent motif in the *Confessiones* of St Augustine (e.g. x 1–5).

¹⁶ *PL* v 788–90. ¹⁷ *PL* v 837, 855–6. ¹⁸ *PL* v 826–8. ¹⁹ *PL* v 859–61.

²⁰ Contrast Adam's reverent agnosticism in his words to Raphael: 'For Man to tell how human Life began | Is hard; for who himself beginning knew?' (*PL* viii 250–1).

²¹ *PL* v 892–5.

²² *PL* vi 148. For Milton's trust in the few rather than the multitude cf. *PL* vii 31; xii 480.

the erring of Satan, of Adam and Eve, and of all Milton's multifarious opponents in seventeenth-century England.



What kind of knowledge do Adam and Eve have before the Fall? What degree of self-knowledge do they possess? Adam's first consciousness is a knowledge of his body, but not of who or what he is:

My self I then perus'd, and Limb by Limb
Survey'd, and sometimes went, and sometimes ran
With supple joints, and lively vigour led:
But who I was, or where, or from what cause,
Knew not.²³

Unlike Satan, Adam possesses a form of self-knowledge which grasps his dependence upon his Creator, and which soon leads to a request to the natural world around him—the book of Nature—to tell him more:

how came I thus, how here?
Not of my self; by some great Maker then,
In goodness and in power præminent;
Tell me, how may I know him, how adore,
From whom I have that thus I move and live,
And feel that I am happier then I know.²⁴

This quest for knowledge is a quest for a more fully informed, better-directed worship, and the repeated first-person singular pronouns express not an egoistic self-assertion but a desire to root that 'I' in the ground of his being. In this early state Adam knows the animals, in the sense that he

understood
Thir Nature, with such knowledg God endu'd
My sudden apprehension.²⁵

In the ensuing dialogue with God, Adam asks for a companion other than the animals, and God teasingly replies:

know'st thou not
Thir language and thir wayes, they also know,
And reason not contemptibly; with these
Find pastime, and beare rule; thy Realm is large.²⁶

But Adam seeks a more suitable associate with higher faculties of reason and more potential for knowledge, and God praises him because this desire shows him to be

knowing not of Beasts alone,
Which thou hast rightly nam'd, but of thy self,
Expressing well the spirit within thee free.²⁷

²³ *PL* viii 267–71. *went*: walked. *and lively*: 1674; as lively 1667. The later reading may be a misprint.

²⁴ *PL* viii 277–82.

²⁵ *PL* viii 352–4.

²⁶ *PL* viii 372–5.

²⁷ *PL* viii 438–40.

In this prelapsarian state, self-knowledge, understanding of the created world, and acknowledgement of man's dependence upon God woven together form an ideal of knowledge which man will struggle to replicate in his postlapsarian condition.

Eve has been created with an immediate knowledge of what becomes a woman and a wife, for when Adam courted her 'she what was Honour knew'.²⁸ Yet Adam's admiration of Eve's apparent self-knowledge is so excessive that it risks altogether redefining knowledge, wisdom, and reason, as he explains to Raphael:

when I approach
Her loveliness, so absolute she seems
And in her self compleat, so well to know
Her own, that what she wills to do or say,
Seems wisest, vertuosest, discreetest, best;
All higher knowledge in her presence falls
Degraded, Wisdom in discourse with her
Looses discount'nanc't, and like folly shewes;
Authority and Reason on her waite.²⁹

To be absolute, to be complete in one's self, is to be godlike, and there is no recognition in Adam's encomium of Eve that she might in any way be incomplete or fallible. Moreover it is (ominously) what she wills that seems *ipso facto* to be 'wisest' and 'best', so Eve's will has become a definition of wisdom. In her presence—specifically in the presence of her physical 'loveliness'—'All higher knowledge in her presence falls | Degraded', and in this respect Adam shows himself to be the precise opposite of a Platonist philosopher for whom love of physical beauty is a step towards higher knowledge.³⁰ The point is made implicitly in the use of 'Degraded', which has its etymological origin in the Latin *gradus*, a step: this love of Eve's beauty is a step down the ladder of knowledge and wisdom. Indeed, this admiration for Eve is not really love at all, if, as Milton says, 'the first and chiefest office of love, begins and ends in the soule, producing those happy twins of her divine generation knowledge and vertue'.³¹ The word 'falls' alerts us to the dire consequences of this degradation of higher knowledge and of a wisdom which is made to look like folly. 'Authority and Reason' are also subordinated to Eve, so Adam implicitly rejects both the will of his divine Author and the reason with which his Creator has endowed him as the faculty with which he should know God, Nature, and himself. Raphael's rebuke urges Adam to trust instead a different form of the feminine, which is wisdom personified:

be not diffident
Of Wisdom, she deserts thee not, if thou
Dismiss not her, when most thou needst her nigh,
By attributing overmuch to things
Less excellent, as thou thy self perceav'st.³²

²⁸ *PL* viii 508. ²⁹ *PL* viii 546–54.

³⁰ See Irene Samuel, *Plato and Milton* (Ithaca, N.Y., 1947), ch. 5 for Milton's uses of Plato's theory of knowledge.

³¹ *Apology: Works* iii 305; cf. Plato, *Symposium* 209a (noted in *CPW* i 892n).

³² *PL* viii 562–6.

Adam hears the warning, but will soon forget it, and in Book IX he is drawn by his physical bond with Eve to turn aside from what he knows to be God's command: 'All higher knowledge in her presence falls' is a succinct summary of Adam's own future Fall.

What do Adam and Eve know? They know unambiguously that the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil is forbidden, and although they do not know precisely what death is, they do know that it is the ultimate punishment for what is the sole transgression.³³ Eve when recounting her dream refers unhesitatingly to 'the Tree | Of interdicted Knowledge',³⁴ which she immediately recognizes when Satan leads her to it.³⁵ She also knows something of the serpent, because she says, 'Thee, Serpent, subtlest beast of all the field | I knew, but not with human voice endu'd'.³⁶ Eve also knows her place in the divinely ordained hierarchy, calling Adam

My Author and Disposer, what thou bidst
Unargu'd I obey; so God ordains,
God is thy Law, thou mine: to know no more
Is womans happiest knowledge and her praise.³⁷

But this does not mean that Eve is ignorant of the Fall of the rebel angels or the wonders of creation, both of which she hears about from Raphael.³⁸

Milton is careful to make it clear that Adam's quest for knowledge from Raphael is not an instance of that excessive desire for knowledge to which Gabriel had alluded, since Adam asks under correction from Raphael and in order to glorify his Maker: he seeks to know only

if unforbid thou maist unfould
What wee, not to explore the secrets aske
Of his Eternal Empire, but the more
To magnifie his works, the more we know.³⁹

Adam is

Led on, yet sinless, with desire to know
What neerer might concern him.⁴⁰

while Raphael is the

Divine interpreter, by favour sent
Down from the Empyrean to forewarne
Us timely of what might else have bin our loss,
Unknown, which human knowledg could not reach.⁴¹

³³ *PL* iv 421–8. The prohibition is repeated by Raphael at vii 542–5.

³⁴ *PL* v 51–2.

³⁵ *PL* ix 647–54.

³⁶ *PL* ix 560–1.

³⁷ *PL* iv 635–8.

³⁸ Eve listens to Raphael's account of the war in Heaven and the creation of the world, but when Adam begins to ask about more abstruse astronomical matters she leaves him alone with Raphael, not through lack of interest but because she prefers to hear about these things from her husband: *PL* viii 48–57.

³⁹ *PL* vii 94–7. *secrets*: mysteries, hidden workings (*OED* *s.v.* *secret* *n.* 1).

⁴⁰ *PL* vii 61–2.

⁴¹ *PL* vii 72–5.

Adam asks only for that knowledge which God has determined is necessary for man to have, and which exceeds the reach of his unaided human powers:

But since thou hast voutsaf't
Gently for our instruction to impart
Things above Earthly thought, which yet concernd
Our knowing, as to highest wisdom seemd,
Deign to descend now lower, and relate
What may no less perhaps availe us known,
How first began this Heav'n which we behold
Distant so high.⁴²

If the knowledge of the creation of the world truly belongs to the category of knowledge which will 'availe us known', then this is because Adam receives the knowledge imparted by Raphael as a mode of contemplation of the divine glory:

Well hast thou taught the way that might direct
Our knowledge, and the scale of Nature set
From center to circumference, whereon
In contemplation of created things
By steps we may ascend to God.⁴³

What is important in this quasi-Platonic quest, in which man ascends gradually towards God, is that Adam should know all that he needs to know in order to live wisely; this is the instruction which Raphael has received from God:

what thou canst attain, which best may serve
To glorifie the Maker, and inferr
Thee also happier, shall not be withheld
Thy hearing, such Commission from above
I have receav'd, to answer thy desire
Of knowledge within bounds; beyond abstain
To ask, nor let thine own inventions hope
Things not reveal'd, which th' invisible King,
Onely Omniscient, hath suppress in Night,
To none communicable in Earth or Heaven:
Anough is left besides to search and know.
But Knowledge is as food, and needs no less
Her Temperance over Appetite, to know
In measure what the mind may well contain,
Oppresses else with Surfet, and soon turns
Wisdom to Folly, as Nourishment to Winde.⁴⁴

Adam is to be provided with that knowledge which he needs in order to glorify God and to make him happier; this will answer fully his 'desire | Of knowledge within bounds'. He is not to ask more, nor speculate about what is not revealed.

⁴² *PL* vii 80–7. ⁴³ *PL* v 508–12. *scale*: ladder.

⁴⁴ *PL* vii 115–30. *inferr*: make, render (*OED s.v.* *infer* v. 1c; sole example). *hope*: suppose, think (*OED s.v.* *hope* v. 4; last example 1632).

Knowledge, like other appetites, needs to be held in check by temperance if it is to be true nourishment, or else surfeit will turn 'Wisdom to Folly'. Why is this? Because knowledge is knowledge of God's creation, the book of Nature, which is to be read with reverence as a source of spiritual nourishment. Because the intemperate pursuit of knowledge would be a gratification of human desires rather than a mode of worship. And because God in his providential wisdom has hidden from mankind some things the knowledge of which would only be harmful.⁴⁵

If the pursuit of knowledge needs to be governed, this requires self-government and self-knowledge.⁴⁶ There are three contrasting examples of self-knowledge in *Paradise Lost*. There is Satan, who on the top of Mount Niphates exhibits a remarkable depth and clarity of self-knowledge when he identifies the causes of his Fall, but this insight is ultimately futile because it leads him not to an Augustinian recognition of his dependence upon God but in the opposite direction, to a despairing assertion of the ego which embraces evil.⁴⁷ (It is also not without some moments of evasive self-exculpation.) There is Eve, who knows herself to be dependent upon Adam, but whose desire for self-assertion leads her to ensnare herself in fallacious arguments which she mistakenly takes to be intelligent reasoning. And there is Adam, who knows exactly what he is doing when he takes the forbidden fruit from the hand of Eve, though he is quite unaware of the enormity of the consequences. Subsequently, however, the Son rebukes him for a lack of self-knowledge because Eve's attributes, he says,

Were such as under Government well seem'd,
Unseemly to beare rule, which was thy part
And person, had'st thou known thy self aright.⁴⁸

True self-knowledge would have led Adam to cleave to—and act upon—his superior role in his relationship with Eve; this role was created by God, and therefore to lay it aside is a form of disobedience. Knowledge and self-knowledge need to be contained within the framework of the divine order. Knowledge is the opposite of ignorance, indeed, but more profoundly it is the opposite of erring.

Self-knowledge and self-government are prerequisites for the government of others, and man is created as a being who,

endu'd
With Sanctitie of Reason, might erect
His Stature, and upright with Front serene
Govern the rest, self-knowing, and from thence
Magnanimous to correspond with Heav'n,
But grateful to acknowledge whence his good
Descends, thither with heart and voice and eyes

⁴⁵ Cf. 'the rest | From Man or Angel the great Architect | Did wisely to conceal' (*PL* viii 71–3). In these passages Milton is probably drawing on Horace: *prudens futuri temporis exitum | caliginosa nocte premit deus* (*Carm.* III xxix 29–30; cf. 'God has widely hid from human sight | The dark decrees of future fate, | And sown their seeds in depth of night': Dryden, 'Horat. Ode 29. Book 3' ll. 45–7).

⁴⁶ For a thoughtful discussion of self-knowledge in *PL* see Jacobus, *Sudden Apprehension*, ch. 2.

⁴⁷ *PL* iv 32–113.

⁴⁸ *PL* x 154–6.

Directed in Devotion, to adore
 And worship God Supream, who made him chief
 Of all his works.⁴⁹

Knowledge goes with acknowledgement of one's origin from the hand of God, government of the self with government of the animals, and all is directed to the worship of the source of this good. So true knowledge and self-knowledge sustain man in his right place in the hierarchy. But we know that Eve's pursuit of forbidden knowledge, and Adam's consequent abandonment of his place in the scale of things in order not to be separated from her, will change everything.



What part does the quest for knowledge play in the Fall? When Satan plots the seduction of man he reflects on the sole prohibition in the passage quoted in the epigraph to this chapter. Satan has heard Adam remind Eve of the interdicted 'Tree | Of knowledge',⁵⁰ so he assumes that it is knowledge *tout court* which has been forbidden, that knowledge would elevate the protoplasts to a status 'Equal with Gods', and that this is why the Tree is interdicted. But of course this is not correct: what is prohibited is this one particular way of attaining one particular form of knowledge, namely the knowledge of good and evil: moreover, Raphael has told Adam that 'If ye be found obedient' he and Eve may in due course come to be like the angels;⁵¹ it is therefore not knowledge but obedience which would make human beings 'Equal with Gods'.⁵² The Tree is, as God tells Adam,

the Tree whose operation brings
 Knowledg of good and ill, which I have set
 The Pledge of thy Obedience and thy Faith.⁵³

And Adam reminds Eve,

thou knowst
 What hath bin warn'd us, what malicious Foe
 Envyng our happiness, and of his own
 Despairing, seeks to work us woe and shame
 By sly assault.⁵⁴

⁴⁹ *PL* vii 507–16. *Magnanimous*: 'great or noble in spirit, ambition, or purpose' (*OED*³ *s.v.* *magnanimous* *adj.* 1); cf. George Herbert: 'Pitch thy behaviour low, thy projects high; | So shalt thou humble and magnanimous be' ('The Church-porch' ll. 331–2: *The English Poems of George Herbert*, edited by Helen Wilcox (Cambridge, 2007), p. 59). *correspond*: (i) be in harmony with; (ii) hold communication with (*OED* *s.v.* *correspond* *v.* 1, 4). Amongst the animals Adam and Eve know the serpent to be a subtle creature (*PL* vii 494–5; ix 560–1), but neither of course know that Satan has taken on the form of the serpent.

⁵⁰ *PL* iv 423–4. ⁵¹ *PL* v 493–503.

⁵² The plural 'Gods' here primarily means 'angels', though when inveigling Eve into eating the fruit Satan finds it convenient to imply a pagan universe of many gods: cf. p. 231.

⁵³ *PL* viii 323–5. *pledge*: 'A thing given or taken as a sign or token of favour, loyalty, love, etc., or as a guarantee of something to come' (*OED*³ *s.v.* *pledge* 4a). Cf. *PL* iv 428, where Adam says that the tree is 'the only sign of our obedience'.

⁵⁴ *PL* ix 252–6.

Adam and Eve are not ignorant of good, for they already understand something of their Creator, and worship him; Raphael imparts to them ample knowledge of evil through his account of the rebellion and fall of the angels, along with the exemplary narrative of Abdiel as an instance of how to recognize and resist evil. They already know good and evil: that is, they already know enough.

From the Satanic perspective knowledge is a mode of power, to be used in order to aspire to a higher place; and conversely it is to be withheld from one's inferiors in order to keep them subordinate. It is this interpretation which he places in the mind of Eve through the medium of her dream:

And O fair Plant, said he, with fruit surcharg'd,
Deigns none to ease thy load and taste thy sweet,
Nor God, nor Man; is Knowledge so despis'd?
Or envie, or what reserve forbids to taste?⁵⁵

In Book IX he tells her that the prohibition was a device intended solely 'to awe, | . . . to keep ye low and ignorant, | His worshippers'.⁵⁶ Satan then makes this knowledge seem more attractive to Eve by calling it 'wisdom', addressing the tree as 'O Sacred, Wise, and Wisdom-giving Plant',⁵⁷ and saying that 'whoso eats thereof, forthwith attains | Wisdom',⁵⁸ which Eve then accepts when she tells herself,

In plain then, what forbids he but to know,
Forbids us good, forbids us to be wise?

As the narrator had remarked of Satan,

So little knows
Any, but God alone, to value right
The good before him, but perverts best things
To worst abuse, or to thir meanest use.⁵⁹

It is not that Eve does not wish the good, but that she is perverting it to its meanest use, redefining it as the gratification of desire and the pursuit of power, and it is her perversion of the right meanings of 'good', 'know', and 'wise' which aids her in this self-deception. Then she asks, with a rhetorical question,

What fear I then, rather what know to feare
Under this ignorance of good and Evil,
Of God or Death, of Law or Penaltie?⁶⁰

But she is not ignorant of these things: she knows from what Raphael and Adam have taught her enough about good and evil to enable her to act rightly. In fact, the moment when she eats the fruit of the Tree of Knowledge is one in which she is, paradoxically, ignorant, for

Greedily she ingorg'd without restraint,
And knew not eating Death.⁶¹

⁵⁵ *PL* v 58–61.

⁵⁶ For the arguments of Satan and Eve in Book IX see Chapter 30 ?, pp. 445–50.

⁵⁷ *PL* ix 679.

⁵⁸ *PL* ix 724–5.

⁵⁹ *PL* iv 201–4.

⁶⁰ *PL* ix 773–5.

⁶¹ *PL* ix 791–2.

Although she knows, or rather, had known beforehand, that death would be the result of her transgression, at this moment she no longer knows this; she has forgotten, or is oblivious.

After she has taken the fruit she plans to eat more of it, 'Till dieted by thee I grow mature | In knowledge, as the Gods who all things know', the plural 'Gods' clearly showing that she has come to speak Satan's pagan language.⁶² But should she share this supposed new knowledge with Adam?

shall I to him make known
As yet my change, and give him to partake
Full happiness with mee, or rather not,
But keep the odds of Knowledge in my power
Without Copartner?⁶³

More and more she resembles Satan in assuming that knowledge confers power, and that the withholding of knowledge is a useful way of keeping subordinates in their place. As for Adam, his Fall into knowledge of good and evil is quite different, for

he scrupl'd not to eat
Against his better knowledge, not deceav'd,
But fondly overcome with Femal charm.⁶⁴

Adam knows the right course, but turns away: *Video meliora proboque, | deteriora sequor*.⁶⁵

The first postlapsarian knowledge which the couple share is lust, with Adam telling Eve that they had not 'known till now | True relish'.⁶⁶ But soon the tone changes as they become aware of what this new-found knowledge really is:

our Eyes
Op'nd we find indeed, and find we know
Both Good and Evil, Good lost, and Evil got,
Bad Fruit of Knowledge, if this be to know,
Which leaves us naked thus, of Honour void,
Of Innocence, of Faith, of Puritie.⁶⁷

This new knowledge is defined entirely in negatives; it is a knowledge of what has been lost. What now ensues is a terrifying ignorance of what may lie in store for them as a consequence of their transgression:

then in the Grave,
Or in some other dismal place who knows
But I shall die a living Death? O thought
Horrid, if true!

...

⁶² *PL* ix 803–4.

⁶³ *PL* ix 817–21. *odds*: difference, disparity (*OED*³ *s.v.* *odds* *n.* 2).

⁶⁴ *PL* ix 997–9.

⁶⁵ See Chapter 13 *FANCY AND REASON*, p. 158.

⁶⁶ *PL* ix 1023–4. It is ironically fitting that from all the possible meanings of 'know'—from the whole possible field of knowledge—the meaning 'have sexual intercourse with' is the one which now emerges: cf. *OED*³ *s.vv.* *know* *v.* 8 and *knowledge* *n.* 3c.

⁶⁷ *PL* ix 1070–5.

All of me then shall die: let this appease
The doubt, since humane reach no further knows.⁶⁸

Adam's punishment is, appropriately, a much darker form of knowledge, experiential knowledge of his own mortality, knowledge of man as dust:

In the sweat of thy Face shalt thou eat Bread,
Till thou return unto the ground, for thou
Out of the ground wast taken, know thy Birth,
For dust thou art, and shalt to dust returne.⁶⁹

As the pair struggle towards repentance, they are haunted by a lack of knowledge about what their future might hold, and so how to act in the face of this ignorance. All they do know is the bare fact of their mortality, for

how long, and what till then our life,
Who knows, or more then this, that we are dust,
And thither must return and be no more.⁷⁰

Adam tells Eve that her wish to take all the punishment on herself is another example of her previous desire for what she does not know or understand:

Unwarie, and too desirous, as before,
So now of what thou knowst not, who desir'st
The punishment all on thy self.⁷¹

Eve's melancholy rejoinder is simply, '*Adam*, by sad experiment I know | How little weight my words with thee can finde'.⁷² The pain of the coming exile of the pair from Eden is figured through the poignant idea that not only do they not know any other place, but no other place knows them:

all places else
Inhospitable appeer and desolate,
Nor knowing us nor known.⁷³

But Michael's rejoinder reassures Adam that God is present everywhere and in all things:

Adam, thou know'st Heav'n his, and all the Earth.
Not this Rock onely; his Omnipresence fills
Land, Sea, and Aire, and every kinde that lives.⁷⁴

Finally, Michael provides a rectification of fallen knowledge in the account of the history of mankind which he relates to Adam. The wretchedness of fallen man is revealed 'that thou mayst know | What miserie th' inabstinence of *Eve* | Shall bring on men', so this knowledge of the future is a form of moral and spiritual instruction, penance even, though leading ultimately to renewed hope.⁷⁵ Some men will

⁶⁸ *PL* x 786–9, 792–3.

⁶⁹ *PL* x 205–8.

⁷⁰ *PL* xi 198–200.

⁷¹ *PL* x 947–9.

⁷² *PL* x 967–8. *experiment*: experience.

⁷³ *PL* xi 305–7.

⁷⁴ *PL* xi 335–7.

⁷⁵ *PL* xi 475–7.

refuse knowledge of God, like 'the lawless Tyrant, who denies | To know thir God, or message to regard', and therefore 'Must be compell'd by Signes and Judgements dire'.⁷⁶ But there is the counter-example of Abraham, who, when commanded by God to leave his home 'straight obeys | Not knowing to what Land, yet firm believes'.⁷⁷ Michael's purgation of Adam's knowledge draws him to the final recognition of his and the world's redemption:

now I see
His day, in whom all Nations shall be blest,
Favour unmerited by me, who sought
Forbidd'n knowledge by forbidd'n means.⁷⁸

The Son is 'Now amplier known thy Saviour and thy Lord',⁷⁹ 'whom I now | Acknowledge my Redeemer ever blest'.⁸⁰ Adam will impart to Eve what he has heard from Michael,

Chiefly what may concern her Faith to know,
The great deliverance by her Seed to come
(For by the Womans Seed) on all Mankind.⁸¹

Consequently, says Adam,

Greatly instructed I shall hence depart,
Greatly in peace of thought, and have my fill
Of knowledge, what this Vessel can containe;
Beyond which was my folly to aspire.⁸²

To which Michael replies approvingly:

onely add
Deeds to thy knowledge answerable, add Faith,
Add vertue, Patience, Temperance, add Love,
By name to come call'd Charitie, the soul
Of all the rest.⁸³

For a holy life in the postlapsarian world knowledge of man's redemption is an essential starting point, but is not sufficient: to knowledge must be added the fruits of the Spirit which form the moral life: *immo obedientia et charitas ad scientiam*

⁷⁶ PL xii 173–5.

⁷⁷ PL xii 126–7.

⁷⁸ PL xii 276–9.

⁷⁹ PL xii 544.

⁸⁰ PL xii 572–3.

⁸¹ PL xii 599–601. Eve has also received illumination directly from God:

Whence thou returnst, and whither wentst, I know;
For God is also in sleep, and Dreams advise,
Which he hath sent propitious.

(PL xii 610–12)

⁸² PL xii 557–60.

⁸³ PL xii 581–5. Michael's list of virtues follows 2 Peter i 5–7; the apostle goes on to say in verse 8 that disciples who have these qualities 'shall neither be barren, nor vnfruitfull in the knowledge of our Lord Iesus Christ', and Milton may well have recalled this image of spiritual fruitfulness as he concluded his poem about the fruit of the forbidden tree.

*optima semper dux est.*⁸⁴ The moral struggle which is the fallen life is nevertheless a state in which, says God himself,

Upheld by me, yet once more he shall stand
On even ground against his mortal foe,
By me upheld, that he may know how frail
His fall'n condition is.⁸⁵

Two kinds of knowledge are joined here, for man will know that he is upheld by God precisely in order that he may know the fragility of his fallen condition: what man finally comes to know is the insufficiency of his own resources and his complete dependence upon his Creator.



What is the relationship between knowledge and wisdom? In *De Doctrina Christiana* Milton relates wisdom explicitly to man's search for knowledge of God's will. Fundamentally, *reverentia Domini sapientia dicitur*,⁸⁶ for *Sapientia est virtus qua voluntatem Dei studiose indagamus, omni diligentia cognitam habemus, eamque ad normam facta nostra omnia dirigimus*.⁸⁷ Its opposite, folly, is the disregarding of God's will,⁸⁸ a false persuasion of wisdom,⁸⁹ and, most particularly, folly is *rerum occultarum indagatio: ut cum primi parentes boni et mali scientiam vetitam indagabant*.⁹⁰

Several characters in *Paradise Lost* reduce wisdom to something lesser. Satan entices Eve to imagine that she can derive wisdom from the Tree of Knowledge. It is not a concept to which Satan attaches any value other than as a rhetorical counter. From the Satanic perspective, all that can, it seems, be comprehended about the divine wisdom is that it is a kind of cunning. Belial tells those of his peers who seek annihilation that God is unlikely to grant them their wish:

Will he, so wise, let loose at once his ire,
Belike through impotence, or unaware,
To give his Enemies thir wish, and end
Them in his anger[?]⁹¹

⁸⁴ 'Indeed, obedience and charity are always the best guide to knowledge' (*De Doctrina: OCW* viii 20–1).

⁸⁵ *PL* iii 178–81.

⁸⁶ 'reverence for God is called wisdom' (*De Doctrina: OCW* viii 926–7).

⁸⁷ 'Wisdom is the virtue by which we earnestly search out God's will, hold on to it with all diligence once it is learnt, and regulate all our actions according to that rule' (*De Doctrina: OCW* viii 924–5).

⁸⁸ *Huic opponitur stultitia, quae maximè quidem est voluntatis Dei ignoratio* ('Set against this [i.e. wisdom] is folly, which above all, in fact, is disregard of God's will') (*De Doctrina: OCW* viii 926–7). The editors of *OCW* point out that since Milton normally uses *ignorantia* to mean 'ignorance' his use of *ignoratio* here probably means 'ignoring', 'disregard' (viii 942): folly, then, is not being unaware of God's will, but being aware of it and disregarding it.

⁸⁹ *Et sapientiae falsa persuasio* ('[Folly is] also a false persuasion of wisdom') (*De Doctrina: OCW* viii 928–9).

⁹⁰ 'prying into hidden things, as when our first parents went prying into the forbidden knowledge of good and evil' (*De Doctrina: OCW* viii 928–9).

⁹¹ *PL* ii 155–8.

The kind of wisdom which Belial attributes here to God is the cunning of an enemy who will not miss any opportunity to inflict maximum pain on his enemies, one who is

Not more Almighty to resist our might
Then wise to frustrate all our plots and wiles.⁹²

A similar meaning for 'wise' is present when Belial refers back to their original revolt: was this 'wise' in the sense of having been well plotted, a good strategy?

this was at first resolv'd,
If we were wise, against so great a foe
Contending, and so doubtful what might fall.⁹³

And when Sin compliments Satan on having so skilfully seduced mankind, she calls this his 'vertue' and his 'Wisdom'.⁹⁴ The devils discuss wisdom in their philosophical debates, but fail to find it. Aquinas says that angelic knowledge is three-fold: firstly from nature; secondly from grace, giving knowledge of divine secrets; and thirdly also from grace, producing love for God, which is a form of wisdom. In the devils, the first form of knowledge is intact, the second lessened, and the third absent.⁹⁵ With such diminishment their discussion leaves them

in wandering mazes lost.
Of good and evil much they argu'd then,
Of happiness and final misery,
Passion and Apathie, and glory and shame,
Vain wisdom all, and false Philosophie.⁹⁶

The devils cannot philosophize because they cannot love wisdom.⁹⁷

Satan's own, narrowed, concept of wisdom becomes evident in his exchange with Gabriel. Responding to Gabriel's demand to know why he has broken out of Hell, he says:

Gabriel, thou hadst in Heav'n th' esteem of wise,
And such I held thee; but this question askt
Puts me in doubt. Lives ther who loves his pain?
Who would not, finding way, break loose from Hell,
Though thither doomd? Thou wouldst thyself, no doubt.⁹⁸

As Satan taunts Gabriel for not being wise, he equates wisdom with the pragmatic avoidance of pain, a parodic form of Epicureanism. Gabriel replies with a matching sarcasm which turns back on Satan his misappropriation of the idea of wisdom:

O loss of one in Heav'n to judge of wise,
Since *Satan* fell, whom follie overthrew,

⁹² *PL* ii 192–3.

⁹³ *PL* ii 201–3.

⁹⁴ *PL* x 372–4.

⁹⁵ *ST* I, q. 64, art. 1.

⁹⁶ *PL* ii 561–5.

⁹⁷ *The Divine Comedy of Dante Alighieri*, edited by Robert M. Durling and Ronald L. Martinez, 3 vols (New York, 1996–2011), i 430 (note on *Inferno* xvii 123). The word 'philosophy' means 'love of wisdom' in Greek.

⁹⁸ *PL* iv 886–90.

And now returns him from his prison scap't,
 Gravely in doubt whether to hold them wise
 Or not, who ask what boldness brought him hither
 Unlicenc't from his bounds in Hell prescrib'd;
 So wise he judges it to fly from pain
 However, and to scape his punishment.
 So judge thou still, presumptuous, till the wrauth,
 Which thou incurr'st by flying, meet thy flight
 Seavenfold, and scourge that wisdom back to Hell.⁹⁹

So much for Satanic wisdom.

As for divine wisdom, Satan at least knows what praise of the eternal wisdom should sound like, for he apes this when speaking to Uriel: 'wise are all his wayes',¹⁰⁰ he says, and speaking of the newly created worlds he exclaims:

But what created mind can comprehend
 Thir number, or the wisdom infinite
 That brought them forth, but hid thir causes deep.¹⁰¹

In the Judaeo-Christian tradition wisdom is an aspect of the Deity, specifically of the divine creativity; it is 'The divine essence, beholding and infinitely knowing himself and all things else . . . being Author of wisdom in all others'.¹⁰² When Satan spoke deceitfully to Uriel about the divine wisdom bringing forth the created world he was aping the hymn to Wisdom found in the Book of Proverbs, where Wisdom herself speaks of her presence with God and her role in creation:

The LORD possessed me in the beginning of his way, before his works of old.
 I was set vp from euerlasting, from the beginning, or euer the earth was.
 When *there were* no depthes, I was brought forth: when *there were* no fountaines
 abounding with water.
 Before the mountaines were settled: before the hilles, was I brought forth:
 While as yet he had not made the earth, nor the fields, nor the highest part of the
 dust of the world.
 When hee prepared the heauens, I was there: when he set a compasse vpon the face
 of the depth.
 When he established the cloudes aboue: when he strengthned the fountaines of the
 deepe.
 When he gaue to the sea his decree, that the waters should not passe his
 commandment: when he appointed the foundations of the earth.
 Then I was by him, *as one brought vp with him*: and I was daily *his* delight, reioycing
 alwayes before him.¹⁰³

In Christian teaching, wisdom is conceptualized as one of the manifestations of the divine nature in Christ,¹⁰⁴ the divine Word or *λόγος*, and even Milton—inclined

⁹⁹ *PL* iv 904–14. Gabriel's word 'follie' is a strong one: cf. n. 89.

¹⁰⁰ *PL* iii 680.

¹⁰¹ *PL* iii 705–7.

¹⁰² Wilson, p. 729.

¹⁰³ Proverbs viii 22–30.

¹⁰⁴ Cf. 1 Corinthians i 24, 30.

as he is towards an Arian understanding of the Son—has God address the Son as a manifestation of his wisdom:

Son of my bosom, Son who art alone
My word, my wisdom, and effectual might.¹⁰⁵

Seeking for divine aid for his own creativity Milton associates his chosen Muse Urania with heavenly wisdom in an echo of the end of the passage from Proverbs:

Thou with Eternal Wisdom didst converse,
Wisdom thy Sister, and with her didst play
In presence of th' Almighty Father, pleas'd
With thy Celestial Song.¹⁰⁶

Wisdom creates; more specifically, wisdom creates good out of evil. The angels praise God 'whose wisdom had ordain'd | Good out of evil to create',¹⁰⁷ and the narrator says that God

in all things wise and just,
Hinder'd not *Satan* to attempt the minde
Of Man.¹⁰⁸

So the divine wisdom, in bringing good out of evil, reverses the effects of the Fall, in which the seizing of a particular kind of knowledge led to disaster. True wisdom rectifies perverted knowledge.



Man as the image of God has something of the divine wisdom in Eden before the Fall, for

in thir looks Divine
The image of thir glorious Maker shon,
Truth, wisdom, Sanctitude severe and pure.¹⁰⁹

Whereas Adam confessed to Raphael that Eve's beauty seemed to him to triumph over wisdom, Eve is drawn away from an obsession with her own beauty to see

How beauty is excelld by manly grace
And wisdom, which alone is truly fair.¹¹⁰

Wisdom is true beauty, a lesson which Adam needs to learn.

After imparting much knowledge to Adam about the war in Heaven and the Fall of the angels, the creation of the world, the structure of the universe, and the modes of angelic love, Raphael's final message to him concerns wisdom: wisdom entails, in part, curbing idle speculation and concentrating upon the task of living well:

Heav'n is for thee too high
To know what passes there; be lowly wise:
Think onely what concernes thee and thy being;
...

¹⁰⁵ *PL* iii 169–70.

¹⁰⁸ *PL* x 7–9.

¹⁰⁶ *PL* vii 9–12.

¹⁰⁹ *PL* iv 291–3.

¹⁰⁷ *PL* vii 187–8.

¹¹⁰ *PL* iv 490–1.

To whom thus *Adam* cleerd of doubt, repli'd.

...

God hath bid dwell farr off all anxious cares,
And not molest us, unless we our selves
Seek them with wandring thoughts, and notions vain.
But apt the Mind or Fancie is to roave
Uncheckt, and of her roaving is no end;

...

That which before us lies in daily life,
Is the prime Wisdom, what is more, is fume,
Or emptiness, or fond impertinence.¹¹¹

Knowledge which aids daily life is a form of wisdom; but the anxious 'roaving'¹¹² after those things which God in his wisdom has hidden from us is debilitating, and incapacitates man's reason.¹¹³ It is no accident that Milton uses the same word, 'wandring', for this unbridled search for knowledge and for Eve's insistence on gardening alone.¹¹⁴

The two dialogues which precede the Fall—that between Adam and Eve, and the ensuing exchanges between the serpent and Eve—keep returning to the idea of wisdom. When Eve wishes to leave his side in order to garden alone, Adam says to her:

I from the influence of thy looks receive
Access in every Vertue, in thy sight
More wise, more watchful, stronger, if need were
Of outward strength.¹¹⁵

This is by no means as blatant a surrender of wisdom as the one which he confessed to Raphael, but there is nevertheless reason for anxiety here: it is from Eve's looks that Adam receives 'influence', which is a word used particularly for the inflowing of divine power into a person,¹¹⁶ and which Milton uses for 'the sacred influence | Of light' which streams from Heaven.¹¹⁷ It is also the way in which the author of *The Wisdom of Solomon* defines wisdom herself, as 'a pure influence flowing from the glory of the Almighty'.¹¹⁸ It is in the physical presence of Eve, not in the

¹¹¹ *PL* viii 172–95. *fume*: several senses seem appropriate here: smoke (*OED s.v. fume n. 1a*); irritating or stifling vapour (3b); 'A vapour or exhalation produced as an "excrement" of the body; *esp.* a noxious vapour supposed formerly to rise to the brain from the stomach' (4; cf. *PL* ix 1050); 'something comparable to smoke or vapour as being unsubstantial, transient, imaginary' (5); 'something which "goes to the head" and clouds the faculties or the reason' (6; cf. Shakespeare, *The Tempest* V i 67: 'Their rising senses | Begin to chace the ignorant fumes that mantle | Their clearer reason'). *fond*: foolish (cf. *PL* ix 999). Douglas Trevor discusses the knowledge and wisdom imparted to Adam by Raphael in his 'Milton and Solomon Education', in *Milton and the Jews*, edited by Douglas A. Brooks (Cambridge, 2008), pp. 83–104, at pp. 90–3.

¹¹² *PL* viii 189. The devils go 'roving on | In confus'd march forlorn' through the wastelands of Hell (*PL* ii 613–14).

¹¹³ Cf. *ignorari certè praestat quod Deus ignotum vult* ('it is assuredly best that what God wills to be unknown should not be known') (*De Doctrina*: *OCW* viii 480–1). The context is a discussion of the mystery of the nature of Christ.

¹¹⁴ *PL* ix 1136, 1146.

¹¹⁵ *PL* ix 309–12.

¹¹⁶ *OED s.v. influence n. 3*.

¹¹⁷ *PL* ii 1034–5; cf. iv 669; vii 375; viii 513; ix 107.

¹¹⁸ *Wisdom of Solomon* vii 25.

spiritual presence of God, that Adam reckons he becomes 'More wise'. As part of her argument for gardening alone Eve tells Adam:

Let us not then suspect our happy State
Left so imperfet by the Maker wise,
As not secure to single or combin'd.¹¹⁹

This reference to 'the Maker wise' may sound reverent, but what Eve is doing here is presuming to understand the ways of God, attributing to him what she herself considers to be wise. By the time that she comes to the point of decision she has convinced herself that she is pursuing not knowledge but wisdom, for the fruit is, she says, 'Of vertue to make wise'.¹²⁰

Afterwards, Eve extols

Experience . . .
Best guide; not following thee, I had remaind
In ignorance; thou op'nst Wisdoms way,
And giv'st access, though secret she retire.¹²¹

Unfortunately, 'experience' (meaning 'putting something to the test'¹²²) has not opened the way to wisdom, and later Eve will call this—with some understatement—a 'sad experiment'.¹²³ Explaining to Adam what has happened, Eve attributes wisdom to the serpent, saying:

the Serpent wise,
Or not restrain'd as wee, or not obeying.¹²⁴

Then Adam begins to use 'wise' in a way which is similarly tinged with Satanic usage when he says:

Nor can I think that God, Creator wise,
Though threatning, will in earnest so destroy
Us his prime Creatures, dignifi'd so high.¹²⁵

It is a much reduced, postlapsarian human perspective on wisdom which Adam expresses here, akin to the fallen angels' understanding of wisdom as pragmatic self-interest. He similarly redefines wisdom when he tells Eve that she is 'exact of taste, | And elegant, of Sapience no small part',¹²⁶ thus degrading 'sapience' (*sapientia*, wisdom¹²⁷) to mean 'judgement of sensual pleasure'. Too late Adam realizes that Eve was not, as he had imagined, wise:

but with the Serpent meeting
Fool'd and beguil'd, by him thou, I by thee,
To trust thee from my side, imagin'd wise.¹²⁸

¹¹⁹ *PL* ix 337–9.

¹²⁰ *PL* ix 778. *vertue*: power.

¹²¹ *PL* ix 809–10.

¹²² *OED* *s.v.* experience *n.* 1a; last example 1668.

¹²³ *PL* x 967.

¹²⁴ *PL* ix 867–8.

¹²⁵ *PL* ix 938–40. As Eve had adopted the serpent's vocabulary in her pursuit of 'wisdom', now Adam in calling God 'threatning' unconsciously recalls the serpent's term 'the Threatner' (ix 687).

¹²⁶ *PL* ix 1017–18. *elegant*: having superior taste or discernment (*OED*³ *s.v.* elegant *adj.* 5a).

¹²⁷ 'Sapience' was specifically applied to Wisdom as an attribute of God, and as a designation of the second person of the Trinity (*OED* *s.v.* sapience *n.* 1b). The *OED* cites this particular use as the first example of the sense 'correct taste and judgement' (1c), though the prevailing senses act to judge this innovatory usage.

¹²⁸ *PL* x 879–81.

In this mood Adam even questions the wisdom of God, exclaiming:

O why did God,
 Creator wise, that peopl'd highest Heav'n
 With Spirits Masculine, create at last
 This noveltie on Earth.¹²⁹

though he does credit God with some merely pragmatic provision when he tells Eve that her idea of seeking refuge in suicide is futile because God 'Hath wiselier arm'd his vengeful ire then so | To be forestall'd'.¹³⁰ Like Belial, Adam now uses 'wise' to mean merely 'crafty'.

Michael begins his education of Adam by making it clear that he cannot blame Eve for his Fall, for

From Mans effeminate slackness it begins,
 Said th' Angel, who should better hold his place
 By wisdom, and superiour gifts receav'd.¹³¹

It is according to the order of things that the wiser should govern the less wise,¹³² and in this Adam has failed. Eventually, under the tutelage of Michael, Adam comes to recognize that the way God works in the fallen world is through weakness rather than strength,

by things deemd weak
 Subverting worldly strong, and worldly wise
 By simply meek.¹³³

To be 'worldly wise' is different *toto caelo* from the kind of wisdom, informed by the Gospels, which values humility. Humility is one of the key lessons, perhaps the key lesson, which Adam has to learn, and Michael tells him:

This having learnt, thou hast attained the summe
 Of wisdom; hope no higher, though all the Starrs
 Thou knewst by name, and all th' ethereal Powers,
 All secrets of the deep, all Natures works,
 Or works of God in Heav'n, Aire, Earth, or Sea.¹³⁴



In the world as it is after the Fall, the acquisition of knowledge is a laborious search after truth. In part, this is a scholarly quest, for

The end then of Learning is to repair the ruines of our first Parents by regaining to know God aright, and out of that knowledge to love him, to imitate him, to be like him, as we may the nearest by possessing our souls of true vertue, which being united to the heavenly grace of faith makes up the highest perfection. But...our understanding cannot in this body found it self but on sensible things, nor arrive so clearly to the knowledge of God and things invisible, as by orderly conning over the visible and inferior creature.¹³⁵

¹²⁹ PL x 888–91.

¹³⁰ PL x 1023–4.

¹³¹ PL xi 634–6.

¹³² Milton makes this point in *Tetrachordon*, where he concedes that if the wife 'exceed her husband in prudence and dexterity, and he contentedly yeeld...then a superior and more naturall law comes in, that the wiser should govern the lesse wise, whether male or female' (*Works* iv 77).

¹³³ PL xii 567–9.

¹³⁴ PL xii 575–9.

¹³⁵ *Of Education: Works* iv 277. *sensible*: perceptible to the senses. Yet there are limitations to schol-

Our postlapsarian quest for knowledge, then, should have as its aim knowledge of God in order to love and imitate him, that is, to obey his will as Adam and Eve failed to do, and the path to knowledge of God begins with the orderly study of two books, the book of Nature and the Bible. Although all men have, through the innate faculty of conscience or right reason, the ability to know something of God, *Rectè autem de Deo sentire, natura vel ratione sola duce sine verbo aut nuntio Dei, potest nemo*.¹³⁶ The path to knowledge provided in Scripture is open to all, regardless of their learning or occupation, for it is not, in its essentials, an obscure text, since 'that which is most necessary to be known is most easie'.¹³⁷ In this context the opposite of that knowledge which man gains through the study of Scripture is mere opinion, particularly the credulous opinions of the multitude, and the enlightened observer can see 'who lives by faith and certain knowledge, and who by credulity and the prevailing opinion of the age'.¹³⁸ And while amongst the rabble mere opinion is valueless, indeed, corrupting, 'opinion in good men is but knowledge in the making'.¹³⁹

To attain true knowledge, specifically true knowledge of good and evil, is a laborious task, as Milton explained in *Areopagitica*,¹⁴⁰ and it requires the self-knowledge of

such a one as is a true knower of himselfe, and himselfe in whom contemplation and practice, wit, prudence, fortitude, and eloquence must be rarely met, both to comprehend the hidden causes of things, and span in his thoughts all the various effects that passion or complexion can worke in mans nature.¹⁴¹

Milton's prime example of the 'true knower of himselfe' is the Son in *Paradise Regain'd*. He recalls his baptism, when he heard the voice from Heaven which

pronounc'd me his,
Me his beloved Son, in whom alone
He was well pleas'd; by which I knew the time
Now full.¹⁴²

What the Son knows is that the word of the Father indicates that the present time is 'full', that is, 'complete, perfect',¹⁴³ a moment of human time fully opened to the

arly studies, and, remembering his dissatisfaction with the Cambridge curriculum of his youth, Milton would surely have given a wry smile if he had encountered the title of the Quaker pamphlet by George Whitehead called *The Key of Knowledge Not Found in the University-Library of Cambridge* (London, 1660). For the context of this pamphlet see my 'Thomas Smith: A Beleaguered Humanist of the Interregnum', *Bulletin of the Institute of Historical Research* 56 (1983) 180–94.

¹³⁶ 'Yet no one can have a right perception of God with nature or reason as sole guide, without God's word or his messenger' (*De Doctrina*: OCV viii 26–7).

¹³⁷ *Reformation*: Works iii 32.

¹³⁸ *Reason*: Works iii 222.

¹³⁹ *Areopagitica*: Works iv 341.

¹⁴⁰ *Areopagitica*: Works iv 310–11, quoted on p. 119.

¹⁴¹ *Reason*: Works iii 186. *complexion*: bodily habit or constitution, deriving from the combination of humours; constitution or habit of mind, disposition, temperament (*OED* s.v. *complexion* n. 2a, 3).

¹⁴² *PR* i 284–7.

¹⁴³ *OED* s.v. *full* adj. 7a. There may also be a solemn pun here on 'full' meaning 'to baptize', an obsolete usage last recorded in 1531 (*OED* s.v. *full*. v').

action of God.¹⁴⁴ It is because the Son is likewise fully opened to the action of God that he is able to say:

And now by some strong motion I am led
 Into this Wilderness, to what intent
 I learn not yet, perhaps I need not know;
 For what concerns my knowledge God reveals.¹⁴⁵

By contrast Satan offers him worldly knowledge, holding out for his emulation the knowledge and wisdom of the classical pagan world, and urging him:

Be famous then
 By wisdom; as thy Empire must extend,
 So let extend thy mind o're all the world,
 In knowledge, all things in it comprehend,
 All knowledge is not couch't in *Moses* Law,
 The *Pentateuch* or what the Prophets wrote,
 The *Gentiles* also know, and write, and teach
 To admiration, led by Natures light.¹⁴⁶

But such knowledge—an imperializing knowledge which rejects, or at least subordinates, the law of Moses and turns to the light of Nature—is not for the Son. He tells the Tempter that there is a better kind of empire and a higher knowledge for him to impart:

Yet he who reigns within himself, and rules
 Passions, Desires, and Fears, is more a King;
 Which every wise and vertuous man attains:
 ...
 But to guide Nations in the way of truth
 By saving Doctrine, and from errour lead
 To know, and knowing worship God aright,
 Is yet more Kingly.¹⁴⁷

Thus are knowledge and wisdom redefined, rectified, and redeemed.

¹⁴⁴ This understanding of time is often referred to as *καίρως*: see Chapter 24 *NEW AND OLD*, p. 359 n. 59.

¹⁴⁵ *PR* i 290–3.

¹⁴⁶ *PR* iv 221–8.

¹⁴⁷ *PR* ii 466–8, 473–6.

22

Love

In loving thou dost well, in passion not,
Wherein true Love consists not; love refines
The thoughts, and heart enlarges, hath his seat
In Reason, and is judicious, is the scale
By which to heav'nly Love thou maist ascend,
Not sunk in carnal pleasure.

Paradise Lost viii 588–93



The story of *Paradise Lost* is the story of the loss and recovery of love. In prelapsarian Eden the love of Adam and Eve, though not untroubled, is offered to readers as exemplary: caring, mutual, and sexual.¹ But their understanding of love is limited—as is ours—and Milton seeks to define and redefine ‘love’ as the poem progresses. ‘Love,’ says Milton, ‘hath a brother wondrous like him, call’d *Anteros*: whom while he seeks all about, his chance is to meet with many fals and faining Desires that wander singly up and down in his likenes.’² So one must learn to distinguish Love from his impersonations. Repeatedly ‘love’ is revealed through contrasts, not only by contrast with its obvious antonyms such as ‘hate’ but also by being distinguished from those versions of love which lead man astray—notably passion, and the subjection of the reason to sexual desire and to sensual pleasures.³ It is also distinguished from those impulses and courses of action which lead man away from mutuality, and these include self-love—either of a narcissistic or of an ambitious character—and subjection to an inferior. The antithesis of love in *Paradise Lost* is more frequently self-love than it is hate.⁴ Love is typically placed by Milton within the framework of obedience, for love is expressed through hierarchy: Eve’s

¹ For an account of the tradition of interpreting the presentation of love and sex in Genesis, and Milton’s relation to that tradition, see James Grantham Turner, *One Flesh: Paradisal Marriage and Sexual Relations in the Age of Milton* (Oxford, 1987).

² *Divorce: Works* iii 401. The phrasing suggests the influence on Milton’s thought of Spenser’s *FQ*, in which characters are often presented with false simulacra of true virtues, whose real identity they have to discern.

³ For the place of passion in Milton’s thinking in *PL* see Christopher Tilmouth, *Passion’s Triumph over Reason: A History of the Moral Imagination from Spenser to Rochester* (Oxford, 2007), esp. pp. 190–209; and his ‘Milton on Knowing Good from Evil’, in *John Milton: Life, Writing, Reputation*, edited by Paul Hammond and Blair Worden (Oxford, 2010), pp. 43–65.

⁴ For self-love see Chapter 28 SELF-. For Milton’s conception of the antipathy between love and hate see Michael Lieb, *Theological Milton: Deity, Discourse and Heresy in the Miltonic Canon* (Pittsburgh, Penn., 2006), p. 175.

subordination to Adam is a sign of her loving acceptance of her place in the order of creation, and her revolt against it is a rejection of true love, both love for Adam and love for God. Man's obedience to the divine will is a sign of his love for God, and this obedience is also, it seems, a condition of God's continued love for mankind.

Lest Miltonic love seem only a moral testing ground, we should note how often 'love' is associated with 'joy' in the vocabulary of *Paradise Lost*. As God looks down from Heaven in Book III he sees

Our two first Parents, yet the only two
Of mankind, in the happie Garden plac't,
Reaping immortal fruits of joy and love,
Uninterrupted joy, unrivald love.⁵

These, the poetry tells us, are the true fruits which Adam and Eve should be enjoying, the immortal fruits of joy and love, not the mortal and forbidden fruit of the Tree of Knowledge. The 'un-' prefixes simultaneously evoke and ward off dangers: there is no interruption to their joy, no rival in their love; but there will be. Joy and love are repeatedly evoked together: prostitutes offer only 'loveless, joyless' encounters;⁶ the angels meet in heavenly 'Festivals of joy and love';⁷ eventually the Son's triumph will see 'Joy and Love triumphing, and fair Truth'.⁸ Having accustomed us to this bond between joy and love, Milton expects us to see a distortion both of love and of joy when Eve uses these very words to persuade Adam to take the forbidden fruit, saying, 'Thou therefore also taste, that equal Lot | May joyne us, equal Joy, as equal Love'.⁹ Afterwards, manifesting a debased, deluded form of joy, and celebrating what is now a debased form of love, she 'embrac'd him, and for joy | Tenderly wept, much won that he his Love | Had so enobl'd'.¹⁰ At this point in the poem Eve has redefined 'love' and 'joy' as signifiers of Adam's subjection to her. For Satan in Hell there is

neither joy nor love, but fierce desire,
Among our other torments not the least,
Still unfill'd with pain of longing pines.¹¹

and he reflects that 'Save what is in destroying, other joy | To me is lost'.¹² This is an example of how Milton shows us some of the meanings of 'love' by associating it repeatedly with other terms: linking it with 'joy', and distinguishing it from desire and unfulfilled longing.¹³ Elsewhere in the poem he links 'love' with such concepts as purity, reason, obedience, freedom, and zeal, as we shall see.

The prelapsarian love of Adam and Eve is at once mutual and hierarchical.¹⁴ Mutual, since marriage was, so *The Book of Common Prayer* tells us, 'ordained for

⁵ *PL* iii 65–8.

⁶ *PL* iv 766.

⁷ *PL* vi 94.

⁸ *PL* iii 338.

⁹ *PL* ix 881–2.

¹⁰ *PL* ix 990–2.

¹¹ *PL* iv 509–11.

¹² *PL* iv 478–9.

¹³ Eve, as she and Adam tentatively rediscover love in Book X, will describe the pain of unfulfilled longing when she suggests that they might find it too difficult to abstain from sex after the Fall, even though they fear that its consequences would be the creation of fallen offspring: see p. 339.

¹⁴ See Turner, *One Flesh*, pp. 216–22 and 283 for a discussion of Milton's handling of the question of Eve's subordination or equality.

the mutual society, help and comfort that the one ought to have of the other, both in prosperity and adversity'.¹⁵ Eve is weaned from incipient self-love when she is led away from admiring her own reflection which, in a false form of mutuality, answers her gaze, for 'Pleas'd it returnd as soon with answering looks | Of sympathie and love'.¹⁶ She is brought out of this self-enclosed narcissism to meet Adam and find a truly mutual love, though self-love will re-emerge later as a crucial element in Eve's transgression. Before the Fall, however, Adam and Eve help each other in the work of tending the Garden, and reflect in their evening prayer that they

in our appointed work imployd
Have finisht happie in our mutual help
And mutual love, the Crown of all our bliss
Ordaind by thee.¹⁷

Mutual love means, *inter alia*, mutual help, but also mutual honour, for honour is reciprocal and is not simply accorded by the lower party to the higher. As the narrator exclaims, 'O when meet now | Such pairs, in Love and mutual Honour joyn'd?'¹⁸ And it is the mutual love of Adam and Eve, 'Imparadist in one anothers arms',¹⁹ which so pains Satan as he watches them from his solitary viewpoint.

Mutuality is signalled by the proliferation of words beginning with the Latin prefix *co-* which are a feature of the poem.²⁰ Adam asks God to end his solitude by providing a 'consort' (*con* + *sors*, lot)²¹ for him and 'Collateral love' (from *co* + Latin *latus*, side);²² 'Collateral' means both 'side by side',²³ evoking the physical lovemaking of the pair, but also 'accompanying', so that procreation has love as its accompaniment. Eve looks at Adam 'with eyes | of conjugal attraction' (*con* + *jug-*, root of *jungere*, to join),²⁴ while Adam responds with 'conjugal Caresses'²⁵ and Eve does not refuse 'the Rites | Mysterious of connubial Love' (*con* + *nubere*, to marry).²⁶ Satan, however, seeks to disturb their 'Conjugal Love'.²⁷ The pair 'commune' (*com* + *munis*, debt) to organize their work,²⁸ and frequently engage in 'converse' (*con* + *versari*, to turn): Adam tells God that he cannot be satisfied by 'conversing' with the animals,²⁹

¹⁵ 'The Form of Solemnization of Matrimony' (1662) in *The Book of Common Prayer: The Texts of 1549, 1559, and 1662*, edited by Brian Cummings (Oxford, 2011), p. 435.

¹⁶ *PL* iv 464–5.

¹⁷ *PL* iv 726–9.

¹⁸ *PL* viii 57–8.

¹⁹ *PL* iv 506.

²⁰ The prefix *co-* derives from the Latin prefixes *co-* and *con-*; the general sense is 'together', 'in company', 'in common', 'joint', '-ly', 'equal', '-ly', 'reciprocally', 'mutually' (*OED s.v. co- prefix*).

²¹ *PL* iv 448, 610; vii 50, 529; viii 392.

²² *PL* viii 426.

²³ *PL* viii 426; *OED s.v. collateral* 1a, 2a. Cf. the phrase 'collateral glorie' (*PL* x 86) to describe the Son in his relation to God: a small but significant link between the two examples of union. Cf. also 'Strait side by side were laid' (*PL* iv 741).

²⁴ *PL* iv 492–3.

²⁵ *PL* viii 56.

²⁶ *PL* iv 742–3. *connubial*: this is the *OED*'s first example of the word except for its appearance in Thomas Blount's dictionary of rare words *Glossographia* (1656).

²⁷ *PL* ix 263.

²⁸ *PL* ix 201. *commune*: 'talk together, confer, consult' (*OED s.v. commune v. 1a*), but the word also has a spiritual significance: 'to communicate intimately... esp. at a deep level of mental or spiritual engagement; to attain a state of rapport and spiritual unity' (1c), so the bond between the couple is (at least at this point in Book IX) a deeply spiritual one.

²⁹ *PL* viii 432.

and seeks 'By conversation with his like to help, | Or solace his defects'.³⁰ 'With thee conversing I forget all time', says Eve.³¹ Facing the choice whether or not to take the fruit at Eve's hands, Adam reflects that he cannot bear to forgo 'Thy sweet Converse and Love so dearly joyn'd'.³² The word 'converse' derives from the Latin deponent verb *conversari*, 'to turn oneself about, to move to and fro, pass one's life, dwell, abide, live somewhere, keep company with';³³ in early-modern English the word was acquiring its modern meaning of 'to engage in conversation with', 'to convey the thoughts reciprocally in talk', as Dr Johnson has it,³⁴ but its primary meaning, reflecting its etymological senses, was still 'to dwell, to keep company with' and also 'to have sexual intercourse with'.³⁵ The 'sweet Converse' with Eve which Adam cannot bear to relinquish is therefore the fulness of their mutuality: dwelling together, speaking together, and enjoying sex together. After she has taken the fruit, Eve, thinking that she has acquired superior knowledge, wonders whether she might keep this knowledge to herself 'Without Copartner'.³⁶ But, as Adam recognizes, what she has done is to engage herself to another partner, for now Death will 'Consort with thee';³⁷ and like 'converse', 'consort' means both 'keep company with' and 'have sexual intercourse with',³⁸ so this is a grim indication of how profoundly Eve has changed the meaning of their collateral love. She has become the companion and partner of Death, 'Defact', defloured, and now to Death devote'.³⁹ Later Adam laments the misfortunes which arise from 'conjunction with this Sex'.⁴⁰

Love is mutual, but also hierarchical. When Adam tells Raphael about their harmonious marriage he explains what it is in Eve that particularly delights him:

those graceful acts,
Those thousand decencies that daily flow
From all her words and actions mixt with Love
And sweet compliance, which declare unfeign'd
Union of Mind, or in us both one Soule;
Harmonie to behold in wedded pair
More grateful then harmonious sound to the eare.⁴¹

Eve's love for Adam is manifest in a 'thousand decencies', and the various contemporary meanings of the word 'decencies' are in play here. The *Oxford English Dictionary* defines the word in the plural as meaning 'decent or becoming acts or observances; the established observances of decent life or decorum; proprieties'.⁴² Eve's words and actions are therefore appropriate to her station and, with connotations which applied in the seventeenth century to the idea of 'decency', they are appropriate to the occasion, to her rank or social status, to orderly social life, to beauty and

³⁰ *PL* viii 418–19. ³¹ *PL* iv 639; for 'converse' and its cognates cf. also v 230; viii 252; ix 247.

³² *PL* ix 909. ³³ *OED s.v. converse v*, etymology.

³⁴ *OED s.v. converse v* 5. ³⁵ *OED s.v. converse v* 1, 2a, 2b.

³⁶ *PL* ix 821. The only other use of this word in *PL* is at i 265, when Satan speaks of the 'associates and copartners of our loss'.

³⁷ *PL* ix 954. ³⁸ *OED s.v. consort v* 3, 5c. ³⁹ *PL* ix 901.

⁴⁰ *PL* x 898. ⁴¹ *PL* viii 600–6. ⁴² *OED s.v. decency n* 4a.

proportion of form, to the requirements of modesty and delicacy.⁴³ Eve's 'decencies' are her attractions, but what makes her attractive is in part her conformity to her subordinate position: hence the perhaps unexpected word 'compliance', which combines the senses 'desire to please' with 'submission to another's will',⁴⁴ an illustration of the intimate link in Milton's thinking between mutuality and order: the pleasures of mutual love and wedded harmony come to fruition within an order in which each knows his or her place and acts accordingly. The resulting 'Union of Mind, or in us both one Soule' is exactly that form of mental and spiritual union which Milton in his divorce tracts sees as the essential basis of marriage.⁴⁵ Beyond that—as Pseudo-Dionysius explained—the purpose of the cosmos and the function of the hierarchies are to draw the world to God;⁴⁶ and therefore in so far as either Adam or Eve seek to disturb the hierarchy of creation they are drawing the world away from God.

For the relationship between Adam and Eve is part of a great chain of being which is also a chain of love.⁴⁷ Raphael is concerned that Adam only partly acknowledges this, and that he is too responsive to Eve's sexual attractiveness to be able to see properly the necessarily ordered relationship between them. For, as Adam admits, he knows that Eve is outwardly a less perfect image of the divine than he is himself, and inwardly less gifted with mental faculties than he, and yet he cannot help being seduced by her allure into considering her a source of wisdom. This is a passage which we have already encountered:⁴⁸

when I approach
Her loveliness, so absolute she seems
And in her self compleat, so well to know
Her own, that what she wills to do or say,
Seems wisest, vertuousest, discreetest, best;
All higher knowledge in her presence falls
Degraded, Wisdom in discourse with her
Looses discount'nanc't, and like folly shewes;
Authority and Reason on her waite,
As one intended first, not after made
Occasionally; and to consummate all,
Greatness of mind and nobleness thir seat
Build in her loveliest, and create an awe
About her, as a guard Angelic plac't.⁴⁹

The mutations of 'love' here are significant. Adam's judgement is affected by Eve's 'loveliness', her physical attractiveness which renders her 'absolute'. The principal meaning of 'absolute' in this context seems to be 'free from imperfection or

⁴³ Various senses and connotations in *OED s.v. decency n.*

⁴⁴ *OED s.v. compliance n.*

⁴⁵ There is also, in Milton's thinking, a hierarchy of aspects of marriage, in that some are more important than others: 'Dr. Ames defines it *an individual conjunction of one man and one woman, to communion of body and mutual society of life*; But this perverts the order of God, who in the institution places meet help and society of life before communion of body' (*Tetrachordon: Works* iv 102–3). Here 'order' seems to mean both 'hierarchy of priorities' and 'command'.

⁴⁶ *Patrologia Graeca* iii 165.

⁴⁷ See Chapter 10 EQUAL, pp. 101–2.

⁴⁸ See pp. 157–8, 308.

⁴⁹ *PL* viii 546–59.

deficiency; perfect, consummate',⁵⁰ which an enraptured lover might well think Eve to be; and yet the word also means 'free from all external restraint or interference; unrestricted, unlimited', and 'not dependent on or affected by anything outside oneself; autonomous; self-sufficient'.⁵¹ This double meaning creates an ominous shadow to Adam's praise of her, because it will be Eve's desire to be unrestricted by her subordination to Adam, and unrestricted by God's prohibition on the Tree, that will lead to her Fall. 'Greatness of mind and nobleness thir seat | Build in her loveliest' says that these abstract qualities find their most beautiful residence in her, but there is a secondary meaning which is that such qualities are lovely because he finds them in her: her beauty, in effect, defines them.

Raphael in his reply reminds Adam of what, in effect, he already knows:

For what admir'st thou, what transports thee so,
 An outside? fair no doubt, and worthy well
 Thy cherishing, thy honouring, and thy love,
 Not thy subjection: weigh with her thy self;
 Then value: Oft times nothing profits more
 Then self esteem, grounded on just and right
 Well manag'd; of that skill the more thou know'st,
 The more she will acknowledge thee her Head,
 And to realities yield all her shows:
 Made so adorn for thy delight the more,
 So awful, that with honour thou maist love
 Thy mate, who sees when thou art seen least wise.
 But if the sense of touch whereby mankind
 Is propagated seem such dear delight
 Beyond all other, think the same voutsaf't
 To Cattel and each Beast; which would not be
 To them made common and divulg'd, if aught
 Therein enjoy'd were worthy to subdue
 The Soule of Man, or passion in him move.
 What higher in her societie thou findst
 Attractive, human, rational, love still;
 In loving thou dost well, in passion not,
 Wherein true Love consists not; love refines
 The thoughts, and heart enlarges, hath his seat
 In Reason, and is judicious, is the scale
 By which to heav'nly Love thou maist ascend,
 Not sunk in carnal pleasure, for which cause
 Among the Beasts no Mate for thee was found.⁵²

⁵⁰ *OED*³ *s.v.* absolute *adj.* 8a.

⁵¹ *OED*³ *s.v.* absolute *adj.* 4a, 6.

⁵² *PL* viii 567–94. Raphael repeats this injunction, again linking love and obedience, when he says:

Be strong, live happie, and love, but first of all
 Him whom to love is to obey, and keep
 His great command; take heed least Passion sway
 Thy Judgement to do aught, which else free Will
 Would not admit.

(*PL* viii 633–7)

Among the key words here is 'scale': a ladder or staircase, like the ladder which Jacob saw in his dream, linking Earth with Heaven, on which angels were ascending and descending;⁵³ it is also 'a graduated series of beings extending from the lowest forms of existence to the highest'.⁵⁴ Love is rational and refines the reason, and is itself the means by which man may ascend to contemplation of the divine, as Plato taught.⁵⁵ It was by reading Plato, Milton records, that he learnt

of chastity and love, I meane that which is truly so, whose charming cup is only vertue which she bears in her hand to those who are worthy. The rest are cheated with a thick intoxicating potion which a certaine Sorceresse the abuser of loves name carries about; and how the first and chiefeest office of love, begins and ends in the soule, producing those happy twins of her divine generation knowledge and vertue.⁵⁶

If Adam is fixated upon Eve's physical beauty he risks drinking the sorceress' intoxicating potion rather than the charming cup of virtue; he thus becomes a slave to passion rather than love, degrades wisdom and higher knowledge to a subordinate position, and degrades himself too from his own proper rung in the divine and natural order. He loses his place in the scale. What Adam ought to do is to love Eve in the sense of devoting himself to cherishing and honouring her as the marriage service enjoins,⁵⁷ loving that which is rational and human in her, not that which is animal and carnal. After the Fall, Michael will remind Adam that in following Eve and taking the fruit he mistook his proper role, for Eve was, says Michael,

lovely to attract
Thy Love, not thy Subjection, and her Gifts
Were such as under Government well seem'd,
Unseemly to beare rule, which was thy part
And person, had'st thou known thy self aright.⁵⁸

Adam has mistaken love for subjection, as a result of not truly knowing himself.

Do physical attraction and its sexual expression have no place, then, in prelapsarian love? Milton does indeed envisage sex in paradise before the Fall, unlike many previous expositors of Genesis,⁵⁹ so the Fall is not a lapse into sexuality, but a fall away from a sexuality which was both hierarchical and pure, as we see in this passage from Book IV:

So spake our general Mother, and with eyes
Of conjugal attraction unprov'd,
And meek surrender, half embracing leand
On our first Father, half her swelling Breast

⁵³ *OED s.v. scale n.* 3; Genesis xxvii 12, also alluded to in *PL* iii 510–15.

⁵⁴ *OED s.v. scale n.* 3 5a.

⁵⁵ For Milton's interest in the Platonic doctrine of love see Irene Samuel, *Plato and Milton* (Ithaca, N.Y., 1947), ch. 7.

⁵⁶ *Apology: Works* iii 305; Milton is refuting allegations that he frequented brothels.

⁵⁷ In *The Book of Common Prayer* (1662) the priest asks the man if he will 'honour' his bride, and he in turn promises 'to love and to cherish' her (pp. 435–6). Fowler notes *ad loc.* that 'honour' and 'cherish' derive here from Ephesians v 29 and 1 Peter iii 7.

⁵⁸ *PL* x 152–6.

⁵⁹ See Turner, *One Flesh, passim*.

Naked met his under the flowing Gold
 Of her loose tresses hid: he in delight
 Both of her Beauty and submissive Charms
 Smil'd with superior Love, as *Jupiter*
 On *Juno* smiles, when he impregns the Clouds
 That shed *May* Flowers; and press'd her Matron lip
 With kisses pure.⁶⁰

Here the sexual attraction between Adam and Eve is framed by a doubled insistence on Eve's maternal character ('Mother ... Matron'⁶¹) and a reminder that this is married sex: it is 'conjugal attraction' and therefore 'unreprov'd'. This is also hierarchical sex, because she surrenders meekly to Adam, and Adam delights in her 'submissive Charms',⁶² himself manifesting 'superior Love' like Jupiter with Juno. (This is not an altogether propitious analogy, given Jove's penchant for sexual adventures with mortal women, and Juno's jealous behaviour.) Milton is also anxious to insist that prelapsarian sex is 'pure', 'unlibidinous',⁶³ dismissing

Whatever Hypocrites austere talk
 Of puritie and place and innocence,
 Defaming as impure what God declares
 Pure, and commands to som, leaves free to all.⁶⁴

As so often the poem insists upon wresting its terminology away from quotidian or partisan usage and relocating it within Milton's own conceptual and semantic field: 'pure' is wrested from the Puritans and redefined as part of the Miltonic redefinition of 'love'.⁶⁵

Milton's definition of love appears most lyrically in the passage in praise of wedded love:

Haile wedded Love, mysterious Law, true source
 Of human offspring, sole proprietie,
 In Paradise of all things common else.
 By thee adulterous lust was driv'n from men
 Among the bestial herds to raunge, by thee
 Founded in Reason, Loyal, Just, and Pure,
 Relations dear, and all the Charities
 Of Father, Son, and Brother first were known.
 Farr be it, that I should write thee sin or blame,
 Or think thee unbecfitting holiest place,
 Perpetual Fountain of Domestic sweets,
 Whose bed is undefil'd and chaste pronounc't,
 Present, or past, as Saints and Patriarchs us'd.
 Here Love his golden shafts imploies, here lights

⁶⁰ *PL* iv 492–502.

⁶¹ *OED*³ records this as the first use of 'matron' used attributively.

⁶² For contemporary meanings of 'charms' see Chapter 7 *DESIRE*, p. 68 n. 33.

⁶³ *PL* v 449. This is the *OED*'s only example of 'unlibidinous'. ⁶⁴ *PL* iv 744–7.

⁶⁵ The emphasis on purity returns when Raphael answers Adam's enquiry about angelic sex: 'Whatever pure thou in the body enjoy'st | (And pure thou wert created) we enjoy | In eminence' (*PL* viii 622–4).

His constant Lamp, and waves his purple wings,
 Reigns here and revels; not in the bought smile
 Of Harlots, loveless, joyless, undeard,
 Casual fruition, nor in Court Amours
 Mixt Dance, or wanton Mask, or Midnight Bal,
 Or Serenate, which the starv'd Lover sings
 To his proud fair, best quitted with disdain.
 These lulld by Nightingales imbracing slept,
 And on thir naked limbs the flourie roof
 Showrd Roses, which the Morn repair'd. Sleep on
 Blest pair; and O yet happiest if ye seek
 No happier state, and know to know no more.⁶⁶

'Law' is perhaps a surprising word here, but this may in part be Milton's riposte to the antinomian attitudes of his radical contemporaries who rejected all law save that of the spirit, as they themselves interpreted it, and who were alleged to share sexual partners.⁶⁷ Instead, this wedded love is 'sole propriety, | In Paradise of all things common else', the sole instance in Eden of private property.⁶⁸ This love is a 'mysterious' law, 'mysterious' in the sense that it belongs 'to religious mysteries . . . to that which is divine and hence beyond human understanding'.⁶⁹ 'Founded in Reason', this love is nevertheless sexual, as Milton shows not only in his definition of wedded love as 'true source | Of human offspring' but through images which are at once mythic exaltations of love and precise erotic evocations of female and male bodies, the 'Perpetual Fountain of Domestic sweets' where 'Love his golden shafts imploies'. This is love rescued from the Puritan, the antinomian, and the libertine. The paen to married love ends, however, with a warning: Adam and Eve are 'happiest if ye seek | No happier state, and know to know no more'.⁷⁰ It is a warning that even if love is its own law, love nevertheless entails obedience.

Love entails both freedom and obedience. When God explains the necessity of free will for man, he says, 'Not free, what proof could they have givn sincere | Of true allegiance, constant Faith or Love'.⁷¹ Only if man's 'no' is a genuine possibility does his 'yes' have value, and then his obedience will be loving and not enforced. In Book V Raphael warns Adam that the pair may dwell in an earthly or heavenly paradise only

If ye be found obedient, and retain
 Unalterably firm his love entire
 Whose progenie you are.⁷²

What does it mean for Adam and Eve to 'retain' God's love? It seems that obedience is the way to keep hold of God's love. The passage echoes Isaiah's words to the people of Israel, 'If yee be willing and obedient, yee shall eate the good of the land.

⁶⁶ *PL* iv 750–75.

⁶⁷ The Ranters were represented as engaging in group nudity and having sexual partners in common: see J. C. Davis, *Fear, Myth and History: The Ranters and the Historians* (Cambridge, 1986).

⁶⁸ *propriety*: approx. *OED*³ *s.v.* *propriety* 4a: 'right of possession or use; ownership, proprietorship'.

⁶⁹ *OED*³ *s.v.* *mysterious adj.* 3, quoting this example.

⁷⁰ See Chapter 20 *IF AND PERHAPS*, pp. 289–90.

⁷¹ *PL* iii 103–4.

⁷² *PL* v 501–3.

But if yee refuse and rebell, yee shalbe deuoured with the sword'.⁷³ But Milton adds to this citation the idea of love, so that it is more than the physical fruits of the land that are at stake; rather, Raphael raises the possibility that man might choose to abandon God's love through disobedience. Adam replies:

What meant that caution joind, *if ye be found*
Obedient? can we want obedience then
 To him, or possibly his love desert
 Who formd us from the dust, and plac'd us here
 Full to the utmost measure of what bliss
 Human desires can seek or apprehend?⁷⁴

At this point in the poem Adam is shocked at the possibility that they might desert God's love, believing that they already enjoy all that they could possibly desire or understand, and indeed it is not Adam but Eve who desires more, and who grasps at what appears to be a fuller apprehension. This dialogue with Raphael reiterates that obedience to God is an acceptance of God's love for man, and is a constituent of man's love for God. Adam repeats his assurance:

we never shall forget to love
 Our maker, and obey him whose command
 Single, is yet so just.⁷⁵

Raphael develops the idea of an essential link between love and obedience when he explains the position of the faithful angels:

My self and all th' Angelic Host that stand
 In sight of God enthron'd, our happie state
 Hold, as you yours, while our obedience holds;
 On other surety none; freely we serve,
 Because wee freely love, as in our will
 To love or not; in this we stand or fall:⁷⁶

The angels hold their place in the heavenly order so long as they obey; and they obey because they love.⁷⁷



Love is mutual and hierarchical; it is pure and it is sexual; it is also both free and obedient. So what transformations deform love at the Fall? How does love fall? First, Eve seems to be drawing away from her role in the divine order when she suggests that they work separately. Adam's reply defines their love as mutual aid and refreshment, but also as having differentiated roles:

nothing lovelier can be found
 In Woman, then to studie houshold good,
 And good workes in her Husband to promote.

⁷³ Isaiah i 19–20; as Fowler notes, the second half of Isaiah's statement is not voiced by Raphael; but Milton's readers might be expected to supply it *otto voce*.

⁷⁴ *PL* v 513–18.

⁷⁵ *PL* v 550–2.

⁷⁶ *PL* v 535–40.

⁷⁷ The angels join 'in Festivals of joy and love | Unanimous, as sons of one great Sire' (*PL* vi 94–5).

Yet not so strictly hath our Lord impos'd
 Labour, as to debarr 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 deni'd, and are of Love the food,
 Love not the lowest end of human life.
 For not to irksom toile, but to delight
 He made us, and delight to Reason joynd.
 These paths & Bowers doubt not but our joynt hands
 Will keep from Wilderness with ease, as wide
 As we need walk, till younger hands ere long
 Assist us.⁷⁸

What is most lovely in woman is her attention to domestic life, and her ability to promote good works in her husband: this is a hierarchical relationship. But it is also one nourished by mutuality, for both partners depend upon the refreshment of body and mind which the other provides. Love, explains Adam, is rational, for the smiles which nourish love are derived from rational appreciation, and are among the marks which distinguish the human from the animal, and therefore define man's place in the great chain of being. Through love is 'delight to Reason joynd', and the 'joynt hands' of the couple make their work easy. The spelling and assonance invite us to link 'joy' and 'joynd', though they have no etymological connection. The repetition of 'join' underlines the bond between the pair which Eve's wish to work alone risks disturbing; indeed, the word 'join' occurs six times in Book IX, marking the necessity of the union.

Adam suspects that their adversary, envying above all their conjugal union, might seek to separate them: he

Watches, no doubt, with greedy hope to find
 His wish and best advantage, us asunder,
 Hopeless to circumvent us joynd, where each
 To other speedie aide might lend at need;
 Whether his first design be to withdraw
 Our fealtie from God, or to disturb
 Conjugal Love, then which perhaps no bliss
 Enjoy'd by us excites his envie more.⁷⁹

Adam is right, for Satan in abandoning God has abandoned love and reduced himself to a condition in which love is replaced by hate, by envy, and by self-love. Having rejected 'Heav'ns free Love dealt equally to all', he sees no distinction between love and hate, saying, 'Be then his Love accurst, since love or hate, | To me alike, it deals eternal woe'.⁸⁰ But Satan still clings to the possibility that he could love, saying of mankind that

my thoughts pursue
 With wonder, and could love, so lively shines

⁷⁸ PL ix 232–47.

⁷⁹ PL ix 257–64.

⁸⁰ PL iv 68–70.

In them Divine resemblance, and such grace
The hand that formd them on thir shape hath pourd.⁸¹

Satan's hypothetical love for man is a response to the work of God manifest in human beings, and therefore is potentially still a love for God himself. Later he sees this incipient love as a temptation which has momentarily distracted him from his purposed hate.⁸² Even so, gazing subsequently at the beautiful cherub Zephon, Satan 'saw | Vertue in her shape how lovly, saw, and pin'd | His loss'.⁸³ Though he no longer loves virtue, he can still see how lovely it is; and he understands what it is that he has lost. When Satan does assail Eve, it is 'under shew of Love well feign'd', 'with shew of Zeale and Love',⁸⁴ and the better to seduce her 'pleasing was his shape, | And lovely, never since of Serpent kind | Lovelier'.⁸⁵

It is such a show of love that Eve prepares when, having eaten the fruit, she thinks that she may attract Adam's love the more if she is his superior in knowledge. She tells herself,

So dear I love him, that with him all deaths
I could endure, without him live no life.⁸⁶

But this 'love' is focused on herself, not on Adam, and will indeed cost Adam 'dear'; the far-reaching pun returns when Adam says to himself that they are 'linkt in Love so deare'.⁸⁷ When inviting Adam to take the forbidden fruit, Eve says:

Thou therefore also taste, that equal Lot
May joyne us, equal Joy, as equal Love;
Least thou not tasting, different degree
Disjoyne us.⁸⁸

Eve places on Adam the responsibility for breaking the union of the couple if he refuses to taste the fruit, but it is of course she who has already disjoined them. The assonance of 'Love' and 'Lot' is ominous, for it is this perverted version of love which will bring about Adam's fate. So too the echo of 'Joy' in 'Disjoyne' shows us that to disjoin is to annul joy. Later, as Adam chooses to share Eve's lot, the word 'love' is subjected to continuing distortions. Eve

for joy
Tenderly wept, much won that he his Love
Had so enobl'd, as of choice to incurr
Divine displeasure for her sake, or Death.⁸⁹

Has Adam 'enobl'd' or debased his love by his choice? Both, surely. Unquestionably the poem shows that he has turned away from 'love' in its fullest sense—pure, rational, and at once nourished by and contributing to the divine scale of creation—in order to follow 'love' in a more limited sense, impelled particularly by what he calls 'The Link of Nature' since Eve is 'Flesh of Flesh, | Bone of my Bone'.⁹⁰ If the emphasis

⁸¹ *PL* iv 362–5.

⁸² *PL* iv 388–92.

⁸³ *PL* iv 847–9.

⁸⁴ *PL* ix 492, 665.

⁸⁵ *PL* ix 503–5.

⁸⁶ *PL* ix 832–3.

⁸⁷ *PL* ix 970.

⁸⁸ *PL* ix 881–4. See Chapter 10 *EQUAL*.

⁸⁹ *PL* ix 990–3.

⁹⁰ *PL* ix 914–15.

here is on the physical bond between them (and on nature rather than on, say, reason or grace) that does not mean that Adam is simply drawn to follow Eve by physical lust, by the passion which he confessed in his speech to Raphael, for he recalls her 'sweet Converse and Love so dearly joyn'd'.⁹¹ 'Converse' is a deep word, as is 'joyn'd', and his choice is not lightly made. He cannot bear to contemplate the disjoining of the couple, even though he knows that this choice of his will bring about his own death. In thus sacrificing all for love, Adam is indeed ennobling his love, even if this is simultaneously a rejection of love-as-obedience; and in this respect Adam is implicitly contrasted with the Son, whose love for mankind is self-sacrificial and who always manifests filial obedience. It is a sad embracing of autonomy, a redefinition of the mysterious law of wedded love: a decision for freedom over obedience, for mutuality over hierarchy. But if physical desire is not a predominant motive in Adam's decision, it is nevertheless a consequence of it, for the couple soon devote themselves to passionate postlapsarian sex which is quite different in character from its prelapsarian form: whereas their love had once been both pure and sexual, now it is greedy and guilty:

There they thir fill of Love and Loves disport
Took largely, of thir mutual guilt the Seale,
The solace of thir sin, till dewie sleep
Oppress'd them, wearied with thir amorous play.⁹²

Here 'Love' has been transformed to become almost synonymous with sexual pleasure, and sexual pleasure synonymous with 'mutual guilt' and with 'sin'. Sex is a 'disport' (entertainment, amusement⁹³) not a sacred expression of 'wedded love' as it had once been. This is the Fall of love.

The metamorphoses of 'love' continue yet more darkly when Adam towards the end of Book IX turns 'love' into the terrible word 'lost':

Is this the Love, is this the recompence
Of mine to thee, ingrateful *Eve*, exprest
Immutable when thou wert lost, not I.⁹⁴

Gradually, however, the couple rediscover meanings for 'love'. Adam recuperates mutuality when he says that they should now

strive
In offices of Love, how we may light'n
Each others burden in our share of woe.⁹⁵

Love leads to the lightening of the partner's burdens. It is worth pausing over the word 'offices', which in seventeenth-century English has a semantic field which is shaped by its Latin root *officium*. 'Offices' are duties, tasks, and services, but also kindnesses.⁹⁶ Then Eve prefaces her use of this rediscovered word 'love' by using its near-anagram 'vile' to acknowledge her sinfulness, and her proper place to which Adam's acceptance has restored her:

⁹¹ *PL* ix 909.

⁹² *PL* ix 1042–5.

⁹³ *OED* *s.v.* *disport* *n.* 1.

⁹⁴ *PL* ix 1163–5.

⁹⁵ *PL* x 959–61.

⁹⁶ *OED* *s.v.* *office* *n.* 3, 5.

Restor'd by thee, vile as I am, to place
Of new acceptance, hopeful to regain
Thy Love, the sole contentment of my heart.⁹⁷

But the words which had once defined the wonders of wedded love ('Conversing, looking, loving') now return to form part of a despairing reflection when Eve suggests to Adam that the consequences of sex—bringing children into a now fallen world—are so grave that abstinence is best; and yet abstinence would be so hard that mutual death might be preferable:

But if thou judge it hard and difficult,
Conversing, looking, loving, to abstain
From Loves due Rites, Nuptial imbraces sweet,
And with desire to languish without hope,
Before the present object languishing
With like desire, which would be miserie
And torment less then none of what we dread,
Then both our selves and Seed at once to free
From what we fear for both, let us make short,
Let us seek Death.⁹⁸

'Loves due Rites, Nuptial imbraces sweet' is the language of what seems now to be a lost form of love, a language which cannot any longer be used without leading into 'desire...without hope...miseries...torment'. But Michael counsels against such suicidal despair, saying:

Nor love thy Life, nor hate; but what thou livest
Live well, how long or short permit to Heav'n.⁹⁹

Here both 'love' and 'live' receive new definitions.

Michael then renews the link between 'love' and 'law', now referring to the law of God which will be fulfilled by the Son by means of love:

The Law of God exact he shall fulfill
Both by obedience and by love, though love
Alone fulfill the Law.¹⁰⁰

The chiasmus binds law and love together, as the Son restores the link between love and obedience. Milton hardly ever associates love with God the Father,¹⁰¹ and never makes him the subject of the verb 'love'; this is not to imply that the Father is without love, but rather that the Son is the visible manifestation of God's love towards mankind, and Milton repeatedly uses the word 'love' to define the Son's redemptive action, exclaiming, 'O unexempl'd love, | Love no where to be found less then Divine!'.¹⁰² In this way self-sacrificial obedience to the divine will becomes

⁹⁷ *PL* x 971–3.

⁹⁸ *PL* x 992–1001.

⁹⁹ *PL* xi 553–4.

¹⁰⁰ *PL* xii 402–4.

¹⁰¹ One exception is Satan's reference to 'heav'ns free Love' (*PL* iv 68) and another Michael's reference to 'paternal Love' (*PL* xi 353).

¹⁰² *PL* iii 410–11; for other instances associating love with the Son cf. *PL* iii 142, 213, 225, 267, 298, 312; vii 195.

an ideal definition of love, and a defining contrast with Adam's self-sacrificial but disobedient love for Eve. Michael promises a transformation of 'law' in mankind through the work of the Spirit:

Hee to his own a Comforter will send,
The promise of the Father, who shall dwell
His Spirit within them, and the Law of Faith
Working through love, upon thir hearts shall write.¹⁰³

This is a metamorphosis of both law and love, the work of the Spirit upon the human heart, and an example of God 'still compassing thee round | With goodness and paternal Love'.¹⁰⁴ Ultimately 'joy' and 'love' will be characteristics of the heavenly Jerusalem,

Founded in righteousness and peace and love
To bring forth fruits Joy and eternal Bliss.¹⁰⁵

The poem has once again redefined 'love' and 'joy', placing their human manifestations in the context of eschatological hope.

Adam finally returns to the link between love and obedience which he was so sure earlier could never be broken:¹⁰⁶

Henceforth I learne, that to obey is best,
And love with feare the onely God.¹⁰⁷

He now adds 'feare' to his love for God: fear in the sense of

An holy affection of the heart, awing us, and making us loath to displease God by sin, in respect of his great goodness and mercies, and for a love we bear to righteousness... This is filial or childe-like fear: Gods children are commanded thus to fear, and are often commended for so fearing.¹⁰⁸

In the future love will be understood as charity, *caritas*, which is both God's love for man, and man's love for God and his neighbour.¹⁰⁹ When God asks the angels,

Say Heav'nly powers, where shall we find such love,
Which of ye will be mortal to redeem
Mans mortal crime, and just th' unjust to save,
Dwels in all Heaven charitie so deare?¹¹⁰

¹⁰³ *PL* xii 486–9.

¹⁰⁴ *PL* xi 352–3. David Quint observes that Milton's theodicy 'depends on whether we see God as power or as love' (*Inside 'Paradise Lost': Reading the Designs of Milton's Epic* (Princeton, N.J., 2014), p. 7). The answer is surely that we see different aspects of God in different contexts; or perhaps one could say that different characters make choices which determine whether they experience God as power or as love. The rejection of God as love is liable to lead to an experience of God solely as power.

¹⁰⁵ *PL* xii 550–1.

¹⁰⁶ Cf. *PL* v 535–40, v 550–2; viii 633–7; quoted on pp. 335, 331.

¹⁰⁷ *PL* xii 561–2.

¹⁰⁸ Wilson, p. 217.

¹⁰⁹ *OED s.v. charity n.* 1a, b; *caritas* is how the Vulgate usually translates ἀγάπη. William Tyndale's decision to translate ἀγάπη in 1 Corinthians xiii as 'love' rather than 'charity' incensed St Thomas More. The Geneva Bible uses 'loue' at this point, while the AV uses 'charitie'.

¹¹⁰ *PL* iii 213–16. The Cambridge Platonist John Smith has an eloquent meditation on the serenity of 'love' as manifested in God:

the answer is that such charity is exemplified by the Son. If, says Michael, mankind understands and shows this form of love, Adam will not regret the loss of Eden:

onely add
 Deeds to thy knowledge answerable, add Faith,
 Add vertue, Patience, Temperance, add Love,
 By name to come call'd Charitie, the soul
 Of all the rest: then wilt thou not be loath
 To leave this Paradise, but shalt possess
 A Paradise within thee, happier farr.¹¹¹

'Charitie' is 'That affection of love which moves us to hold our neighbours dear, and to desire and seek their good in every thing which is dear unto them, and that for Christ his sake, according to the will of God'.¹¹² 'Charitie' now broadens 'Love', extending it from the bond which unites the couple into the 'soul' of all the virtues which will nourish and sustain human society. Love as Charity will fashion the 'Paradise within', and help man to regain the paradise lost.

the *Divine Love* is never attended with those turbulent passions, perturbations, or wrestlings within it self, of *Fear, Desire, Grief, Anger*, or any such like, whereby *our Love* is wont to explicate and unfold its affection towards its Object. But as *the Divine Love* is perpetually most infinitely *ardent and potent*, so it is alwaies *calm and serene*, unchangeable, having no such ebblings and flowings, no such diversity of stations and retrogradations as that *Love* hath in us which ariseth from the weakness of our Understandings, that doe not present things to us alwaies in the same Orient lustre and beauty.

('Of the Existence and Nature of God', in *Select Discourses* (London, 1660), p. 129).

¹¹¹ *PL* xii 581–7.

¹¹² Wilson, p. 95.

23

Naked

Two of far nobler shape erect and tall,
Godlike erect, with native Honour clad
In naked Majestie seemd Lords of all,
And worthie seemd, for in thir looks Divine
The image of thir glorious Maker shon,
Truth, wisdom, Sanctitude severe and pure,
Severe but in true filial freedom plac'd;
Whence true autoritie in men.

Paradise Lost iv 288–95



There are two kinds of nakedness in *Paradise Lost*—nakedness before the Fall, and nakedness after the Fall.¹ St Ambrose reflected that before the Fall Adam and Eve were naked but clothed in virtue; their nakedness betokened their simplicity of life and their lack of any deceitfulness.² Thomas Wilson explained that in the Bible

There is a double Nakednesse to be gathered out of Gen. 2.25. *They were both naked and were not ashamed*; and Gen. 3.7 *They knew they were naked, and sowed fig-leaves*. The former was a nakednesse full of glory, holinesse, and innocency, containing four things.

1. Uprightnesse of minde and will.
 2. Beauty and brightnesse of the whole body and every part.
 3. Harmony and consent of appetite, senses and members with the mind.
 4. Impassibility of the body, not obnoxious to cold, heat, or to suffer any hurt.
- The latter nakednesse after sin is full of turpitude, misery, and containeth a sense of all those evils, contrary to the four good things now mentioned.
- As 1. Depravation of minde and will by blindness and perversenesse; and depravation of the Image of God in wisdom, holinesse and righteousness.
2. Filthynesse and deformity, in the privy members specially.

¹ For contemporary discussions of the significance of the nakedness of Adam and Eve before and after the Fall see Philip C. Almond, *Adam and Eve in Seventeenth-Century Thought* (Cambridge, 1999), pp. 198–202. He writes that ‘The Genesis text gives no hint of which parts of their bodies they covered nor of why they should have become aware of their nakedness. But commentators had a firm conviction that they covered their sexual organs, and that they did so as a result of shame’ (p. 198). See also Fowler’s note on *PL* ix 1052–9 for a discussion of nakedness before and after the Fall.

² *ante quidem nudi erant, sed non sine virtutum integumentis... Nudi erant propter morum simplicitatem, et quod amictum fraudis natura nesciret* (St Ambrose, *De Paradiso Liber Unus: Patrologia Latina* xiv 307).

3. Rebellion in the Appetite, and interiour powers against the rule of the minde.
4. Passions sundry and many afflicting and affecting the body by disease, and distemper of the air, &c.³

Samuel Purchas believed that Adam and Eve were awakened above all to their symbolic nakedness; he wrote:

naked they were of *diuine* protection and fauour, naked of *Angelicall* guard and custodie, naked of *Humane* puritie and holinesse, naked of dutifull *subiection* from the rebelling Creatures; naked in *Soule*, naked in *Body*, naked of *Happinesse*, naked of *Hopes*, exposed naked to the fierce *Wrath* of that God, from whom to bee hidden was impossible (alas, what could *Fig-leaues*, what could *Trees* doe?) and to whom to appeare was intolerable.⁴

The nakedness of Adam and Eve in Book IV is a 'naked Majestie',⁵ which, as Patrick Hume explained, is

A glorious Nakedness, heightened and set off by spotless Innocence, preferable to all the gawdy Disguises, worn by Mankind since the sad Concealments of our Shame. For in the State of Innocence, there was such an Agreement between Soul and Body, so exact an Obedience paid by the Sensual to the Rational and Sovereign part, that no audacious, unbecoming thought could with a guilty Blush have stain'd the Cheek of *Adam*, Majestick even in Nakedness.⁶

Or rather, majestic precisely because of his nakedness.

The phrase 'naked Majestie' has a double signification. Firstly, 'Naked majestie' is a rebuke to the barbaric splendour of Satanic majesty which opens Book II, and implicitly also to the elaborate court fashions of Stuart England. It also rebukes the exhibitionist nudity of Restoration rakes such as Sir Charles Sedley at the Cock in Bow Street in June 1663, 'coming in open day into the Balcone and showed his nakedness—acting all the postures of lust and buggery that could be imagined, and abusing of scripture and, as it were, from thence preaching a Mountebanke sermon from that pulpit'.⁷ True 'naked Majestie' outshines these debased forms of majesty and of nakedness because it is a reflection of the divine image. Secondly, it

³ Wilson, p. 431; the second '2' is misprinted '1' in the original. *obnoxious*: exposed to harm, vulnerable.

⁴ Samuel Purchas, *Microcosmus: Or The Historie of Man* (London, 1619), p. 152. I owe this reference to Almond's discussion.

⁵ *PL* iv 290.

⁶ Hume, p. 144.

⁷ *The Diary of Samuel Pepys*, edited by Robert Latham and William Matthews, 11 vols (London, 1970–83), iv 209. The composition of *PL* predates poems in which court writers such as the Earl of Rochester celebrated an often grossly sexualized nudity; indeed, Rochester would depict the naked majesty of Charles II himself in his notorious satire 'In the Isle of Brittain' (written in 1673) (*The Works of John Wilmot Earl of Rochester*, edited by Harold Love (Oxford, 1999), pp. 85–90). See also my essay 'The King's Two Bodies: Representations of Charles II' in *The Making of Restoration Poetry* (Cambridge, 2006), pp. 107–36, and for the libertine culture of the Restoration see James Grantham Turner, *One Flesh: Paradisal Marriage and Sexual Relations in the Age of Milton* (Oxford, 1987); *Libertines and Radicals in Early Modern London: Sexuality, Politics, and Literary Culture, 1630–1685* (Cambridge, 2002); and *Schooling Sex: Libertine Literature and Erotic Education in Italy, France, and England, 1534–1685* (Oxford, 2003).

is a majestic nakedness, in that the very nudity of the pair is itself something to be admired because this nakedness is a sign of purity:

Nor those mysterious parts were then conceald,
Then was not guiltie shame, dishonest shame
Of natures works, honor dishonorable,
Sin-bred, how have ye troubl'd all mankind
With shews instead, meer shews of seeming pure,
And banisht from mans life his happiest life,
Simplicities and spotless innocence.
So passd they naked on, nor shund the sight
Of God or Angel, for they thought no ill.⁸

Here, and in the epigraph to this chapter, Milton associates bodily nakedness with spiritual purity⁹ and the rejection of those mere outward shows which are now displayed as a sign of righteousness but are only a cover for sin. The human body in its prelapsarian state is a true image of its Maker, untarnished by sin. It is also 'with native Honour clad',¹⁰ arrayed not with the false honours of a social hierarchy, but with the native honour due to its birth, which in this case is its origin from the hand of God; as such it is not the subject of 'dishonest shame | Of natures works, honor dishonorable, | Sin-bred'.¹¹ The word 'dishonest' carries some meanings not now current: 'Entailing dishonour or disgrace; dishonourable, discreditable, misbecoming, shameful, ignominious; . . . Unchaste, lewd, filthy',¹² so the shame with which the postlapsarian world views the genitals is itself shameful and even lewd, as well as being dishonest in the sense of hypocritical. The genitals are 'mysterious' in that they belong to a mystery,¹³ to a sacred rite whose performance or significance is hidden from the uninitiated outsider. Milton repeatedly sees married love as such a mystery. In Book IV the couple enjoy 'the Rites | Mysterious of connubial Love', the narrator extols 'wedded Love, mysterious Law', and Adam later tells Raphael of the 'mysterious reverence' with which he views their nuptial bed.¹⁴ Eve was originally brought 'in naked beauty' to Adam by 'the genial Angel',¹⁵ and it is with the unselfconsciousness of innocence that 'at Table *Eve* | Ministerd

⁸ *PL* iv 312–20.

⁹ In 'Sanctitude severe and pure' (*PL* iv 293) 'severe' has some of the senses of the Latin *seuerus*, 'plain, unadorned' (*OLD s.v. seuerus* 4; cf. *OED s.v. severe adj.* 6).

¹⁰ *PL* iv 289.

¹¹ *PL* iv 313–15.

¹² *OED s.v. dishonest adj.* 1, 2.

¹³ *OED s.v. mysterious adj.* 4a, citing only *PL* viii 599.

¹⁴ *PL* iv 742–3, 750, viii 599. In the MS of 'At a solemn Musick' Milton writes of a 'high misterious spousall' (Trinity MS, p. 4). Virginity is also thought of as a 'high mystery' in *Maske* l. 785. In his *Apology* Milton writes in similar terms of the proper sexual use of the body when he defends himself against an allegation that he frequented brothels, and maintains his adherence to 'the doctrine of holy Scripture unfolding those chaste and high mysteries with timeliest care infus'd, that *the body is for the Lord and the Lord for the body*' (*Apology: Works* iii 306). In his divorce tracts Milton writes of marriage as a 'mystery of joy and union' (*Divorce: Works* iii 403; the expression is defended in *Colasterion: Works* iv 263), and of 'the sacred and misterious bed of marriage' (*Tetrachordon: Works* iv 89; cf. 98–100). St Paul in Ephesians v 32 says that marriage is 'a great mysterie'. The Form of Solemnization of Matrimony (1662) refers to Ephesians v 32–3 in saying that marriage signifies 'the mystical union that is betwixt Christ and his Church' (*The Book of Common Prayer: The Texts of 1549, 1559, and 1662*, edited by Brian Cummings (Oxford, 2011), p. 434).

¹⁵ *PL* iv 712–13. *genial*: concerning procreation.

naked' to Adam and Raphael. This is an 'innocence | Deserving Paradise' which prompts only 'Love unlibidinous':¹⁶

Eve

Undeckt, save with her self more lovely fair
Then Wood-Nymph, or the fairest Goddess feign'd
Of three that in Mount *Ida* naked strove,
Stood to entertain her guest from Heav'n; no vaile
Shee needed, Vertue-proof, no thought infirme
Alterd her cheek.¹⁷

Such nakedness is quite different from the display offered to Paris by Venus, Juno, and Minerva, and neither attracts unwanted glances nor causes her embarrassment. When the naked couple do make love, Milton draws our attention to their erotic nudity ('And on thir naked limbs the flourie roof | Showrd Roses'¹⁸), but also carefully qualifies it with references to Eve as 'Mother' and 'Matron', and 'kisses pure'.¹⁹

However, after the Fall, Adam and Eve see the significance of their nakedness anew:

Soon found thir Eyes how op'nd, and thir minds
How dark'nd; innocence, that as a veile
Had shadow'd them from knowing ill, was gon,
Just confidence, and native righteousness
And honour from about them, naked left
To guiltie shame hee cover'd, but his Robe
Uncover'd more, so rose the *Danite* strong
Herculean Samson from the Harlot-lap
Of *Philistean Dalilah*, and wak'd
Shorn of his strength, They destitute and bare
Of all thir vertue.²⁰

Now they have lost the 'innocence, that as a veile | Had shadow'd them from knowing ill'; to shadow here is 'to shelter or protect as with covering wings; to enfold with a protecting and beneficent influence',²¹ so innocence had previously shielded the pair from knowing evil; and this is now lost, along with their 'native righteousness | And honour', so that in the postlapsarian world honour now takes a debased form. The subsequent syntax of the clause 'naked left | To guiltie shame hee cover'd' is awkward: who covers what?²² The subject of 'cover'd' has to be 'shame': it is shame which covers the pair, as Hume explains: 'they were left naked and open to dishonest Shame, the Son of Guilt: He cover'd 'em indeed, but 'twas

¹⁶ *PL* v 443–9.

¹⁷ *PL* v 379–85.

¹⁸ *PL* iv 772–3.

¹⁹ *PL* iv 492, 501–2; see Chapter 22 LOVE, p. 333.

²⁰ *PL* ix 1053–63.

²¹ *OED* 2a. Cf. Psalm xvii 8: 'hide mee vnder the shadowe of thy wings'.

²² Some editors insert punctuation after 'shame'; Fowler changes his mind on this point between his two editions, and inserts a colon in his second edition. See his notes *ad loc* in the two editions. A paraphrase might run thus: 'The loss of innocence left them exposed to shame; shame covered them, but this shame only revealed their condition the more clearly'.

with Confusion, a wretched Robe, that laid 'em much more open'.²³ It is Shame, quasi-personified, which makes them conscious of their nakedness, or rather conscious of the new meaning of their nakedness. Now their nudity is the perceived absence or privation²⁴ of all those qualities with which they were previously decked: the Fall

leaves us naked thus, of Honour void,
Of Innocence, of Faith, of Puritie,
Our wonted Ornaments now soild and staind.²⁵

—an outcome which Adam blames squarely on Eve, because if it had not been for Eve's insistence on working alone,

we had then
Remaind still happie, not as now, despoild
Of all our good, sham'd, naked, miserable.²⁶

Nakedness has become almost synonymous with shame and misery, so they seek

Some Tree whose broad smooth Leaves together sowl,
And girded on our loyns, may cover round
Those middle parts, that this new commer, Shame,
There sit not, and reproach us as unclean.²⁷

'Shame' is a strong word, with connotations which reach further and deeper than the modern sense of social embarrassment.²⁸ Thomas Wilson again provides an indication of the word's power: it signifies

Trouble and perturbation of minde and conscience, being grieved and cast down at the remembrance of sin against God... This is shame of Conscience, which in wicked men is an evil affection [i.e. strong feeling, passion], and part of that torment of Hell: but in the godly it is a good affection, a sign and fruit of their repentance... The word... signifies such a perturbation of minde, that he who is affected therewith, seeketh through shamefastness where to hide himself. It's when a man *turneth within himself*, for that they who are ashamed turn their face from them whose look they cannot abide.²⁹

In Adam and Eve shame is felt at this point in Wilson's first sense, as torment, but it is a necessary step towards being the second form of shame, a sign and fruit of repentance. And so the pair gather leaves

To gird thir waste, vain Covering if to hide
Thir guilt and dreaded shame; O how unlike
To that first naked Glorie.³⁰

²³ Hume, p. 264. Cf. 'Let mine aduersaries be clothed with shame: and let them couer them selues with their owne confusion, as with a mantle' (Psalm cix 29): this echo may imply that Adam and Eve have now become God's adversaries.

²⁴ The privation of good is a traditional way of understanding Evil: see Chapter 11, EVIL, pp. 109–12.

²⁵ *PL* ix 1074–6.

²⁶ *PL* ix 1137–9.

²⁷ *PL* ix 1095–8.

²⁸ It is 'shame' as extreme embarrassment rather than any more profound guilt that Satan envisages feeling if he were to submit to God (*PL* i 115, iv 82). Adam tells Eve that if he were confronted with their enemy, 'shame, thou looking on, | Shame to be overcome or over-reacht | Would utmost vigor raise' (*PL* ix 312–14).

²⁹ Wilson, p. 578.

³⁰ *PL* ix 1113–15.

When God meets the pair in the garden after the Fall they feel ‘guilt, | And shame’,³¹ and Adam eventually admits:

I heard thee in the Garden, and of thy voice
 Affraid, being naked, hid my self. To whom
 The gracious Judge without revile repli'd.
 My voice thou oft hast heard, and hast not fear'd,
 But still rejoyc't, how is it now become
 So dreadful to thee? that thou art naked, who
 Hath told thee?³²

The Son is sent to judge the pair, and to clothe both their outward and their inward nakedness:

then pitting how they stood
 Before him naked to the aire, that now
 Must suffer change, disdain'd not to begin
 Thenceforth the form of servant to assume,
 As when he wash'd his servants feet so now
 As Father of his Familie he clad
 Thir nakedness with Skins of Beasts, or slain,
 Or as the Snake with youthful Coate repaid;
 And thought not much to cloath his Enemies:
 Nor hee thir outward onely with the Skins
 Of Beasts, but inward nakedness, much more
 Opprobrious, with his Robe of righteousness,
 Araying cover'd from his Fathers sight.³³

When Adam and Eve stand before the Son they are ‘naked to the air’—not literally so, for they are presumably still wearing their fig leaves, but they are naked in the sense of being exposed to the gaze of the Son. For, as the Epistle to the Hebrews says, ‘Neither is there any creature that is not manifest in his sight: but all things *are* naked, and opened vnto the eyes of him with whome wee haue to doe.’³⁴ (Eve failed to realize this earlier when blithely supposing that God may not have noticed her taking the fruit.³⁵) More especially, though Satan does not acknowledge this, ‘Hell *is* naked before him, and destruction *hath* no couering’.³⁶ The pair are also exposed to the air, which is shortly to ‘suffer change’ along with the couple as hostile conditions beset them.³⁷ In their prelapsarian nakedness this did not matter, as the couple were (as Thomas Wilson puts it) ‘not obnoxious to cold, heat, or to suffer any hurt’,³⁸ but with the Fall of man comes the Fall of the climate, and Adam and Eve need now to be protected from the chill winds of the postlapsarian world.

More significant is the ‘inward nakedness’ which the Son covers, and this is explained by Wilson’s glosses for biblical uses of ‘naked’:

3. One which lacketh Christ, the wedding and best garment...4. Such as want the
 favour and protection of God, which is our best covering...7. One destitute of

³¹ PL x 112–13.

³² PL x 116–22.

³³ PL x 211–23.

³⁴ Hebrews iv 13.

³⁵ PL ix 811–16.

³⁶ Job xxvi 5.

³⁷ PL x 692–707 describes how the climate changes as a result of the Fall.

³⁸ Wilson, p. 431.

the image of God... 8. One abiding in his natural corruption... 9. One that is void of faith and piety... 10. One that is in a perishing condition... 11. One destitute of the grace and help of God.³⁹

Here the naked Adam and Eve stand as figures for the reader's own spiritual and moral nakedness, destitute until they receive the grace with which God clothes his creatures. The figure of the Son here is also, figuratively, naked in the role of the servant:⁴⁰ it is not just that, as Milton says in 'Upon the Circumcision', Christ 'Emptied his glory, ev'n to nakednes'⁴¹ in the Incarnation, but also that the reference to Jesus washing his servants' feet recalls for us the incident recounted by St John:

Jesus knowing that the Father had giuen all things into his hands, and that he was come from God, and went to God: He riseth from supper, and layed aside his garments, and tooke a towell, and girded himselfe. After that, he powreth water into a bason, and beganne to wash the disciples feete.⁴²

Here the laying aside of his garments is a practical and symbolic prelude to Jesus taking on the role of servant; so too the Son in *Paradise Lost* acts as a servant in clothing the fallen couple both with animal skins and with his robe of righteousness, laying aside his own majesty in order to replace their robe of shame.

We have seen that Milton associates prelapsarian nakedness with the purity of marital sex. When he turns to consider the condition of marriage after the Fall the form of nakedness which Milton considers to be particularly important is the 'nakednes or unfitnes of mind', maintaining that

The cause of divorce mention'd in the Law is translated *some uncleannesse*; but in the Hebrew it sounds *nakednes of ought, or any reall nakednes*: which by all the learned interpreters is refer'd to the mind, as well as to the body. And what greater nakednes or unfitnes of mind then that which hinders ever the solace and peacefull society of the married couple, and what hinders that more then the unfitnes and defectiveness of an unconjugal mind.⁴³

It is the inward nakedness of man (by which we might infer his inaptness for moral and spiritual companionship) which is more damaging than any bodily state. This is not only manifest in individuals, for Milton accuses the contemporary church of seeking to cover its own inward nakedness (its lack of gospel purity) with elaborate vestments:

Do not, ye Church-maskers, while Christ is cloathing upon our barennes with his righteous garment to make us acceptable in his fathers sight, doe not, as ye do, cover

³⁹ Wilson, p. 430.

⁴⁰ Cf. John xiii 4. However, as William Wilkinson says, 'Christ commeth not bare or naked, but clothed and accompanied with all his mercies' (*A Confutation of Certaine Articles Deliuiered vnto the Familie of Loue* (London, 1579), f. 7^r).

⁴¹ 'Upon the Circumcision' l. 20: *Works* i 27.

⁴² John xiii 3–5.

⁴³ *Divorce: Works* iii 389. *unconjugal*: This is the *OED*'s first example and, with *SA* l. 979, the only example before the nineteenth century.

and hide his righteous verity with the polluted cloathing of your ceremonies to make it seem more decent in your own eyes.⁴⁴

Truth does not need such dress, even though some 'especially of soft and delicious temper... will not so much as look upon Truth herselfe, unlesse they see her elegantly drest'.⁴⁵ All that Adam and his descendants need is to be able to say with Isaiah, 'my soule shalbe ioyfull in my God: for he hath clothed me with the garments of saluation, he hath couered me with the robe of righteousness',⁴⁶ and with St Paul, 'being clothed we shal not be found naked'.⁴⁷

⁴⁴ *Reason: Works* iii 246–7. *Church-masks*: implies that the liturgy is merely a 'masque', a performance. For an extended quotation see Chapter 2 ART, p. 9.

⁴⁵ *Reason: Works* iii 239.

⁴⁶ Isaiah lxi 10.

⁴⁷ 2 Corinthians v 3.

24

New *and* Old

thou profoundest Hell
Receive thy new Possessor: One who brings
A mind not to be chang'd by Place or Time.

Paradise Lost i 251–3



Sero te amavi, pulchritudo tam antiqua et tam nova, sero te amavi, said St Augustine in his hymn of contrition and thanksgiving.¹ The divine beauty which he extols is not in itself either old or new, but seems so as it is experienced from his human perspective: new in his belated appreciation, ancient in its abiding presence. In *Paradise Lost* what seems old and what seems new often inflect men and angels' understanding of the divine, and time is apprehended differently in the fallen and the unfallen worlds. As Augustine also said, *quid est ergo tempus? si nemo ex me quaerat, scio; si quaerenti explicare velim, nescio*.² Sometimes it is a false confidence in their understanding of time that leads men and angels astray.

There is no passing of time in Heaven; there nothing is either old or new, as God sees all *sub specie aeternitatis* from the perspective of eternity, which is not simply an unending stretch of time, but an atemporal mode of being.³ The story of Adam and Eve, *qua* myth, is also atemporal in that it unfolds an abiding truth about mankind, and the unfolding is only superficially something that is presented in narrative terms in order to accommodate a complex truth to our understanding. It is the unfolding of man's perpetual and repeated loss of innocence, and a promise of his perpetual and repeated redemption. This is 'Mans First Disobedience',⁴ first in time but also first in gravity; but it is not his last. Yet *Paradise Lost* needs a narrative which appears to unfold through time, and its characters live in a temporal dimension in which there are actions and consequences which take sequential form, though this narrative logic is rendered more complex by Milton's construction of the poem, with its beginning *in medias res*, the analeptic narrative of the war in Heaven by Raphael, and the proleptic account

¹ 'Late have I loved you, beauty so old and so new, late have I loved you!' (St Augustine, *Confessiones* x 27).

² 'What then is time? If no one asks me, I know; if I wish to explain it to someone who asks, I know not' (St Augustine, *Confessiones* xi 14).

³ See Chapter 15 GOD, p. 217.

⁴ *PL* i 1.

of human history by Michael.⁵ The poem also needs to remind its readers that God is beyond time even while using temporal terms.

At several points Milton, both to ease and to stretch the reader's imagination, suggests that we might think of old things and new things in Heaven. The narrative of the war, which is presented as if it were the story of an Homeric battle, includes reference to chariots which 'stand of old | ... Against a solemn day', that contrast with the rebel angels' weapons which, says Raphael, seemed 'new and strange', their very novelty apparently a form of defection from the ancient order.⁶ The Son resumes his seat in Heaven 'In glory as of old'.⁷ But such apparent references to age are signals of a depth which is not temporal so much as ontological, the 'old' being an aspect of being which is beyond our comprehension. Similarly the biblical title 'Ancient of dayes'⁸ describes God's majesty not his antiquity. Addressing the Heavenly Muse Urania, Milton says:

for thou
Nor of the Muses nine, nor on the top
Of old *Olympus* dwell'st, but Heav'nlie borne,
Before the Hills appeerd, or Fountain flow'd,
Thou with Eternal Wisdom didst converse.⁹

Urania is not one of the nine Muses of classical antiquity, nor one of the pagan gods of Mount Olympus: she is therefore not part of any human historical or mythic chronology but instead 'Heav'nlie borne'; before the creation of the world she dwelt¹⁰ with eternal Wisdom, that is to say, with God himself under one of the forms through which he makes himself known. Urania is therefore placed conceptually within a form of quasi-time which unites her with the Eternal, a state of being rather than a developing narrative.

The creation of the world is said to take place 'on a day' which, as Raphael explains, is not really to be thought of as a day:

As yet this World was not, and *Chaos* wilde
Reign'd where these Heav'ns now rowl, where Earth now rests
Upon her Center pois'd, when on a day
(For Time, though in Eternitie, appli'd
To motion, measures all things durable
By present, past, and future) on such day
As Heav'ns great Year brings forth.¹¹

⁵ For the chronology of *PL* see Miner, pp. 427–33; Anthony Welch, 'Reconsidering Chronology in *Paradise Lost*', *Milton Studies* 41 (2002) 1–17; Ayelet C. Langer, "Pardon May Be Found in Time Besought": Time Structures of the Mind in *Paradise Lost*', *Milton Studies* 52 (2011) 169–83; and Judith Scherer Herz, 'Meanwhile: (Un)making Time in *Paradise Lost*' in *The New Milton Criticism*, edited by Peter C. Herman and Elizabeth Sauer (Cambridge, 2012), pp. 85–101.

⁶ *PL* vii 200–2; vi 571.

⁷ *PL* x 226.

⁸ Daniel vii 9; cf. *ST* III, q. 59, a.1, r. 2.

⁹ *PL* vii 5–9.

¹⁰ *converse*: dwell with; commune with (*OED* s.v. *converse* v. 1, 4b).

¹¹ *PL* v 577–83. Cf. 'two dayes are past, | Two dayes, as we compute the dayes of Heav'n' (*PL* vi 684–5; Raphael reporting God speaking).

'Heav'ns great Year' is the cycle which is completed when all the stars return to their original positions,¹² so the competing models of cyclical and of linear time are both in play here as ways of imagining—and thwarting our attempts to define too easily—the acts of God within eternity, which have to be accommodated to the demands of human narration:¹³

Immediate are the Acts of God, more swift
Then time or motion, but to human ears
Cannot without process of speech be told,
So told as earthly notion can receive.¹⁴

Adam, on our behalf, acknowledges the limitations of his understanding of time and eternity:

How soon hath thy prediction, Seer blest,
Measur'd this transient World, the Race of time,
Till time stand fixt: beyond is all abyss,
Eternitie, whose end no eye can reach.¹⁵

But by definition there can be no end to eternity: it is not simply a very long stretch of time whose end eludes human sight, so Adam's acknowledgement that human understanding falls short, itself falls short.

Satan, however, is not so aware of the hazards of using temporal language to explain the ways of God, as he imagines that the creation of earth resulted from God's second thoughts, correcting an earlier mistake:

O Earth, how like to Heav'n, if not preferr'd
More justly, Seat worthier of Gods, as built
With second thoughts, reforming what was old!¹⁶

But what God does or makes cannot be considered 'old' in the sense of being antiquated or imperfect and in need of reformation. There is, however, an evocation by the narrator of a deep antiquity in creation, for the abyss through which Satan travels is the *primaeval* realm of '*Chaos and ancient Night*'.¹⁷ Chaos is 'the Anarch old',¹⁸ and Night is called the 'eldest of things',¹⁹ because, as Patrick Hume says, '*Night and Chaos*, that is, Darkness and Confusion, are so

¹² As Fowler explains *ad loc.*

¹³ See C. A. Patrides, *Milton and the Christian Tradition* (Oxford, 1966), and Joad Raymond, *Milton's Angels: The Early-Modern Imagination* (Oxford, 2010) for the processes of 'accommodation' by which seventeenth-century writers sought to represent heavenly things.

¹⁴ *PL* vii 176–9; cf. *PL* x 90–1: 'the speed of Gods | Time counts not, though with swiftest minutes wing'd'.

¹⁵ *PL* xii 553–6.

¹⁶ *PL* ix 99–101; cf. *PL* ix 143–6:

hee to be aveng'd,
And to repaire his numbers thus impair'd,
Whether such vertue spent of old now faild
More Angels to Create.

¹⁷ *PL* ii 970.

¹⁸ *PL* ii 988. 'Anarch' is Milton's coinage (*OED* s.v. *anarch* n.).

¹⁹ *PL* ii 962; cf. i 543; ii 894, 986, 1002; iii 421.

near Privation and Non-entity, that they might well be styled, *The Ancestors of the Creation*; Things that have no Being, are, as to us, in unconceivable Darkness'.²⁰ There is even a suggestion that the piles of hail which Satan sees might be the ruins of some ancient civilization:

Beyond this flood a frozen Continent
Lies dark and wilde, beat with perpetual storms
Of Whirlwind and dire Hail, which on firm land
Thaws not, but gathers heap, and ruin seems
Of ancient pile.²¹

This suggests a mysterious temporal depth to Chaos, while marking it as a place of loss, of ruin, one where temporal laws do not apply but 'where length, breadth, & highth, | And time and place are lost'.²² But as a place of loss it is also a sign of a spiritual condition which seems (but of course actually is not) beyond the reach of the light of Heaven. Both time and place are therefore metaphors for existential and ontological states.²³ There is also a disturbing possibility that, as Adam imagines,

total darkness should by Night regain
Her old possession, and extinguish life
In Nature and all things.²⁴

These lines imply that anciently Night was not merely the privation which Hume describes but effectively the possessor of this space, and might at length repossess her realm. This may seem to be a Manichaean idea, but it is really one of those quasi-Manichaean gestures which articulate the drama, seeming to embody oppositional principles with some degree of substance.²⁵ The lines are part of Adam's explanation to Eve for the existence of the stars at which they are marvelling, and therefore in his reverent mind there is actually no possibility that such an eventuality might come about.

There is another form of antiquity in *Paradise Lost*, which consists of evocations of the classical world.²⁶ Milton tells us that the fallen angels were venerated in pagan times as gods: the architect of Pandaemonium was known and worshipped 'In ancient Greece; and in Ausonian land | Men call'd him *Mulciber*';²⁷ in Egypt too there was a cult of these fallen angels,

A crew who under Names of old Renown,
Osiris, Isis, Orus and their Train
With monstrous shapes and sorceries abus'd
Fanatic *Egypt* and her Priests.²⁸

²⁰ Hume, *ad PL* ii 894.

²¹ *PL* ii 587–91.

²² *PL* ii 893–4.

²³ One result of the Fall is the disappearance of Eden as a place but also as a condition: 'There was a place, | Now not, though Sin, not Time, first wraught the change' (*PL* ix 69–70).

²⁴ *PL* iv 665–7.

²⁵ See Chapter 11 *EVIL*, pp. 111–12.

²⁶ For an account of Milton's relation to the classical world see Charles Martindale, *John Milton and the Transformation of Ancient Epic* (London, 1986), and David Hopkins, 'Milton and the Classics' in *John Milton: Life, Writing, Reputation*, edited by Paul Hammond and Blair Worden (Oxford, 2010), pp. 23–42.

²⁷ *PL* i 739–40.

²⁸ *PL* i 477–80. *fanatic*: the fundamental meaning is 'being possessed by a deity or demon' (*OED* *s.v.* *fanatic adj.* 1a), so the priests of ancient Egypt are possessed by the fallen angels, who are demons;

Some devils 'among the Sons of *Eve* | Got them new Names',²⁹ so as to disguise their true identities. Milton's repeated use of the words 'old' and 'ancient' consigns these deities to a remote past before the Christian revelation:

Hither of ill-joynd Sons and Daughters born
First from the ancient World those Giants came
With many a vain exploit, though then renown'd.³⁰

Milton also evokes pagan deities like 'old *Proteus*'³¹ or 'Old Ocean',³² or those who presided over the area from 'the bordring flood | Of old *Euphrates* to the Brook that parts | *Egypt* from *Syrian* ground',³³ 'or who with *Saturn* old | Fled over *Adria* to th' *Hesperian* Fields'.³⁴ Implicitly this old world awaits the new covenant which comes through Christ.³⁵

Several fallacies attend the ideas about the old and the new which are entertained by Satan and his followers. Satan resents the begetting of the Son as an offensive novelty,³⁶ and this proves to be the occasion for his revolt because he regards it as imposing new laws on the angels and exacting new reverence

but the word was also used extensively in the mid- and late seventeenth century to refer pejoratively to radical nonconformist Protestants (some of whom claimed to be directly inspired by the Spirit) who were regarded by their opponents as being religious maniacs. In this respect Milton may be shrugging off the pejorative application of 'fanatic' to Independents like himself, and implying that the proper application of the word is to those who serve devils.

²⁹ *PL* i 364–5.

³⁰ *PL* iii 463–5. *vain*: worthless, unavailing (*OED* 1a).

³¹ *PL* iii 604.

³² *PL* iv 165.

³³ *PL* i 419–21.

³⁴ *PL* i 519–20.

³⁵ But Milton also recognizes piety and devotion in the ancient world, as when

th' ancient Pair
In Fables old, less ancient yet then these,
Deucalion and chaste *Pyrrha* to restore
The Race of Mankind drown'd, before the Shrine
Of *Themis* stood devout.

(*PL* xi 10–14)

³⁶ At *PL* v 603–6 God says:

This day I have begot whom I declare
My onely Son, and on this holy Hill
Him have anointed, whom ye now behold
At my right hand.

This is a much-debated passage (see John Leonard, *Faithful Labourers: A Reception History of 'Paradise Lost', 1667–1970*, 2 vols (Oxford, 2013), pp. 426–7, 434). Sir Herbert Grierson proposed that 'begot' here has the sense 'exalted'. Though there is no support for this meaning in the *OED*, Milton does say in *De Doctrina* that some biblical references to the Son being begotten should be interpreted figuratively as referring to his exaltation above the angels (*OCW* viii 128–35). According to this interpretation, at this particular moment the Son is not generated but revealed and exalted before the angels (whom the Son himself, as the divine Word, has created, as Abdiel tells Satan at v 835–40). As Hume noted (*ad loc.*) the wording of l. 603 echoes Psalm ii 7: 'the LORD hath said unto mee, Thou art my sonne, this day haue I begotten thee'. The problem is partly ameliorated by recognizing that 'day' in divine speech is not to be taken in too literal a temporal sense; Wilson (p. 141) glosses 'This day' as 'The season and opportunity, appointed of God for doing something. . . All that time in which God made his Son known by his wonderful works'. Rather than gloss 'begot' as 'exalted' (which is theologically dubious and linguistically unjustified) it may be more appropriate to interpret the passage as announcing or disclosing the begetting of the Son which is atemporal.

and submission. He tells Beelzebub, with repeated emphasis on the offensive term 'new',

new Laws thou seest impos'd;
New Laws from him who reigns, new minds may raise
In us who serve, new Counsels.³⁷

This is a new state of affairs which he is not prepared to tolerate, a new relationship between God and the angels which he regards as abrogating their ancient rights. When Abdiel tells or reminds Satan that they were all created by the Son, he objects that this is a novel notion, and contradicts him with an insistence that their being is of ancient, indeed immemorial, origin:

That we were form'd then saist thou? and the work
Of secondarie hands, by task transferd
From Father to his Son? strange point and new!
Doctrin which we would know whence learnt: who saw
When this creation was? rememberst thou
Thy making, while the Maker gave thee being?
We know no time when we were not as now;
Know none before us, self-begot, self-rai'd
By our own quick'ning power, when fatal course
Had circl'd his full Orbe, the birth mature
Of this our native Heav'n, Ethereal Sons.³⁸

Far from being God's creation, Satan maintains, the angels created themselves at a moment determined by Fate. Furthermore, the rebel angel Nisroc hails Satan as their 'Deliverer from new Lords, leader to free | Enjoyment of our right as Gods'.³⁹ Those supposed rights are imagined to be an ancient entitlement to the possession of Heaven which they dream of regaining after their Fall, aspiring to return to 'our ancient Seat', and 'To claim our just inheritance of old'.⁴⁰ Such an appeal to ancient rights was a familiar part of the rhetoric of seventeenth-century political discourse, as parliamentarians sought to defend against the royal prerogative what they regarded as the immemorial privileges and freedoms which they derived from their ancestors: rather than proposing revolution, they were defending the old order against the incursions of Stuart innovation. Sir John Holland, for instance, told the House of Commons of the need to preserve 'our *Rights*, our ancient *Rights*, the *Rights* of our Inheritances'.⁴¹ Milton himself appealed to a myth of ancient rights, freedom, and nobility when he wrote of 'some few, who yet retain in them

³⁷ *PL* v 679–81; cf. Satan's resentful reference at v 691 to the Son's 'new commands', and the repeated reference to 'new' and 'now' in his speech at v 774–84.

³⁸ *PL* v 853–63. ³⁹ *PL* vi 451–2.

⁴⁰ *PL* ii 394, 38. Satan uses the same language in *PR*, calling his followers 'ancient Powers of Air' and 'Heavens antient Sons' (*PR* i 44, ii 121).

⁴¹ *Sir John Holland His Speech in Parliament. Declaring the Great and Manifold Grievances of This Kingdome* (London, 1641), p. 5. For a thorough account of the rhetoric of such appeals to the ancient constitution see J. G. A. Pocock, *The Ancient Constitution and the Feudal Law* (Cambridge, 1957; second edition 1987). Peter C. Herman discusses Milton and the ancient constitution in his *Destabilizing Milton: 'Paradise Lost' and the Poetics of Incertitude* (New York, 2005), ch. 3.

the old English fortitude and love of Freedom', whereas the majority were now 'imbastardiz'd from the ancient nobleness of thir Ancestors'.⁴² Marvell in 1650 saw the powerlessness of an appeal to ancient rights in circumstances where raw military power prevails, for Cromwell was able to

cast the kingdoms old
Into another mould.
Though Justice against Fate complain,
And plead the ancient rights in vain,
But those do hold or break
As men are strong or weak.⁴³

From a different political standpoint, Dryden would decry Whig attempts in 1681 at constitutional 'innovation', for

All other errors but disturb a state,
But innovation is the blow of fate.
If ancient fabrics nod, and threat to fall,
To patch the flaws and buttress up the wall
Thus far 'tis duty; but here fix the mark.⁴⁴

In *Paradise Lost* God himself uses this rhetoric to assert his claim to rule, though with irony, as he is, in effect, mocking the erroneous assumptions of the fallen angels as to the basis upon which his power rests:

Neerly it now concernes us to be sure
Of our Omnipotence, and with what Arms
We mean to hold what anciently we claim
Of Deitie or Empire.⁴⁵

The idea that God's deity or rule might depend upon some ancient right is of course fatuous, though the notion is one which Satan propounds.⁴⁶

⁴² *Eikonoklastes*: *Works* v 69. *imbastardiz'd*: this is the *OED*'s sole example. In Sonnet XII Milton invokes 'the known rules of antient libertie' (l. 2: *Works* i 62). But ancient freedoms are no guarantee that present claimants have the moral sense to make proper use of their ancestral liberties, as Jesus says in *PR*:

Should I of these the liberty regard,
Who freed, as to their antient Patrimony,
Unhumbld, unrepentant, unreform'd,
Headlong would follow; and to thir Gods perhaps
Of *Bethel* and of *Dan*?

(*PR* iii 427–31)

And Milton remarked that the new ecclesiastical arrangements in England had changed nothing, for 'New Presbyter is but Old Priest writ Large' ('On the new forcers of Conscience under the Long PARLIAMENT' l. 20: *Works* i 71).

⁴³ 'An Horatian Ode upon Cromwell's Return from Ireland' ll. 35–40 (*The Poems of Andrew Marvell*, edited by Nigel Smith (London, 2003), p. 275).

⁴⁴ *Absalom and Achitophel* ll. 799–803.

⁴⁵ *PL* v 721–2.

⁴⁶ Cf.

But he who reigns
Monarch in Heav'n, till then as one secure
Sat on his Throne, upheld by old repute,
Consent or custome.

(*PL* i 637–40)

This misapprehension is but one of the misunderstandings as to the nature of time which the fallen angels exhibit. At the beginning of the poem Satan boasts:

thou profoundest Hell
Receive thy new Possessor: One who brings
A mind not to be chang'd by Place or Time.⁴⁷

But this is not true: he is not Hell's 'Possessor' at all, but rather Hell possesses him, and Hell as his condition is not new but dates from the beginnings of his revolt. As he acknowledges in Book IV, 'Which way I flie is Hell; my self am Hell',⁴⁸ a line which slips into an unobtrusive present tense after all the retrospective analysis and hypothetical forms of the future which that speech explores; but the present tense is nevertheless awful because it appears to admit of no change.⁴⁹ Satan has created for himself an eternal Hell. After his Fall he initially promises Beelzebub that the fallen angels

will soon resume
New courage and revive, though now they lye
Groveling and prostrate on yon Lake of Fire.⁵⁰

But the 'now' of their abjection cannot be a temporary condition as it is a manifestation of their inner revolt, and nothing in Hell will change, for it comprises

Regions of sorrow, doleful shades, where peace
And rest can never dwell, hope never comes
That comes to all; but torture without end
Still urges, and a fiery Deluge, fed
With ever-burning Sulphur unconsum'd.⁵¹

The fallen angels cannot bring themselves to contemplate these meanings of 'never' and 'ever'. Rather, they prefer hypotheses about a future which we know to be illusory:

Suppose he should relent
And publish Grace to all, on promise made
Of new Subjection.⁵²

To suppose this is to delude oneself. Belial also deludes himself:

This is now
Our doom; which if we can sustain and bear,
Our Supream Foe in time may much remit
His anger, and perhaps thus farr remov'd
Not mind us not offending, satisfi'd
With what is punish't.⁵³

⁴⁷ *PL* i 251–3.

⁴⁸ *PL* iv 75.

⁴⁹ Welch comments that in Hell 'Milton imagines time... as movement without change, duration without sequence' ('Reconsidering Chronology in *Paradise Lost*', p. 4).

⁵⁰ *PL* i 278–80.

⁵¹ *PL* i 65–9.

⁵² *PL* ii 237–9.

⁵³ *PL* ii 208–13.

When saying 'This is now | Our doom', Belial makes a fundamental mistake in assuming that the 'now' is a period of time, a merely temporary state which 'in time' might change as God loses interest in them. But—like the 'am' in Satan's 'my self am Hell'—this 'now' is the present which they have chosen for all eternity. There is also an intriguing ambiguity of tense in 'is punish't', which could be either past ('has been punished') or present ('is being punished'). But there is no temporality to their punishment. Mammon is similarly naïve in his assumptions about time:

Our torments also may in length of time
Become our Elements, these piercing Fires
As soft as now severe, our temper chang'd
Into their temper; which must needs remove
The sensible of pain. All things invite
To peaceful Counsels, and the settl'd State
Of order, how in safety best we may
Compose our present evils, with regard
Of what we are and were.⁵⁴

The slippage from 'may' to 'must' is a sign of his self-deceiving rhetoric as he seeks to establish a difference between their 'present evils' 'now' and some amelioration which may arrive 'in length of time'; he thinks that they can accommodate themselves to the difference between 'what we are and were', but that loss is irreparable.

For mankind, however, loss is not irreparable. God says to the Son that while Adam's crime

makes guiltie all his Sons, thy merit
Imputed shall absolve them who renounce
Thir own both righteous and unrighteous deeds,
And live in thee transplanted, and from thee
Receive new life.⁵⁵

Whereas the devils had hoped for new life in the sense of an improvement in their living conditions within measurable time, the new life which men—if they embrace it⁵⁶—will receive through the Son is life of a different order, something qualitatively, existentially different, which in due course will lead man into participation in the divine eternity. 'If any man *be* in Christ, *hee is* a new creature: old things are past away, behold, al things are become new'.⁵⁷ This is made possible because God intervenes in human time, most radically through the Incarnation, when the Son will be

Man among men on Earth,
Made flesh, when time shall be, of Virgin seed,
By wondrous birth.⁵⁸

⁵⁴ *PL* ii 274–82. *were*: the first edition (1667) has 'where'.

⁵⁵ *PL* iii 290–4; cf. Romans v 14–21.

⁵⁶ Cf. Raphael's 'If ye be found obedient' (*PL* v 501).

⁵⁷ 2 Corinthians v 17.

⁵⁸ *PL* iii 283–5.

This will happen 'when time shall be', that is, in God's own time.⁵⁹ Before the Fall it was possible for Raphael to imagine that

time may come when men
With Angels may participate, and find
No inconvenient Diet, nor too light Fare:
And from these corporal nutriments perhaps
Your bodies may at last turn all to Spirit,
Improv'd by tract of time.⁶⁰

But divine foreknowledge sees a different ending, when

The World shall burn, and from her ashes spring
New Heav'n and Earth, wherein the just shall dwell,
And after all thir tribulations long
See golden days, fruitful of golden deeds.⁶¹

This new Heaven and new Earth are also qualitatively different, for these 'golden days' are a timeless eternity which will be 'fruitful' in a way which abolishes the temporal legacy of the bitter fruit of Eden.

But long before that, in mundane time and in the time scheme of the poem, man seeks for novelty in a way which brings disaster, and the connotations of the word 'new' metamorphose into darker and darker shades. Satan had often used the word to refer resentfully to Earth and mankind, the 'new world', 'the happy seat | Of some new Race call'd *Man*', the 'new Favorite | Of Heav'n'.⁶² In his new world Adam finds comfort in the presence of his spouse, God's newest gift to him, who is 'my latest found, | Heav'n's last best gift, my ever new delight'.⁶³ When Eve leaves his side to garden alone, 'Great joy he promis'd to his thoughts, and new | Solace in her return'⁶⁴ (that is, renewed solace), but when she does return she brings 'A bough of fairest fruit that downie smil'd, | New gather'd',⁶⁵ and this newly gathered fruit inaugurates a new kind of time for the couple. Eve had taken the fruit out of a desire for new experiences, for new knowledge, and it wrought in her an ambition for a new relationship with Adam in which she would be equal or superior.⁶⁶ She describes its effects as producing 'new Hopes, new Joyes',⁶⁷ but after the temporary exhilaration of being 'As with new Wine intoxicated',⁶⁸ the couple gird their loins with leaves to hide from 'this new commer, Shame'.⁶⁹ So it happens that after the Fall Sin says that she feels 'new strength within me rise',⁷⁰ and sets out

to found a path
Over this Maine from Hell to that new World

⁵⁹ Biblical thinking often differentiates time as measured by the hours and the days from the special occasions which are opened to the intervention of God. Sometimes the former is denoted by the Greek term *χρόνος* and the latter by *καιρός*, but the lexical distinction is not uniformly observed in the NT: see James Barr, *Biblical Words for Time* (London, 1962).

⁶⁰ *PL* v 493–8.

⁶¹ *PL* iii 334–7.

⁶² *PL* ii 403, 347–8; ix 175–6; cf. iii 89.

⁶³ *PL* v 18–19.

⁶⁴ *PL* ix 843–4.

⁶⁵ *PL* ix 851–2.

⁶⁶ *PL* ix 816–25.

⁶⁷ *PL* ix 985.

⁶⁸ *PL* ix 1008.

⁶⁹ *PL* ix 1097.

⁷⁰ *PL* x 243.

Where Satan now prevails,

...

so strongly drawn

By this new felt attraction and instinct.⁷¹

This 'new World' is now linked to Hell by a bridge over which Sin and Death will travel, a 'new wondrous Pontifice'.⁷² Sin even claims that God himself will abandon his newly created world, 'from this new World | Retiring, by his own doom alienated'.⁷³ It seems to have become Satan's 'new Kingdom'.⁷⁴ Adam laments 'the end | Of this new glorious World',⁷⁵ which he even blames on God's fatal innovation in creating a woman, 'This noveltie on Earth, this fair defect | Of Nature'.⁷⁶

Eventually Eve seeks to renew her relationship with Adam, basing this change now on contrition:

Restor'd by thee, vile as I am, to place

Of new acceptance, hopeful to regain

Thy Love, the sole contentment of my heart.⁷⁷

There is a tension here between the two verbs with 're-' prefixes⁷⁸ and the word 'new': she will, she hopes, be 'Restor'd . . . to place | Of new acceptance . . . to regain' his love. But she cannot be restored to what is new, and in any case would this 'new acceptance' be a renewed acceptance on the same footing as before, or acceptance on a new footing? Such a restoration is not possible. The conceptual confusion here shows that Eve has not yet grasped the full implications of her act, an act which has changed everything, including their experience of time. Work will now be 'Laborious, till day droop'.⁷⁹ But a more radical change is yet to come. The couple are enabled to offer prayers of repentance only because

Prevenient Grace descending had remov'd

The stonie from thir hearts, & made new flesh

Regenerate grow instead.⁸⁰

Here the 're-' prefix marks not a return to a prior state but the growth of something new, the spiritually new flesh which replaces the stony-heartedness of obdurate rebellion, and of near despair. Adam tells Eve to expect 'New Laws to be observ'd',⁸¹ and the new dispensation is signalled when he sees a rainbow 'Betok'ning peace from God, and Cov'nant new',⁸² a sign of God's promise that

Day and Night,

Seed time and Harvest, Heat and hoary Frost

⁷¹ PL x 256–8, 262–3.

⁷² PL x 348.

⁷³ PL x 377–8.

⁷⁴ PL x 406.

⁷⁵ PL x 721.

⁷⁶ PL x 891–2. *noveltie*: frequently pejorative in early-modern usage (*OED*³ 1a).

⁷⁷ PL x 971–3.

⁷⁸ See Chapter 26 RE–.

⁷⁹ PL xi 178.

⁸⁰ PL xi 3–5. *prevenient*: coming before, preparing the way. Prevenient grace is 'the grace of God which precedes repentance and faith, predisposing a person to seek God in advance of any desire or motion on their part' (*OED*³ s.v. *prevenient* *adj.* 1).

⁸¹ PL xi 228.

⁸² PL xi 867.

Shall hold thir course, till fire purge all things new,
Both Heav'n and Earth, wherein the just shall dwell.⁸³

'Behold, I make all things new'.⁸⁴ Henceforth time will follow the rhythm of the seasons—in Eden there were no seasons,⁸⁵ and in Heaven only the appearance of alternating day and night⁸⁶—until God creates a new Heaven and a new Earth.

⁸³ *PL* xi 898–901; cf. *PL* x 645–8.

⁸⁴ Revelation xxi 5.

⁸⁵ *PL* x 651ff. Cf. Donne's magnificent sermon on Christmas Day 1624: 'God made Sun and Moon to distinguish seasons, and day, and night, and we cannot have the fruits of the earth but in their seasons: But God hath made no decree to distinguish the seasons of his mercies; In paradise, the fruits were ripe, the first minute, and in heaven it is alwaies Autumne, his mercies are ever in their maturity' (*The Sermons of John Donne*, edited by Evelyn M. Simpson and George R. Potter, 10 vols (Berkeley, Calif., 1953–62), vi 172).

⁸⁶ *PL* vi 8.

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Not

He brought thee into this delicious Grove,
This Garden, planted with the Trees of God,
Delectable both to behold and taste;
And freely all thir pleasant fruit for food
Gave thee, all sorts are here that all th' Earth yields,
Varietie without end; but of the Tree
Which tasted works knowledge of Good and Evil,
Thou mai'st not.

Paradise Lost vii 537–44



Paradise Lost is built around a prohibition: 'Thou mai'st not'. But beyond this, and to help us to understand the depth of this prohibition and the consequences of disobedience, negatives shape the text in many ways.¹ Milton uses 'not', 'nor', 'nothing', 'never', and 'without', along with words with the prefixes 'un-', 'in-', 'de-', and 'dis-', and others with the suffix '-less', to delineate an imagined world, a moral framework, and a theological truth. Negatives shape the poem's apprehension of God in forms akin to negative theology, approaching the unknowable through a series of demurrals and paradoxes, confessions of our inability to speak precisely of God; and sometimes the simple connective 'nor' may act as a reassurance of a providential ordering of the narrative as it closes off

¹ Thomas N. Corns notes Milton's fondness for words with the prefix 'un-', many of which he coins (*Milton's Language* (Oxford, 1990), pp. 84–6), while J. C. Gray lists thirty-five words beginning 'un-' (from the whole corpus of Milton's work) which are the first recorded examples in the *OED* ('Milton and the *OED* as Electronic Database', *Milton Quarterly* 23 (1989) 66–73). See also Leland Ryken, *The Apocalyptic Vision in 'Paradise Lost'* (Ithaca, N.Y., 1970), ch. 4; William Poole, *Milton and the Idea of the Fall* (Cambridge, 2005), p. 154; and Neil Forsyth, *The Satanic Epic* (Princeton, N.J., 2003), ch. 7 for Milton's use of 'dis-' words. Annabel Patterson discusses Milton's uses of negativity in *Milton's Words* (Oxford, 2009), pp. 165–95. While negations are particularly important in *PL*, they are a distinctive feature of his poetics across his work. In 'At a solemn Musick' he coins the adjective 'undiscording' (l. 17; *Works* i 28), which is the *OED*'s only example apart from an imitation in 1742. 'Lycidas' contains 'Unwept' (l. 13), 'remorseless' (l. 50), 'unceasing' (l. 64), 'thankless' (l. 66), 'unexpressive' (l. 176), and 'uncouth' (l. 186), privative forms which aptly render both the loss of Edward King and Milton's own sense of his unreadiness as a poet (*Works* i 76–83). In *Maske* Comus tries to 'inveigle and invite th' unwary sense | Of them that pass unweeting by the way' (ll. 537–8; *Works* i 105). *SA*, with its pained sense of what Samson has lost, has many words with 'un-' prefixes and '-less' suffixes. In *PR* 'un-' forms mark out Jesus' distance from the lures of the world with which Satan would ensnare him: he presents himself for baptism 'Unmarkt, unknown', confronts Satan 'with unalter'd brow', and after all the temptations returns home 'unobserv'd' (*PR* i 25, 493; iv 638).

some alternative scenario which Satan or the fallen reader might erroneously envisage, as we see here:

the Arch-fiend lay
Chain'd on the burning Lake, nor ever thence
Had ris'n or heav'd his head, but that the will
And high permission of all-ruling Heaven
Left him at large to his own dark designs.²

Negatives mark the revolt of Satan and the fallen angels as they refuse God and embrace the privative forms of evil;³ negatives inhabit the speeches of Adam and Eve both before and after the Fall, exhibiting the movements of the falling and the fallen will. As we move through the poem's imagined worlds, negatives stretch the reader's apprehension of Heaven, Hell, Chaos, and Eden, as we are shown things which both are and are not like our own world, multiple forms of the unfamiliar which can only be grasped by the evocation and then the suspension of what we know. And negatives define the role of the poet himself as he approaches this 'great Argument'.⁴

The poem begins with Milton saying that his song

with no middle flight intends to soar
Above th' *Aonian* Mount, while it pursues
Things unattempted yet in Prose or Rhime.⁵

The negatives in 'no middle' and 'unattempted' might seem proud assertions of ambition, and yet Milton also weaves into his self-assertion some negatives which humbly acknowledge weakness. At the beginning of Book III the invocation of 'holy Light' proceeds by means of apophatic negatives for God whilst also contemplating the role of the poet:

HAIL holy Light, ofspring of Heav'n first-born,
Or of th' Eternal Coeternal beam
May I express thee unblam'd? since God is light,
And never but in unapproach'd light
Dwelt from Eternitie, dwelt then in thee,
Bright effluence of bright essence increate.⁶

The negative 'unblam'd' signals Milton's reverent, tentative approach to God who dwells in 'unapproach'd light',⁷ which is the effluence (the out-flowing or

² *PL* i 209–13.

³ See Chapter 11 *EVIL* for an extended discussion of how Milton's poetry responds to the theological principle that evil is the privation of good.

⁴ *PL* i 24.

⁵ *PL* i 13–16.

⁶ *PL* iii 1–6. See Chapter 15 *God* for apophatic theology.

⁷ *unapproach'd*: this is the *OED*'s first example, and has two meanings, though only the first is recorded in the *OED*: (i) 'not approached': this tells us not that God is unapproachable (which is not true, in so far as divine grace allows man to turn towards God) but that the light in which he dwells (a) cannot be approached by man and (b) cannot be matched by any other light; (ii) 'not able to be approached' (as in 'Thou...that sits't in light & glory unapproachable' (*Reformation: Works* iii 76));

emanation) of an uncreated⁸ essence. This contemplation of uncreated light leads to the reflection that for Milton created light

Revisit's[t] not these eyes, that rowle in vain
To find thy piercing ray, and find no dawn;
So thicke a drop serene hath quencht thir Orbs,
Or dim suffusion veild. Yet not the more
Cease I to wander where the Muses haunt.

...

Thus with the Year
Seasons return, but not to me returns
Day.⁹

The poetry confesses Milton's own negated physical powers ('Revisit'st not... find no dawn'), yet also shows his resolution not to be cowed by this lack: it leads first to a 'Yet not' which negates the power of that bodily negation and asserts the poet's faithfulness to his vocation, and then to a triumphant negative in the prayer that he 'may see and tell | Of things invisible to mortal sight'.¹⁰ To see the invisible is almost a reparation for the loss of his physical sight. There is another strong 'Yet not' in a parallel passage prefacing Book VII, where Milton writes:

Standing on Earth, not rapt above the Pole,
More safe I Sing with mortal voice, unchang'd
To hoarse or mute, though fall'n on evil dayes,
On evil dayes though fall'n, and evil tongues;
In darkness, and with dangers compass round,
And solitude; yet not alone, while thou
Visit'st my slumbers Nightly.¹¹

This is a human poetry, its author 'not rapt above the Pole'—for like Dante 'Io non Enëa, non Paulo sono'¹²—and remaining 'unchang'd' amidst the vicissitudes of Restoration England. Recalling the fate of Bacchus, Milton says, 'nor could the Muse defend | Her Son. So fail not thou, who thee implores';¹³ 'fail not' hovers between imperative and subjunctive, following the grammar of prayer. The power of the pagan Muse is negated; the power of the heavenly Muse is, by contrast, unfailing, and it is by divine aid that in evil days he remains 'unchang'd', and though in solitude 'yet not alone'. Such assertive negatives speak more powerfully than any positive synonyms might have done; they are at once gestures of humility, confessing his own weakened powers (intrinsically weak as a mortal writing of heavenly matters, and weakened through personal blindness and political changes), and declarations of faith and faithfulness, faith that the poet is inspired to write his

for the form '-ed' having the meaning '-able' see E. A. Abbott, *A Shakespearian Grammar* (London, 1870; reprinted New York, 1966), §3.

⁸ *increate*: the *OED*'s citations suggest that this is a rare word.

⁹ *PL* iii 23–7, 41–2.

¹⁰ *PL* iii 54–5.

¹¹ *PL* vii 23–9.

¹² *Inferno* ii 32 (Dante Alighieri, *Commedia*, edited by Anna Maria Chiavacci Leonardi, 3 vols (Milan, 1991–7), i 52).

¹³ *PL* vii 37–8.

'unpremeditated Verse' by the visitations of the heavenly Muse 'who deignes | Her nightly visitation unimplor'd'.¹⁴ 'Unimplor'd' is again assertive and humble, both a claim to be divinely inspired and a confession that this gift has been bestowed without his seeking it.

Negatives recur to strengthen the solitary in Milton's account of the figure who is perhaps his alter ego in the poem, the faithful angel Abdiel:

Among the faithless, faithful only hee;
Among innumerable false, unmov'd,
Unshak'n, uneduc'd, unterrifi'd
His Loyaltie he kept, his Love, his Zeale;
Nor number, nor example with him wrought
To swerve from truth.¹⁵

All these negations serve to distinguish Abdiel from the numerous crowd of those who are faithless, or who try to move, shake, seduce, and terrify the loyal servants of God. After warning Satan that God can 'uncreate thee',¹⁶ Abdiel journeys safely back to the ranks of the faithful angels, and for 'the dreadless Angel unpursu'd' the Morn 'Unbarr'd the gates of Light' rather than simply opening them.¹⁷ The repeated negations are repeated re-enactments of Abdiel's faithfulness, reminders that such a stance has to be repeated and repeated by those whose faithfulness is tested in a hostile world.

In narrative passages, in descriptions of Heaven or Hell or Chaos (or rather, in passages which might at first glance look like descriptions, but are ultimately evocations of states of being, spiritual places) Milton often uses negatives to stretch the reader's imagination, as in the negative which introduces and permits the startling paradox in the description of Hell as having 'No light, but rather darkness visible'.¹⁸ The negative phrasing is a necessary step in the education of our imagination, first presenting a seemingly commonplace state where there is 'no light' before the audacious *paradiastole* delivers that weird near-oxymoron—'darkness visible'. The 'inutterable'¹⁹ strangeness of the universe envisaged by the poem appears through phrasing such as 'the void and formless infinite',²⁰ 'unextinguishable fire',²¹ 'uncreated night',²² 'unessential Night',²³ 'unoriginal *Night*',²⁴ 'unfounded deep',²⁵ 'unapparent Deep',²⁶ 'th' unreal, vast, unbounded deep',²⁷ 'the vast immeasurable

¹⁴ *PL* ix 21–4.

¹⁵ *PL* v 897–902.

¹⁶ *PL* v 895.

¹⁷ *PL* vi 1, 4.

¹⁸ *PL* i 63. See Chapter 6 *DARK AND LIGHT*, p. 49 n. 16. Other examples of this technique include 'With ever-burning Sulphur unconsum'd' (*PL* i 69). As Stanley Fish comments, 'our awareness of the inadequacy of what is described and what we can apprehend provides, if only negatively, a sense of what cannot be described and what we cannot apprehend' (*Surprised by Sin: The Reader in 'Paradise Lost'* (Berkeley, Calif., 1967), p. 27).

¹⁹ *PL* ii 626.

²⁰ *PL* iii 12.

²¹ *PL* ii 88.

²² *PL* ii 150.

²³ *PL* ii 439. *unessential*: possessing no essence or substance; immaterial (*OED s.v. unessential adj.*; first example in this sense).

²⁴ *PL* x 477. *unoriginal*: uncreated (*OED s.v. unoriginal* 1). This is Satan speaking, so the idea that night was not created is suspect; indeed, it is false theologically.

²⁵ *PL* ii 829. *unfounded*: having no foundation (*OED s.v. unfounded adj.*; the first example apart from one instance in an Anglo-Dutch dictionary).

²⁶ *PL* vii 103. *unapparent*: invisible (Fowler).

²⁷ *PL* x 471.

Abyss',²⁸ 'The dark unbottom'd infinite Abyss',²⁹ 'Th' untractable Abyse',³⁰ 'this Gulfe | Impassable, Impervious',³¹ 'this unvoyageable Gulf'.³² Such negatives make the ostensibly physical world behave in non-physical ways, reminding us that in *Paradise Lost* the quasi-physical is a manifestation of the spiritual. It is true both physically and spiritually that perdition is 'bottomless'.³³ In Hell there is 'torture without end',³⁴ 'without hope of end'.³⁵ There is also an

Illimitable Ocean without bound
Without dimension, where length, breadth, & highth,
And time and place are lost.³⁶

Three different forms of negation coalesce here: 'Illimitable' (not simply what has no limits, but what cannot be limited); 'without bound | Without dimension', which negates those very attributes which we think of as being essential to the physical world; and finally the list of those attributes which 'are lost'—and so we are left wondering just how such abstract entities as length or time can be 'lost'. The verbal echo of St Paul tells us that this is a place where one cannot know 'what is the breadth, and length, and depth, and height' of 'the loue of Christ'; or rather, this quasi-geographical space is the existential state which results from turning away from such a knowledge.

Milton's technique in thus expanding our imagination often combines the positive and the negated, the abstract and the physical, as in Uriel's account of God's works:

But what created mind can comprehend
Thir number, or the wisdom infinite
That brought them forth, but hid thir causes deep.
I saw when at his Word the formless Mass,
This worlds material mould, came to a heap:
Confusion heard his voice, and wilde uproar
Stood rul'd, stood vast infinitude confin'd.³⁷

Here several privatives do some of the work of drawing out the reader's imagination: 'infinite', 'formless', 'infinitude'. But the poetry presents the infinite in two different ways: 'infinitude'³⁸ is a noun with a quasi-physical meaning which is made part of a paradox through the addition of the adjective 'confin'd' and the verb 'stood', whereas 'infinite' is applied non-physically to the divine wisdom: there are no limits to God's wisdom, but the limitless chaos is indeed confined by his voice.

²⁸ *PL* vii 211.

²⁹ *PL* ii 405.

³⁰ *PL* x 476. *untractable*: not easily dealt with (*OED* *s.v.* intractable *adj.* 2).

³¹ *PL* x 253–4. *impervious*: through which there is no way. The examples in *OED* *s.v.* *impervious* *adj.* are of physical barriers such as skin or a wall, but Milton's idea that the gulf is impervious is surprising and sends us back to the etymological sense of there being no *via* (way) *per* (through).

³² *PL* x 366. *unvoyageable*: the first example in *OED* *s.v.* *unvoyageable* *adj.*; its later examples come only from Wordsworth and Ruskin, both probably writing with Milton in mind.

³³ *PL* i 47.

³⁴ *PL* i 67.

³⁵ *PL* ii 89.

³⁶ *PL* ii 892–4; cf. p. 128 n. 14.

³⁷ *PL* iii 705–11.

³⁸ *OED* *s.v.* *infinitude* *n.* records this word as Milton's coinage, first used in *Reformation* (1641), where he invokes the Holy Spirit as 'the third subsistence of Divine Infinitude' (*Works* iii 76).

The abstract 'causes' of creation are, again quasi-physically, 'hid... deep'; there is a physical mass, but it is 'formless'; this material is drawn into a homely 'heap'; confusion becomes, it seems, a personification which can hear; and the repeated simple verb 'stood' abruptly signals the power of the divine voice in ruling this Chaos, where uproar and infinitude can be thought to stand. Abstract and concrete language, philosophical terms together with homely vocabulary, and the evocations of near personifications all aid the informing of the reader's imagination and the forming of his spiritual perception. It is not only, not primarily, heightened imagination which such a passage seeks to draw from the reader, but heightened reverence and awe.

Satan and the fallen angels inhabit a world of privation, which is another way of saying a world of evil.³⁹ The privative prefixes sometimes work in complex or unexpected ways to illuminate this condition. When Satan himself moves with 'unblest feet',⁴⁰ these are not feet which have not yet been blessed, but the feet of one who has deprived himself of blessing. When he moves with 'uneasie steps',⁴¹ this is not just because the terrain is rough, but because he has deprived himself of true ease.⁴² As the loyal and the rebel angels clash during the war in Heaven, Milton delineates the difference between the two sides through privative words which signal their contrasting conditions. First, the rebels, a

deformed rout
Enter'd, and foul disorder;
...
Defensive scarce, or with pale fear surpris'd,
Then first with fear surpris'd and sense of paine
Fled **ignominious**, to such evil brought
By sin of **disobedience**.⁴³

After the rebel angels, without form or order, without name, the faithful angels are accorded a different set of negatives:

Far otherwise th' inviolable Saints
In Cubic Phalanx firm advanc't entire,
Invulnerable, **impenitrably** arm'd:
Such high advantages thir **innocence**
Gave them above thir foes, **not** to have sinnd,
Not to have **disobei'd**; in fight they stood
Unwearied, **unobnoxious** to be pain'd.⁴⁴

Not to have disobeyed is not a merely negative condition, for from it springs the strength which puts the faithful beyond harm.

³⁹ For the idea of evil as the privation of good see Chapter 11 EVIL, pp. 106–12.

⁴⁰ *PL* i 238. ⁴¹ *PL* i 295. ⁴² See Chapter 8 EASE.

⁴³ *PL* vi 387–8, 393–6; emphases added here and subsequently. *ignominious*: the word is one of those with a privative prefix as it derives from the Latin *ignominia* (*in* + **gnomen*, 'no name', 'no reputation').

⁴⁴ *PL* vi 398–404. *unobnoxious*: unexposed (*sc.* to danger).

The narrative voice which guides our understanding of the poem's cosmology and geography also guides us as we listen to the plausible but specious speeches of the fallen angels. The narrator says that Satan's words bore 'Semblance of worth, not substance',⁴⁵ and that Belial counselled 'peaceful sloth, | Not peace'.⁴⁶ Belial counsels against renewing the war lest they be punished further and find themselves 'Unrespited, unpitied, unrepreevd, | Ages of hopeless end',⁴⁷ recognizing that the notions of military power with which his associates delude themselves cannot touch God, for whatever they try

our great Enemy
All incorruptible would on his Throne
Sit unpolluted, and th' Ethereal mould
Incapable of stain would soon expel
Her mischief.⁴⁸

Even the corrupted intelligence of Belial understands the distance between the divine and the diabolical signalled in those prefixes 'in-', 'un-', and again 'in-'. They can have no power over God. Beelzebub maintains that their strength is 'undiminisht',⁴⁹ for in angels

the mind and spirit remains
Invincible, and vigour soon returns,
Though all our Glory extinct, and happy state
Here swallow'd up in endless misery.⁵⁰

but he fails to address the contradiction between his false claim to be 'Invincible' and his true recognition of 'endless misery'. If we are becoming sensitive to prefixes and suffixes, then we might register the full force of the 'ex-' in 'extinct', which derives from the Latin *ex-* (intensifying prefix) + *stinguere* 'to quench', thus to quench utterly. The word is used particularly in this period for light or fire: for the rebels the light of Heaven is utterly extinguished, but the fires of Hell will never be. So minimal is the devils' consolation that they manage to find 'some glimps of joy, to have found thir chief | Not in despair, to have found themselves not lost'.⁵¹ But of course they are not 'not lost'.

⁴⁵ *PL* i 529.

⁴⁶ *PL* ii 227–8. As in that last example, the poetry often places an emphatic negative at the beginning or end of a line, or at a caesura, to ensure that we do not miss it:

and found
No rest. (*PL* ii 617–18)
If shape it might be call'd that shape had **none** (*PL* ii 667)
Who first broke peace in Heav'n and Faith, till then
Unbrok'n. (*PL* ii 690–1)
had servd necessitie,
Not mee. (*PL* iii 110–11)
Man therefore shall find grace,
The other **none**: (*PL* iii 130–1).

(emphases added)

⁴⁷ *PL* ii 185–6. *unrepreevd*: this is the *OED*³'s first example.

⁴⁸ *PL* ii 137–41.

⁴⁹ *PL* i 154.

⁵⁰ *PL* i 139–42.

⁵¹ *PL* i 524–5.

When Satan suggests to his followers that they may 'Dwell not unvisited of Heav'ns fair Light',⁵² the tentativeness of that 'not un-' betrays his recognition of the remoteness of that possibility. His claims may sometimes use negation confidently (he maintains that their revolt was 'not inglorious',⁵³ and tells Sin that his defeat was 'unforeseen, unthought of'⁵⁴), but such rhetoric becomes hollow as it is repeated:

All is not lost; the unconquerable Will,
And study of revenge, immortal hate,
And courage never to submit or yield:
And what is else not to be overcome?
That Glory never shall his wrath or might
Extort from me.⁵⁵

Satan's negatives ('not lost... unconquerable... immortal... never... not... never') are all emphatic statements of things which he cannot actually know, and only serve to emphasize his powerlessness, despite his being a master rhetorician. They also reveal what will be the abiding tenor of his new state, which is one of negation and privation, a world of multiple refusals. 'A mind not to be chang'd'⁵⁶ may present itself as an assertion of heroic constancy and endurance, but it can also be construed as a fatal failure to repent and seek divine mercy. Abdiel tells Satan that 'Decrees | Against thee are gon forth without recall',⁵⁷ for he is

Cast out from God and blessed vision, falls
Into utter darkness, deep ingulft, his place
Ordaind without redemption, without end.⁵⁸

Satan thus locks himself into a world of negation.

His own bid for control relies on negatives as he wards off potential challenges:

where there is then no good
For which to strive, no strife can grow up there
From Faction; for none sure will claim in Hell
Precedence, none, whose portion is so small
Of present pain, that with ambitious mind
Will covet more.⁵⁹

So in Hell there is no good to be sought, only degrees of pain. His assurances to his followers rely upon false negatives, or negatives from which he draws a false conclusion:

rememberst thou
Thy making, while the Maker gave thee being?
We know no time when we were not as now.⁶⁰

⁵² *PL* ii 398.

⁵³ *PL* i 624.

⁵⁴ *PL* ii 821.

⁵⁵ *PL* i 106–11.

⁵⁶ *PL* i 253.

⁵⁷ *PL* v 884–5.

⁵⁸ *PL* v 613–15.

⁵⁹ *PL* ii 30–5.

⁶⁰ *PL* v 857–9. Satan is addressing Abdiel here in the presence of his followers.

Yet when left alone, and reflecting on his condition with what approaches honesty, Satan says that he

thought one step higher
Would set me highest, and in a moment quit
The debt immense of endless gratitude,
So burthensome, still paying, still to ow;
Forgetful what from him I still receivd,
And understood not that a grateful mind
By owing owes not, but still pays, at once
Indebted and dischargd.⁶¹

Negatives define the creature's relation to his Creator, which is felt as a burden of 'immense' debt and 'endless' gratitude, words which in another context might be wondering acknowledgements of divine bounty but here are soured into resentment.⁶² As he himself recognizes in this moment of terrifying spiritual clarity, Satan had not previously understood that the truly grateful mind 'By owing owes not', that is, by acknowledging its dependence that very acknowledgement is itself a release from debt; and yet this is not a once-for-all process but a continued state of acknowledged dependency, at once 'Indebted and discharged'.⁶³ The 'dis-' prefix here does not negate the debt in a single act but is rather a condition in which what would have been a burden is gratefully accepted as a source of life. But Satan cannot bring himself to accept such a state, and feels the boundlessness of the divine as a radical displacement of himself:

which way shall I flie
Infinite wrauth, and infinite despair?
...
O then at last relent: is there no place
Left for Repentance, none for Pardon left?
None left but by submission.⁶⁴

The boundless nature of the divine is felt as a threat, felt merely as infinite wrath which induces infinite despair (or is it that infinite despair conceives of the Deity only as infinite wrath?); from neither wrath nor despair is there, it seems to him, any escape: 'no place...none...None'. The repetition of 'infinite' asks us to pause over that word. What is truly infinite, without end, in the world of *Paradise Lost*? It is one of the words through which Milton carefully structures his poem, aligning the spatial imagination with the theological and moral imagination. The world as seen by Satan is not only a world of 'Infinite wrauth, and infinite despair', but one where there is a 'dark unbottom'd infinite Abyss'⁶⁵ which has to be traversed on the way out of Hell; where Sin laments the 'sorrow infinite'⁶⁶ caused to her by her

⁶¹ *PL* iv 50–7.

⁶² *immense*: derives from Latin *immensus*, immeasurable, boundless, consisting of the negative prefix *im-* and *mensus*, the past participle of *metiri*, to measure (*OED* s.v. *immense* *adj.*).

⁶³ For sin as a refusal of such dependency see Chapter 11 *EVIL*, p. 113.

⁶⁴ *PL* v 73–81.

⁶⁵ *PL* ii 405.

⁶⁶ *PL* ii 797.

monstrous offspring; where Gabriel threatens Satan with God's 'anger infinite'.⁶⁷ The Satanic view looks out on infinite despair.⁶⁸

Adam, when he contemplates the full measure of his sin, tries to comprehend the predicament of finite man (finite now, because made subject to death by the Fall) subjected to the wrath of an infinite God:

For though the Lord of all be infinite,
Is his wrauth also? be it, man is not so,
But mortal doom'd.

...

Will he, draw out,
For angers sake, finite to infinite
In punisht man.⁶⁹

But in time Adam comes to realize that there is in God infinite goodness, that Satan's machinations serve only, as the narrator had promised us in Book I, 'to bring forth | Infinite goodness, grace and mercy shewn | On Man'.⁷⁰ In Eden before the Fall Adam had assured Eve that God must 'Be infinitely good, and of his good | As liberal and free as infinite',⁷¹ and in prayer they extol 'Thy goodness infinite'.⁷² After the 'infinite calamitie'⁷³ of the Fall, Eve acknowledges that 'infinite in pardon was my Judge',⁷⁴ and ultimately Adam exclaims (in words which echo the much earlier words of the narrator):

O goodness infinite, goodness immense!
That all this good of evil shall produce,
And evil turn to good.⁷⁵

What this thread of recurrent vocabulary helps us to see is the terrible self-enclosure of Satan, who has created for himself an inescapable world of infinite divine wrath generated by his own infinite despair. So 'infinite wrauth' is the Satanic perspective on God, a perspective shared temporarily by a despairing Adam; 'Infinite goodness, grace and mercy' is the Miltonic perspective, to be shared by his reader.

When Satan meets the unfallen angels Ithuriel and Zephon, a string of negatives marks out just how far Satan has fallen:

Know ye not then said *Satan*, fill'd with scorn,
Know ye not mee? ye knew me once no mate
For you, there sitting where ye durst not soare;
Not to know mee argues your selves unknown.
...
To whom thus *Zephon*, answering scorn with scorn.
Think not, revolted Spirit, thy shape the same,
Or undiminisht brightness, to be known
As when thou stoodst in Heav'n upright and pure;
That Glorie then, when thou no more wast good,

⁶⁷ *PL* iv 916. ⁶⁸ When gazing upon Eden, Satan 'Saw undelighted all delight' (*PL* iv 286).

⁶⁹ *PL* x 794–6, 801–3. ⁷⁰ *PL* i 217–19. ⁷¹ *PL* iv 414–15. ⁷² *PL* iv 734.

⁷³ *PL* x 907. ⁷⁴ *PL* xi 167. ⁷⁵ *PL* xii 469–71.

Departed from thee.

...

So spake the Cherube, and his grave rebuke
Severe in youthful beautie, added grace
Invincible.⁷⁶

Satan begins his speech with sarcastic negatives designed to assert his superiority over the apparently ignorant angels, claiming that not to recognize him indicates just how low they must be in the angelic hierarchy, mere unknowns—unknown to the hierarchically minded Satan, perhaps, but not to God, whose knowledge of his creation is a facet of his love for it. As the Psalmist says, 'O LORD thou hast searched mee, and knowen *me*. Thou knowest my downe sitting, and mine vprising: thou vnderstandest my thought afarre off.'⁷⁷ But Zephon points out that Satan's brightness is no longer 'undiminisht'. He faces angels who are 'Invincible', which is a spiritual not a martial quality, for this is 'grace | Invincible'.⁷⁸ Michael calls him 'Author of evil, unknown till thy revolt, | Unnam'd in Heav'n':⁷⁹ before Satan's revolt evil did not, could not, even have a name. As for Satan's followers, they seem to Raphael to be best characterized as negatives:

Nameless in dark oblivion let them dwell.
For strength from Truth divided and from Just,
Illaudable, naught merits but dispraise
And ignominie, yet to glorie aspires
Vain glorious, and through infamie seeks fame.⁸⁰

They have no name, no praise or merit, no reputation, just infamy rather than true fame.



Milton's approach to writing of God draws on the apophatic tradition of negative theology, which aims at moving towards an understanding of the deity through a series of negative statements.⁸¹ For, as Aquinas says, *quia de Deo scire non possumus quid sit, sed quid non sit, non possumus considerare de Deo quomodo sit, sed potius quomodo non sit*.⁸² Though the demands of epic agency require Milton to make the Deity an actor and speaker in his poem, Milton rarely offers anything approaching a visual or quasi-physical description of God,⁸³ and draws on the

⁷⁶ *PL* iv 827–30, 834–9, 844–6. ⁷⁷ Psalm cxxxix 1–2.

⁷⁸ So too the faithful angels during the war in heaven are 'Invulnerable, impenitrably arm'd' because of their innocence (*PL* vi 400).

⁷⁹ *PL* vi 262–3.

⁸⁰ *PL* vi 380–4. *illaudable*: not worthy of praise; after Puttenham in 1589 the first example in *OED* *s.v.* *illaudable adj.* is from Milton's *History of Britain* (1670). *ignominie*: see n. 43.

⁸¹ Cf. Chapter 15 *GOD*, pp. 203–4. See further Noam Reisner, *Milton and the Ineffable* (Oxford, 2009) and Denys Turner, *The Darkness of God: Negativity in Christian Mysticism* (Cambridge, 1995).

⁸² 'Because we cannot know what God is, but rather what He is not, we have no means for considering how God is, but rather how he is not' (*ST* I, 3, prologue).

⁸³ The reference to God's 'unsleeping eyes' is one exception (*PL* v 647), but is hardly literal.

tradition of the *via negativa* to counteract any impression of anthropomorphism. God himself says:

I am who fill
 Infinitude, nor vacuous the space.
 Though I uncircumscrib'd my self retire,
 And put not forth my goodness, which is free
 To act or not. Necessitie and Chance
 Approach not me.⁸⁴

Here the negatives move us away from imagining God's presence in simplistically physical terms, because such assumptions would limit him: he and his goodness are not finite, not circumscribed, and the paradoxical idea of filling infinitude warns us not to cleave too naïvely to such terms. Necessity and Chance can have no purchase upon God, and therefore cannot in the end be effective agents in a world under God's control. 'Infinitude' is also Milton's coinage, stretching the language a little further.⁸⁵ Nor is Heaven exactly a place, and Milton's evocations of Heaven both deploy but also negate physical suggestions. Satan sees

Farr off th' Empyreal Heav'n, extended wide
 In circuit, undetermind square or round.⁸⁶

Adam and Eve's prayers pass 'Dimensionless through Heav'nly dores',⁸⁷ and the angels stand 'in Orbes | Of circuit inexpressible'.⁸⁸ When the angels praise God, they use terms which include various forms of privative words for the divine attributes:

Thee Father first they sung Omnipotent,
 Immutable, Immortal, Infinite,
 Eternal King; thee Author of all being,
 Fountain of Light, thy self invisible
 Amidst the glorious brightness where thou sit'st
 Thron'd inaccessible, but when thou shad'st
 The full blaze of thy beams, and through a cloud
 Drawn round about thee like a radiant Shrine,
 Dark with excessive bright thy skirts appear,
 Yet dazle Heav'n, that brightest Seraphim
 Approach not, but with both wings veil thir eyes.⁸⁹

'Immutable, Immortal, Infinite . . . invisible . . . inaccessible'—yet not entirely invisible or inaccessible, for when God draws around himself a radiant cloud the angels are able to look upon him. But man is not: for as God said to Moses, 'Thou canst not see my face: for there shall no man see mee, and liue',⁹⁰ and even the Seraphim veil their eyes. So dazzling is even this occluded light that 'Dark with excessive bright thy skirts appear'.⁹¹

⁸⁴ *PL* vii 168–73.

⁸⁵ See n. 38.

⁸⁶ *PL* ii 1047–8.

⁸⁷ *PL* xi 17.

⁸⁸ *PL* v 594–5; cf. v 596–9, discussed on p. 221 (Chapter 15 God).

⁸⁹ *PL* iii 372–82.

⁹⁰ Exodus xxxiii 20.

⁹¹ This passage may have suggested to Dryden his lines in *The Hind and the Panther* i 66–7: 'Thy throne is darkness in th' abyss of light, | A blaze of glory that forbids the sight'.

When God himself speaks, he uses many negatives to define man's relationship to him:

they themselves decreed
Thir own revolt, not I: if I foreknew,
Foreknowledge had no influence on their fault,
Which had no less prov'd certain unforeknown.⁹²

'Not...no...no...unforeknown': God emphatically defines here man's responsibility for his own Fall, which cannot be gainsaid. But he adds:

Man shall not quite be lost, but sav'd who will,
Yet not of will in him, but grace in me
Freely voutsaft.⁹³

Here the negatives insist that all is not lost; man may be saved if he will, but this will is not the natural human will, but rather that will which embraces divine grace. Careful definitions ward off human misunderstandings. And God continues:

This my long sufferance and my day of grace
They who neglect and scorn, shall never taste;
...
And none but such from mercy I exclude.
But yet all is not don; Man disobeying,
Disloyal breaks his fealtie, and sinns
...
To expiate his Treason hath naught left,
But to destruction sacred and devote.⁹⁴

Their shared negative prefixes tie together 'neglect' and the 'never' which results from it, so that it is a man's own refusal of God's grace which brings about his self-exclusion from divine forgiveness. Two 'dis-' prefixes remind us that this poem speaks 'OF Mans First Disobedience',⁹⁵ and then the two 'de-' prefixes⁹⁶ bring finality to the fate of a recalcitrant mankind. But the negatives do not mark out a negative message; rather, grace is

The speediest of thy winged messengers,
To visit all thy creatures, and to all
Comes unprevented, unimplor'd, unsought,
Happie for man, so coming; he her aide
Can never seek, once dead in sins and lost;
Attonement for himself or offering meet,
Indebted and undon, hath none to bring.⁹⁷

⁹² *PL* iii 116–19. *unforeknown*: this is the *OED*'s first example.

⁹³ *PL* iii 173–5.

⁹⁴ *PL* iii 198–9, 202–4, 207–8. ⁹⁵ *PL* i 1.

⁹⁶ *destruction* has the *de-* prefix, undoing or reversing the action of the verb; *devote* has the *de-* prefix meaning 'away' (*OED s.v. de- prefix* 1f, 1b). *devote*: i.e. devoted, 'consigned to destruction, doomed' (*OED s.v. devoted* 3). See Chapter 18 I, p. 267.

⁹⁷ *PL* iii 229–35.

Divine grace comes to man without any actions on his part (though, as we have just seen, such grace can be refused). He will be warned of Satan's plot by Raphael, so that he cannot claim to be 'unadmonisht, unforewarnd'.⁹⁸ But once man has, by his own actions, embraced sin, he is, in effect, 'dead . . . and lost', and therefore 'Indebted and undon', without that grateful acknowledgement of indebtedness to which Satan refers. Finally, what God offers mankind can only be imagined in negatives which confess its infinity: 'Love without end, and without measure Grace'.⁹⁹



In his account of Eden Milton's negatives separate the lost world of innocence from the fallen world of the reader. This too is a place (though not topographically a place¹⁰⁰) which eludes those paradigms and inappropriate forms of readerly knowledge through which we might attempt to understand it: Eden is

Not that faire field
Of *Enna*,
...
 nor that sweet Grove
Of *Daphne*
...
 nor that *Nyseian* Ile.
...
Nor where *Abassin* Kings thir issue Guard.¹⁰¹

It is not what we thought we knew. Nor is it any longer accessible to fallen mankind:

There was a place,
Now not, though Sin, not Time, first wraught the change.¹⁰²

Other negatives similarly point forward to the world after the Fall: the serpent is

Not yet in horrid Shade or dismal Den,
Nor nocent yet, but on the grassie Herbe
Fearless unfeard he slept.¹⁰³

and there is a compactly tragic reference to the 'yet unspoil'd | *Guiana*'.¹⁰⁴ The most serious of these usages occurs when Sin and Death set out to make all living creatures 'unimmortal', the strangeness of the word renewing its meaning for us.¹⁰⁵ Before the Fall, the love of Adam and Eve is in part narrated through negatives

⁹⁸ *PL* v 245. ⁹⁹ *PL* iii 142.

¹⁰⁰ For early-modern ideas about mapping Eden see Alessandro Scafi, *Mapping Paradise: A History of Heaven on Earth* (London, 2006).

¹⁰¹ *PL* iv 268–9, 272–3, 275, 280.

¹⁰² *PL* ix 69–70.

¹⁰³ *PL* ix 185–7.

¹⁰⁴ *PL* xi 409–10.

¹⁰⁵ *PL* x 611. This is the first example in *OED* s.v. *unimmortal* *adj.*; the only other one is from 1876.

which act as a judgement upon the postlapsarian condition by reminding us of what we have lost. God sees Adam and Eve

Reaping immortal fruits of joy and love,
Uninterrupted joy, unrivald love.¹⁰⁶

and the narrator tells us that

in those hearts
Love unlibidinous reign'd, nor jealousy
Was understood, the injur'd Lovers Hell.¹⁰⁷

The rare word 'unlibidinous'¹⁰⁸ directs our attention to the pure sexuality of Adam and Eve, and implicitly links the absence of lust to the absence of jealousy.

But the absence of lust is not synonymous with the absence of sexual desire, for there is sex in Eden:¹⁰⁹ Eve looks at Adam 'with eyes | Of conjugal attraction unprov'd'¹¹⁰ and the nakedness of the couple is extolled at length as a form of judgement on our postlapsarian guilt and shame:

Nor those mysterious parts were then conceald,
Then was **not** guiltie shame, **dishonest** shame
Of natures works, honor **dishonorable**,
Sin-bred, how have ye troubl'd all mankind
With shews instead, meer shews of seeming pure,
And banisht from mans life his happiest life,
Simplicities and **spotless** **innocence**.
So passd they naked on, **nor** shund the sight
Of God or Angel, for they thought **no** ill.¹¹¹

Two groups of privative words meet here: the prelapsarian world of innocence in which there is no reason for the pair to avoid the sight of others proleptically judges the postlapsarian world in which dishonest and dishonourable shame corrupts the purity of sex and the sexual body. The 'Wedded love' of Adam and Eve is likewise presented as a judgement on contemporary mores:

Farr be it, that I should write thee sin or blame,
Or think thee **unbefitting** holiest place,
Perpetual Fountain of Domestic sweets,
Whose bed is **undefil'd** and chaste pronounc't.
...
not in the bought smile
Of Harlots, **loveless**, **joyless**, **unindeard**,

¹⁰⁶ *PL* iii 67–8.

¹⁰⁷ *PL* v 448–50.

¹⁰⁸ This is the only example in *OED* s.v. *unlibidinous* *adj.*

¹⁰⁹ See James Grantham Turner, *One Flesh: Paradisal Marriage and Sexual Relations in the Age of Milton* (Oxford, 1987).

¹¹⁰ *PL* iv 492–3.

¹¹¹ *PL* iv 312–20. *dishonest*: dishonourable, shameful; unchaste, lewd (*OED* s.v. *dishonest* 1, 2).

Casual fruition, **nor** in Court Amours

...

Sleep on

Blest pair; and O yet happiest if ye seek

No happier state, and know to know **no** more.¹¹²

Happiness is contingent upon the crucial negative of not seeking more.

Negatives take on a darker hue as the poem moves towards the Fall. Satan seeks to raise in Adam or Eve 'distemperd, discontented thoughts, | Vaine hopes, vaine aimes, inordinate desires'.¹¹³ Eve is disturbed by her dream that she has taken the forbidden fruit, and Adam finds 'unwak'nd *Eve* | With Tresses discompos'd, and glowing Cheek, | As through unquiet rest'.¹¹⁴ Eve recounts that in her dream the smell of the fruit 'So quick'nd appetite, that I, methought, | Could not but taste':¹¹⁵ the double negative 'not but' slightly delays the fatal word 'taste', while also allowing Eve to avoid saying unambiguously that she did actually taste the fruit. The phrasing also implies an abnegation of the reason and the will, a state in which mere appetite appears to govern. Adam consoles her, saying,

Evil into the mind of God or Man

May come and go, so **un**approv'd, and leave

No spot or blame behind: Which gives me hope

That what in sleep thou didst abhor to dream,

Waking thou **never** wilt consent to do.

Be **not** disheart'nd then, **nor** cloud those looks.¹¹⁶

If evil remains 'unapprov'd', then it cannot harm her, but these negative forms subtly introduce the possibility which they negate: 'unapprov'd' is not synonymous with a vigorous positive such as 'rejected'.

When Raphael instructs Adam as to the nature of his free will, he employs emphatic negatives to define man's free condition:

God made thee perfet, **not** immutable;

And good he made thee, but to persevere

He left it in thy power, ordaind thy will

By nature free, **not** over-rul'd by Fate

Inextricable, or strict necessity;

Our voluntarie service he requires,

Not our necessitated, such with him

Finds **no** acceptance, **nor** can find, for how

Can hearts, **not** free, be tri'd whether they serve

Willing or **no**, who will but what they must

By Destinie, and can **no** other choose?¹¹⁷

¹¹² *PL* iv 758–61, 765–7, 773–5. On the last lines see p. 289.

¹¹⁴ *PL* v 9–11.

¹¹⁵ *PL* v 84–6.

¹¹⁶ *PL* v 117–22.

¹¹³ *PL* iv 807–8.

¹¹⁷ *PL* v 524–34.

These negatives assert and define human freedom: man is not immutable,¹¹⁸ but capable of change, change which lies within his own power; human will is not overruled by a Fate from which man cannot extricate himself; God does not want any service from man which is compelled. Adam acknowledges to Raphael that to seek after forbidden knowledge 'renders us in things that most concerne | Unpractis'd, unprepar'd, and still to seek.'¹¹⁹ Immutability is reserved for God,¹²⁰ and while Adam assures Raphael that the couple have a 'solemn purpose to observe | Immutably his sovran will',¹²¹ they soon fail to do so.

Eve's arguments to Adam about the desirability of gardening alone are replete with negatives which in this case serve to indicate her partial understanding:

And what is Faith, Love, Vertue **un**assaid
 Alone, **without** exterior help sustaind?
 Let us **not** then suspect our happie State
 Left so **im**perfet by the Maker wise,
 As **not** secure to single or combin'd.
 Fraile is our happiness, if this be so,
 And *Eden* were **no** *Eden* thus expos'd.¹²²

The first negatives reveal her bland incomprehension of what is at stake, so quickly does she pass over what 'unassaid' would really entail. The subsequent sequence 'not...imperfect...not' attempts to prescribe the ways of God's Providence from her limited perspective. The negatives with which Adam replies map the many reasons why separation is not a good idea, while nevertheless falling short of being absolute prohibitions:

Firm we subsist, yet possible to swerve,
 Since Reason **not** **im**possibly may meet
 Some specious object by the Foe suborn'd,
 And fall into **de**ception **un**aware,
Not keeping strictest watch, as she was warnd.
 Seek **not** temptation then, which to avoide
 Were better, and most likeli if from mee
 Thou sever **not**: Trial will come **un**sought.
 Wouldst thou approve thy constancie, approve
 First thy obedience; th' other who can know,
Not seeing thee attempted, who attest?
 But if thou think, trial **un**sought may finde
 Us both securer then thus warnd thou seemst,
 Go; for thy stay, **not** free, absents thee more;
 Go in thy native **inn**ocence.¹²³

¹¹⁸ After the Fall Adam angrily says to Eve:

Is this the Love, is this the recompence
 Of mine to thee, ingrateful *Eve*, exprest
 Immutable when thou wert lost, not I.

(*PL* ix 1163–5)

But, as this episode shows, this love is all too mutable.

¹¹⁹ *PL* viii 196–7.

¹²⁰ *PL* iii 121, 373.

¹²¹ *PL* vii 78–9.

¹²² *PL* ix 335–41.

¹²³ *PL* ix 359–73.

Adam's negatives seek to dissuade Eve, reminding her of how little they know about the trial which may come, while also refraining from actually forbidding her.

So Eve goes, like the flowers which she tends that

Hung drooping **unsustained**, them she upstays
Gently with Mirtle band, **mindless** the while,
Her self, though fairest **unsupported** Flour.¹²⁴

The 'mindless' Eve¹²⁵ meets the serpent 'unwarie',¹²⁶ and when she understands his offer she replies at first ('yet sinless'¹²⁷) with a simple statement of the divine prohibition:

God hath said, Ye shall **not** eat
Thereof, **nor** shall ye touch it, least ye die.¹²⁸

The serpent's reply is equally simple, but in this case a groundless assertion which Eve does not question:

Queen of this Universe, doe **not** believe
Those rigid threats of Death; ye shall **not** Die.¹²⁹

Satan then begins to entangle Eve in the rhetoric of negation:

if what is evil
Be real, why **not** known, since easier shunn'd?
God therefore **cannot** hurt ye, and be just;
Not just, **not** God; **not** feard then, **nor** obeyd.¹³⁰

And then Eve entangles herself in 'un-'s and 'not's:

For good **unknown**, sure is **not** had, or had
And yet **unknown**, is as **not** had at all.
...
Such prohibitions binde **not**.¹³¹

Then comes the moment when she takes the fruit, the moment of her ultimate negation of obedience:

Greedily she ingorg'd **without** restraint,
And knew **not** eating Death.¹³²

The last line fuses two negative statements: 'she did not know that she was eating Death', and 'she did not know (*sc.* "she did not know anything, was oblivious to everything"; or "she did not attain the knowledge which she had sought")', because she was eating Death'. Her casual way with negatives has led her into the ultimate negation, death itself. When she returns to Adam, Eve continues her glib negatives, saying:

Thee I have misst, and thought it long, **depriv'd**
Thy presence, agonie of love till now

¹²⁴ *PL* ix 430–2.

¹²⁵ *mindless*: 'unintelligent, stupid, senseless; acting without concern for the consequences'; 'unaware, thoughtless, negligent, heedless, forgetful, unmindful' (*OED*³ *s.v.* *mindless* 1, 2).

¹²⁶ *PL* ix 614.

¹²⁷ *PL* ix 659.

¹²⁸ *PL* ix 662–3.

¹²⁹ *PL* ix 684–5.

¹³⁰ *PL* ix 698–701.

¹³¹ *PL* ix 756–7, 760.

¹³² *PL* ix 791–2.

Not felt, **nor** shall be twice, for **never** more
 Mean I to trie, what rash **untri'd** I sought,
 The pain of absence from thy sight. But strange
 Hath bin the cause, and wonderful to heare:
 This Tree is **not** as we are told, a Tree
 Of danger tasted, **nor** to evil **unknown**
 Op'ning the way, but of Divine effect
 To open Eyes, and make them Gods who taste;
 And hath bin tasted such: the Serpent wise,
 Or **not** restrain'd as wee, or **not** obeying,
 Hath eat'n of the fruit, and is become,
Not dead, as we are threatn'd.

...

Thus *Eve* with Countenance blithe her storie told;
 But in her Cheek **distemper** flushing glowd.¹³³

For all her confident negative assertions, she knows nothing of what she speaks.

Adam sees this fallen Eve as 'Defac't, deflourd, and now to Death devote',¹³⁴ a series of privative Latinate 'de-' words and the brutal Anglo-Saxon monosyllable 'Death' which is linked to them through alliteration though not through etymology. He thinks that what has happened is 'remediless',¹³⁵ evincing a kind of despair, since faith in God might have led him to hope for some remedy.¹³⁶ Adam's decision to join Eve is couched in powerful negatives which refuse a life without her:

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.
 ...
 But past who can recall, or don **undoe**?
Not God Omnipotent, **nor** Fate.¹³⁷

The simplicity of Adam's negatives, and the directness of his reasoning, contrast with the half-thought-out negatives in which Eve entangles herself, and acquire a poignancy from their very simplicity, though he immediately begins to recoil from the finality of these negatives by resorting, like Eve, to rhetorical questions and groundless speculations launched by 'Perhaps':

Perhaps thou shalt **not** Die, perhaps the Fact
 Is **not** so hainous now, foretasted Fruit.¹³⁸

¹³³ *PL* ix 857–70, 886–7. *distemper*: see p. 405.

¹³⁴ *PL* ix 901.

¹³⁵ *PL* ix 919.

¹³⁶ Milton may have expected his readers to recall at this point that 'remedy' is often used to refer to the Atonement, as when Isabella tells Angelo:

Why all the soules that were, were forfeit once,
 And he that might the vantage best have tooke,
 Found out the remedie.

(*Measure for Measure* II ii 73–5)

So for the Christian reader, nothing is 'remediless'.

¹³⁷ *PL* ix 913–16, 926–7.

¹³⁸ *PL* ix 928–9.

Such negatives seek to evade the divine prohibition. The Fall produces a rash of negative consequences:

foul **distrust**, and breach
 Disloyal on the part of Man, revolt,
 And **disobedience**: On the part of Heav'n
 Now alienated, **distance** and **distaste**.¹³⁹

Here we meet a series of Latinate 'dis-' prefixes which signify separation or reversal,¹⁴⁰ and the last two are particularly sharp: 'distance' from the root *disto*, to stand apart, so that Heaven stands apart from man's Fall; and 'distaste', for Heaven recoils from man's disobedient tasting.

After their Fall, the sex between Adam and Eve leaves them in a disturbed state of unnatural ('unkindly') unrest, and

Bred of **unkindly** fumes, with conscious dreams
 Encumberd, now had left them, up they rose
 As from **unrest**.¹⁴¹

They think their genitals 'unseemliest' and 'unclean',¹⁴² 'O how unlike | To that first naked Glorie'.¹⁴³ Eve is dishevelled, her 'tresses all disorderd'.¹⁴⁴ Adam accuses Eve of being 'ingrateful'¹⁴⁵ for his self-sacrifice in sharing the fruit, a strong condemnation which means not just 'not feeling or showing gratitude' but 'not pleasant or acceptable to the mind or senses; displeasing, disagreeable'.¹⁴⁶ Through these privative words we glimpse some of what has been lost: kind (that is, what is natural and nourishing), rest, seemliness, cleanness, order, and gratitude. Moreover, their sin of 'ungovern'd appetite'¹⁴⁷ will be replicated in their descendants. They appear before the Son 'discount'nanc't both, and discompos'd',¹⁴⁸ while the elements of nature themselves reject the corruption which man has wrought:

Those pure **immortal** Elements that know
No gross, **no** **unharmoneous** mixture foule,
 Eject him tainted now, and purge him off
 As a **distemper**, gross to aire as gross,
 And mortal food, as may **dispose** him best
 For **dissolution** wrought by Sin, that first
Distemperd all things, and of **incorrupt**
 Corrupted.¹⁴⁹

Here the 'in-' world rejects the 'dis-' world: the 'immortal' and 'incorrupt' elements of nature reject man because he has become a 'distemper' (disorder, disease¹⁵⁰) as a result of his 'dissolution', which is (i) the condition of being loose from due restraint, that is, dissoluteness, which has led to his (ii) dissolving of a connection

¹³⁹ *PL* ix 6–9; the 'dis-' prefixes are noted by David Quint, *Inside 'Paradise Lost': Reading the Designs of Milton's Epic* (Princeton, N.J., 2014), p. 153.

¹⁴⁰ *OLD s.v.* dis-. ¹⁴¹ *PL* ix 1050–2. ¹⁴² *PL* ix 1094, 1098.

¹⁴³ *PL* ix 1114–15. ¹⁴⁴ *PL* x 911. ¹⁴⁵ *PL* ix 1164.

¹⁴⁶ *OED s.v.* ingrateful *adj.* 3, 1. ¹⁴⁷ *PL* xi 517.

¹⁴⁸ *PL* x 110. *discount'nanc't*: abashed, feeling shame (*OED3 s.v.* discountenance *v.* 3).

¹⁴⁹ *PL* xi 50–7. ¹⁵⁰ *OED s.v.* distemper *n.* 4.

or union (in this case, union with God), and his (iii) destruction, ruin, and will shortly lead to (iv) the reduction of the body to its constituent elements, which is (v) death.¹⁵¹ All this will 'dispose' him (place him apart at a distance, or in a new place¹⁵²).

One might have expected Adam's soliloquy in Book X contemplating what has happened, and what may yet happen, to use many negatives, but what is perhaps unexpected is that his negatives are directed against God's provisions rather than his own failure. He was, he says to himself,

unable to performe
Thy terms too hard, by which I was to hold
The good I sought **not**. To the loss of that,
Sufficient penaltie, why hast thou added
The sense of **endless** woes? **inexplicable**
Thy Justice seems.¹⁵³

So after imposing impossible conditions on an unwanted life, God has punished Adam's inevitable failure with endless punishment; it is all unjustifiable. Such negatives from Adam ward off any recognition of his own responsibility. In despair, he wishes to be 'Earth | Insensible'.¹⁵⁴ As Adam's ruminations continue, he begins, like Eve, to ensnare himself in speculations which circle around negations:

For though the Lord of all be **infinite**,
Is his wrauth also? be it, man is **not** so,
But mortal doom'd. How can he exercise
Wrath **without** end on Man whom Death must end?
Can he make deathless Death? that were to make
Strange contradiction, which to God himself
Impossible is held, as Argument
Of weakness, **not** of Power. Will he, draw out,
For angers sake, finite to **infinite**
In punisht man, to satisfie his rigour
Satisfi'd **never**.¹⁵⁵

Adam is attempting to understand how man, mortal and finite, relates now, in this fallen condition, to the immortal and the infinite, but these rhetorical questions only enclose Adam in his own resentful ignorance.

Eve's negatives continue the vein of self-exculpatory pleading, and are in effect evasions:

Forsake me **not** thus, *Adam*, witness Heav'n
What love sincere, and reverence in my heart
I beare thee, and **unweeing** have offended,
Unhappilie **deceav'd**; thy suppliant
I beg, and clasp thy knees; bereave me **not**,

¹⁵¹ *OED s.v.* dissolution *n.*, respectively senses 5, 6, 9, 1, 8. ¹⁵² *OED s.v.* dispose *v.* 1.

¹⁵³ *PL* x 750–5. Contrast the reassurance of St Basil quoted in Chapter 15 God, p. 230 n. 171.

¹⁵⁴ *PL* x 776–7. ¹⁵⁵ *PL* x 794–804.

Whereon I live, thy gentle looks, thy aid,
Thy counsel in this uttermost distress.¹⁵⁶

If there is a poignancy in the repetition and simplicity of ‘Forsake me not . . . bereave me not’, there is also evasiveness in her other negatives: she was hardly ‘unweeting’ (unwitting, not knowing what she was doing), and ‘unhappily’ implies some accident or misfortune rather than deliberate transgression.¹⁵⁷ She is either lying to Adam or deceiving herself. Later she suggests to Adam that they might avoid begetting a race on whom their present misery would be entailed, for

It lies, yet ere Conception to prevent
The Race **unblest**, to being yet **unbegot**.
Childless thou art, Childless remaine.¹⁵⁸

Such privation of issue would require them to refrain from the pleasures of sex, which Eve thinks may be too hard to bear.¹⁵⁹ In fact, their descendants will not be ‘unblest’, even though they are punished through the ‘Depopulation’¹⁶⁰ wrought by the Flood, and leave God’s altars ‘unfrequented’.¹⁶¹ Adam recalls that God’s

timely care
Hath unbesaught provided, and his hands
Cloath’d us unworthie, pitying while he judg’d.¹⁶²

Now the ‘un-’ words are acknowledging the divine mercy, and rightly so, for God says to Michael, ‘Dismiss them not disconsolate.’¹⁶³



Let us finally draw together some instances of one of the principal negative words through which Milton articulates his narrative, his topography, and his theology: ‘never’. Part of the desolation of Hell is that it is a never-ending condition, a place ‘where peace | And rest can never dwell, hope never comes | That comes to all’.¹⁶⁴ We understand that ‘never’—or at least we grasp it conceptually even though its experiential horror escapes us—but we need to pause over the ostensible paradox of that last phrase: ‘hope never comes | That comes to all’, which can only make sense if the devils are no longer included in ‘all’, if, that is, they no longer count among the living. By contrast with the narrator’s solemn and well-grounded ‘never’, Satan’s ‘never’ forms part of his rhetoric of bravado, as he claims that the fallen angels still have the ‘courage never to submit or yield . . . | That Glory never shall his wrath or might | Extort from me’,¹⁶⁵ and promises that ‘this Infernal Pit

¹⁵⁶ *PL* x 914–20. It is possible that Milton or his readers may have heard an additional privative in this passage if they assumed that the element ‘sin-’ in ‘sincere’ derives from the Latin *sine* (‘without’), as seen in the popular but erroneous assumption that its etymological root *sincerus* means ‘without wax’, i.e. without alloy or adulteration.

¹⁵⁷ *unhappily*: ‘by misfortune or mischance’ (*OED* s.v. *unhappily* 1a); ‘evilly, miserably, wretchedly’ (*OED* 2a, citing this example).

¹⁵⁸ *PL* x 987–9.

¹⁵⁹ *PL* x 992–8.

¹⁶⁰ *PL* xi 756.

¹⁶¹ *PL* i 433.

¹⁶² *PL* x 1057–9. *unbesaught*: the *OED*’s first example.

¹⁶³ *PL* xi 113.

¹⁶⁴ *PL* i 65–7.

¹⁶⁵ *PL* i 108–11.

shall never hold | Cælestial Spirits in Bondage'.¹⁶⁶ But his 'never' is groundless, because he has no power to make it true. When alone, he tells himself that he cannot return to God, 'For never can true reconcilment grow | Where wounds of deadly hate have peirc'd so deep'.¹⁶⁷ Is this 'never' true? It would not be true for man, since divine forgiveness is always available to the contrite—between the stirrup and the ground¹⁶⁸—no matter how deep the wounds have pierced, but it is true for Satan in so far as he has determined that there will be no reconcilment; this desperate decision reconstitutes him existentially, and so he makes this 'never' true: 'To do ought good never will be our task'.¹⁶⁹

How is 'never' associated with God? When Milton tells us that 'God is light, | And never but in unapproached light | Dwelt from Eternitie',¹⁷⁰ this 'never' is not an adverb of time (as if one might have supposed that there was a time when God did not so dwell) but a mode of emphasis: God only dwells in light. Here the labour of language under its submission to the divine remakes the meaning of 'never' as its quotidian applications fail when contemplating eternity. God promises grace to man, but there is a vital 'never':

This my long sufferance and my day of grace
They who neglect and scorn, shall never taste.¹⁷¹

This is a conditional 'never' which will apply if man stubbornly decides to reject grace, for 'he her aide | Can never seek, once dead in sins and lost'.¹⁷² After the Flood God promises 'not to blot out mankind, | And makes a Covenant never to destroy | The Earth again by flood'.¹⁷³ The final divine 'never' pertains to the Crucifixion, through which the old covenant is transformed, and will 'Never . . . hurt them more who rightly trust | In this his satisfaction'. Again, however, these 'never's are conditional upon man's acceptance.¹⁷⁴

Man's 'never's are more fragile. Adam reassures Raphael that 'we never shall forget to love | Our maker', but they soon do.¹⁷⁵ He reassures Eve after her dream that her revulsion from what she has seemed to do

gives me hope
That what in sleep thou didst abhor to dream,
Waking thou never wilt consent to do.¹⁷⁶

It is an honest, hopeful 'never', but lasts less than a day. After Eve has indeed consented to do exactly what the dream depicted, Adam exclaims inwardly that 'loss of thee | Would never from my heart' and so 'from thy State | Mine never shall be parted, bliss or woe':¹⁷⁷ this is the 'never' of the lover who grounds his very existence upon his partner, though it is simultaneously the choice of an apparently

¹⁶⁶ *PL* i 657–8. ¹⁶⁷ *PL* iv 98–9.

¹⁶⁸ William Camden reports this epitaph: 'Betwixt the stirrup and the ground, | Mercy I askt, mercy I found' (*Remaines of a Greater Worke, Concerning Britaine* (London, 1605), second pagination, p. 55). Camden notes that the idea derives from St Augustine: 'Miserecordia Domini inter pontem, & fontem' ('the mercy of the Lord is found between the bridge and the stream').

¹⁶⁹ *PL* i 159.

¹⁷⁰ *PL* iii 3–5.

¹⁷¹ *PL* iii 198–9.

¹⁷² *PL* iii 232–3.

¹⁷³ *PL* xi 891–3.

¹⁷⁴ *PL* xii 418–19.

¹⁷⁵ *PL* v 550–1.

¹⁷⁶ *PL* v 119–21.

¹⁷⁷ *PL* ix 912–13, 915–16.

eternal alienation from God, and soon Adam wishes in his shame that he could hide from the sight of God and angels 'where I may never see them more'.¹⁷⁸ Eve's 'never's range from her self-justifying assertion of freedom—'Was I to have never parted from thy side?'¹⁷⁹—to sorrowful assurance—'I never from thy side henceforth to stray'¹⁸⁰—to regret for her cherished flowers 'That never will in other Climate grow'.¹⁸¹ Now she truly feels the force of the 'never' which she has brought about.

¹⁷⁸ *PL* ix 1090.

¹⁷⁹ *PL* ix 1153.

¹⁸⁰ *PL* xi 176.

¹⁸¹ *PL* xi 274.

26

Re-

OF Mans First Disobedience, and the Fruit
Of that Forbidden Tree, whose mortal tast
Brought Death into the World, and all our woe,
With loss of *Eden*, till one greater Man
Restore us, and regain the blissful Seat,
Sing Heav'nly Muse.

Paradise Lost i 1–6



The Quaker Thomas Ellwood recorded that, probably in the summer of 1665, Milton lent him the manuscript of *Paradise Lost* to read. When Ellwood returned it they discussed the poem, and Ellwood ventured the observation, ‘Thou hast said much here of *Paradise lost*; but what hast thou to say of *Paradise found*? He made me no Answer, but sate some time in a Muse: then brake of that Discourse, and fell upon another Subject.’ On a subsequent visit Milton showed him *Paradise Regain’d*, ‘and in a pleasant Tone said to me, *This is owing to you; for you put it into my Head by the Question you put to me at Chalfont; which before I had not thought of.*’¹ Ellwood’s question, ‘what hast thou to say of *Paradise found*?’, is actually answered by *Paradise Lost* itself, for there runs through this poem a series of pointers to the recovery of paradise, starting in the opening lines of Book I with the promise, ‘till one greater Man | Restore us, and regain the blissful Seat’.² ‘Restore’ and ‘regain’ are the first examples of the words with the prefix ‘re-’ which are threaded through the poem as promises of redemption, recovery, restoration: the regaining of paradise; indeed the idea of restoration frames the whole action of the work, for ‘restore’ is also the last word spoken in the poem.³ These ‘re-’ words invite us to reflect upon how redemption will take place, remind us of the divine promise, and reassure us that man will ultimately return to God. At the same time, Satan uses other ‘re-’ words to clothe his revolt in specious guise as he promises the rebel angels that they will reascend and recover their lost renown. If Ellwood, who read

¹ *The Life Records of John Milton*, edited by J. Milton French, 5 vols (New Brunswick, N.J., 1949–58), iv 417, 419–20.

² *PL* i 4–5.

³ *PL* xii 623, as Earl Miner notes (*ad* i 5). Milton discusses man’s restoration in *De Doctrina* Book I ch. 14, redemption in ch. 16, renewal in ch. 18, and repentance in ch. 19.

Latin texts to Milton,⁴ had been more attentive to the significance of the recurring Latin prefix 're-' in *Paradise Lost*, he would have seen that this poem already shows us paradise found.

Not all words in *Paradise Lost* which begin 're-' derive that element from the Latin prefix which indicates 'back' ('reign', from the Latin *regno*, cognate with *rex*, is an obvious example), but many do. The meanings which 're-' holds in Latin and which it brings into English are varied, and may be mapped as follows:

- (1) backwards from a point reached, or to the starting point, or away;
- (2) back to an earlier state or over to another condition;
- (3) back in a place, from going forward;
- (4) again, in return, in repetition;
- (5) in a contrary direction, so that what has been done is annulled or destroyed;
- (6) in opposition or conflict;
- (7) in response to a stimulus, with intensive force.⁵

To this list we can add that 're-' sometimes acts to intensify the meaning of the verb: to rejoice is to take intense joy in something, to be replete is to be completely full.

Milton's sensitivity to the intellectual and emotional possibilities of words starting with 're-' may derive in part from his recollection of the previous great epic of loss and recovery, Virgil's *Aeneid*, where the loss is that of the primary home, Troy, and the recovery takes the form not of a return to the original site, but the building of a new home on new ground, after a painful journey which is, nevertheless, watched over by the gods.⁶ As Aeneas says to Dido, to tell the story of the fall of Troy is itself to renew an unspeakable grief, *infandum...renovare dolorem*, from which his mind has recoiled in pain, *luctu refugit*.⁷ Aeneas recalls how he escaped from the burning ruins of his city, but went back in an attempt to rally his friends and rescue his family:

ipse urbem repeto et cingor fulgentibus armis.
stat casus renovare omnis omnemque reverti
per Troiam et rursus caput obiectare periclis.⁸

⁴ *Life Records* iv 368–9.

⁵ This tabulation comes from *The Oxford Dictionary of English Etymology*, edited by C. T. Onions (Oxford, 1966, reprinted 1983), p. 742. Cf. also *OLD s.v. re-*, which lists the meanings of the Latin prefix as: 'movement back or in reverse, withdrawal, reversal of a previous process, restoration, response or opposition, separation, repeated action'. Subsequent definitions of Latin words draw on the *OLD*. An example of the importance of hearing the Latin behind Milton's English is seen when Raphael says 'Our voluntarie service he requires, | Not our necessitated' (*PL* v 529–30), where 'requires' has the Latin meaning 'seeks' rather than 'demands'.

⁶ Estelle Hahn suggests that Milton's use of 're-visit' (*PL* iii 13) echoes and alludes to Virgil's three-fold use of *reuisere* in *Aeneid* VI, the book in which Aeneas visits the underworld ('Both English and Latin': Milton's Bilingual Muse', *Renaissance Studies* 21 (2007) 679–700, at pp. 696–700). I have argued that Dryden responded particularly to the motifs of exile and return in his translation of the *Aeneid*: see my *Dryden and the Traces of Classical Rome* (Oxford, 1999), pp. 229–71.

⁷ Virgil, *Aeneid* ii 3, 12.

⁸ *Aeneid* ii 749–51: 'I myself seek the city again, and buckle on my shining arms. I am determined to renew every risk, and to go back through the whole of Troy, and again expose my head to danger.'

The verbs *repeto* ('seek again'), *renovare* ('renew'), and *reverti* ('turn back') underline the danger of Aeneas' decision to go back through the city again (*rursus*), tracing his steps backwards (*repeto et vestigia retro... sequor*⁹). He looks back (*respicio*¹⁰) for his little son, and invites his audience to look back with him and see (*respice*¹¹) the towers of the city in their mind's eye. He goes back, Troy's hopes ebb back: *retro*, says Virgil, *retro*, and again *retro*.¹² These are just some of the 're-' forms which Virgil uses in Book II, the book which narrates the fall of Troy, and such words are braided through his whole poem. Ultimately, however, there is no going back for Aeneas: there is only the divine command to go on.

In *Paradise Lost* the imaginative and theological importance of the set of ideas signalled by 're-' should be immediately apparent: these words mark out the physical and spiritual movements of the rebel angels' recoil from God and their attempted recovery of their position; man's refusal to obey God's prohibition, and the impossibility of him returning to a prelapsarian state once he has resolved to transgress; then ultimately the Son's redemption of man which brings about true reconciliation with God. The distinctive areas in which Milton deploys these words might be designated as:

- (1) the forms of redemption and recovery which God offers to mankind;
- (2) the forms of turning back which are made by man, including attempts to reverse what has happened;
- (3) physical reactions which animate the material and quasi-material world of the poem;
- (4) Satan's revolt, and his attempts to recover the rebel angels' original state, or to replace it with some substitute.

Man's redemption (from the Latin *redemptio*, 'purchase, ransom', itself from the verb *redimere*, 'to buy back, pay the cost of, atone for') by the Son¹³ is strongly signalled through the poem, with fifteen uses of 'redeem' and its cognates. It is announced in Book III before—in narrative terms—there is any Fall to be redeemed, so that the Fall is held proleptically within a structure of providential care for man, the tragedy already contained within an overarching *divina commedia*. The Son offers himself to redeem mankind, and such redemption is costly, painful, contrasting with the ease with which the Fall is accomplished by Satan: the Son is ready 'to redeeme, | So dearly to redeem what Hellish hate | So easily destroy'd'.¹⁴ After the Son has clothed the nakedness of Adam and Eve from the sight of God the Father, 'with swift ascent he up returnd, | Into his blissful bosom reassum'd'.¹⁵ The Son's return to God is swift; man's return will take the whole of human history.

⁹ *Aeneid* ii 753–4.

¹⁰ *Aeneid* ii 564.

¹¹ *Aeneid* ii 615.

¹² *Aeneid* ii 169, 378, 753.

¹³ Milton never uses the word 'Christ' in *PL* or *PR*, preferring 'Son'. 'Christ' is the English form of the Greek *χριστός*, 'anointed', equivalent to the Hebrew term 'Messiah'.

¹⁴ *PL* iii 299–301.

¹⁵ *PL* x 224–5.

Paradise Lost shows how man and God will at length be reconciled; as the Son says to the Father:

Accept me, and in mee from these receive
 The smell of peace toward Mankind, let him live
 Before thee reconcil'd, at least his days
 Numberd, though sad, till Death, his doom (which I
 To mitigate thus plead, not to reverse)
 To better life shall yeeld him, where with mee
 All my redeemd may dwell in joy and bliss.¹⁶

God the Father will 'receive' (from the Latin *recipere*, 'to admit to shelter, make welcome; admit to a particular status; accept, approve; regain possession of; regain, recover') the offering ('the smell of peace') made by the Son on behalf of mankind, who will henceforth be 'reconcil'd' (from *reconciliare*, 'to bring back into friendship or agreement; win back, re-establish, restore'). The sentence of death, however, will not be reversed (from *revertor*, via the late Latin *reversare*, 'to turn, change, or go back'): there is, in this sense, no turning back to the state of man before the Fall. But the course of human history can now be told as a narrative of redemption, which is how Michael emplots it in Books XI and XII,¹⁷ though there is no such salvation for the angels who choose to rebel, whose place in 'utter darkness' is 'Ordaind without redemption'.¹⁸ God the Father himself explains the way in which this redemption of man will happen:

Death becomes
 His final remedie, and after Life
 Tri'd in sharp tribulation, and refin'd
 By Faith and faithful works, to second Life,
 Wak't in the renovation of the just,
 Resignes him up with Heav'n and Earth renewd.¹⁹

'Remedie', 'refin'd', 'renovation', 'Resignes', 'renewd': such is the narrative of redemption. Milton's striking phrase 'Death becomes | His final remedie' draws upon and counters the proverb 'There is a remedy for all things but death',²⁰ and

¹⁶ *PL* xi 37–44.

¹⁷ Michael uses 'redeem' and its cognates at *PL* xii 408, 424, 434, 445, 573.

¹⁸ *PL* v 614–15. There is, however, an element in the Christian tradition, exemplified by Origen, which makes Hell a temporary state of purgation before a universal restoration or ἀποκατάστασις: see Norman Powell Williams, *The Ideas of the Fall and of Original Sin: A Historical and Critical Study* (London, 1927), p. 279 n. 4.

¹⁹ *PL* xi 61–6. Fowler, annotating 'renovation of the just', cites Luke xiv 14, 'the resurrection of the iust', but Milton's use of 'renovation' in association with 'just' may have come instead from his reading of Titus iii 5 in Tremellius' translation: *Non ex operibus iustis quae fecimus nos, sed ex sua misericordia servavit nos per lavacrum regenerationis, & renovationis Spiritus sancti* (emphasis added; 'Not by workes of righteousness which wee haue done, but according to his mercy he saued vs, by the washing of regeneration, and renewing of the holy Ghost'). The Vulgate reads *justitiae ... renovationis*.

²⁰ Morris Palmer Tilley, *A Dictionary of the Proverbs in England in the Sixteenth and Seventeenth Centuries* (Ann Arbor, Mich., 1950), R69.

completes the poem's tentative definitions and redefinitions of 'death',²¹ which had included Satan's specious suggestion to Eve that death might be a form of apotheosis.²² Rather than man becoming a god through death, man through death becomes reunited with God. He will be refined (that is, freed from impurities²³) by faith and the good works that proceed from faith, resurrected in 'the renovation of the just', and will resign or hand himself over to God in a renewal of both heaven and earth. So it is not mankind alone which will be renewed, but the whole universe. God promises that he 'will renew' man's 'lapsed powers',²⁴ that his covenant will be 'renewd' in Eve's offspring,²⁵ and that 'Heav'n and Earth renewd shall be made pure'.²⁶

'Renew' and other such 're-' words take their place in the list of terms that mark out the divine movement of redemption which counters the Satanic movement of revolt: 'recompense', 'reconcile', 'recover', 'recure', 'redeem', 'regain', 'regenerate', 'release', 'remedy', 'remit', 'remove', 'renew', 'renovation', 'repent', 'restore', and 'return'. Many of these are verbs which have God or the Son as their subject, for this is fundamentally their work, since man cannot make any movement of return towards God without divine grace first enabling such a return. But Milton also uses 're-' words to tell the story of Adam and Eve's revolt.

One of the 're-' words which is important for an understanding of the Fall is 'remember' (from the Latin *re* + *memor*, 'mindful'). Raphael completes his narrative of the Fall of the angels by warning Adam, 'remember, and fear to transgress',²⁷ and Adam himself tells Raphael of God's words when he prohibited the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil: 'Remember what I warne thee'.²⁸ For the reader this injunction to remember recalls the Preacher urging his hearers to 'Remember now thy Creatour in the dayes of thy youth, while the euil dayes come not',²⁹ and Christ's instruction to his disciples at the Last Supper, 'this doe in remembrance of me'.³⁰ To remember is to keep faith. Adam and Eve know the prohibition, but knowledge alone seems not to be enough, for as the narrator says in Book X, 'still they knew, and ought to have still remember'd | The high Injunction'.³¹ It seems that they can know that the Tree is forbidden, but not 'remember', perhaps in the radical Latin sense of being mindful ('remember' has the Latin *mens*, 'mind' at its root), not holding this knowledge in their minds in such a way that it may direct their wills. By contrast, angelic memory—the memory of creation and of the war in Heaven—is a form of praise, as we see when Uriel, addressing Satan unawares, recalls God's creation of the world, a sight 'Had in remembrance alwayes with delight'.³² Both Uriel and Raphael use their angelic memory as a way of glorifying God. Satan, on the other hand, has a selective memory, for he

²¹ See Annabel Patterson, *Milton's Words* (Oxford, 2009), pp. 94–113.

²² *PL* ix 713–14.

²³ *OED* *s.v.* refine *v.* 1a. The *OED* cites this passage to illustrate the more abstract meaning 'to purify morally; raise to a higher spiritual state' (1d), but given the strongly physical imagination of *PL* the primary meaning seems to inform the image here.

²⁴ *PL* iii 175–6. *lapsed*: fallen.

²⁵ *PL* xi 116.

²⁶ *PL* x 638; cf. vi 783; xi 66.

²⁷ *PL* vi 912.

²⁸ *PL* viii 327.

²⁹ Ecclesiastes xii 1.

³⁰ Luke xxii 19.

³¹ *PL* x 12–13.

³² *PL* iii 704.

hates the sight of the sun's beams 'That bring to my remembrance from what state | I fell',³³ and tells Abdiel that he and his fellow angels must have been self-begotten because he cannot remember his creation.³⁴ When he does genuinely turn his mind back to recall what he once was, that recollection is a source of pain:

Now conscience wakes despair
That slumberd, wakes the bitter memorie
Of what he was, what is, and what must be
Worse.³⁵

This is a remarkable use of 'memorie', for here Satan remembers not only the past but also the present, and what the future must inevitably be. This audacious extension of the normal meaning of 'memory' as a mental relationship to things in the past indicates how radically Satan's present and future are determined by his defection from God. He has no way of thinking about himself in the present, or of imagining the future, which is not a form of memory 'Of what he was'. Transcending—and judging—Satanic memory there is also divine memory, for Satan and his followers are 'Cancel'd from Heav'n and sacred memorie'.³⁶

Both divine and diabolical memory exist in a different form of temporality from that which humans inhabit. After Eve has taken the fruit, Adam laments, 'But past who can recall, or don undoe?',³⁷ realizing that there is no simple calling back and restaging of the past, but he fails to draw the properly reverent inference, speculating that perhaps Eve will not die, which is an evasion rather than an acknowledgement of her transgression. He uses the word 'recall' again in Book XI when rejoicing to Michael that God 'though I fled him angry, yet recall'd | To life prolong'd',³⁸ and the link between the two uses of 'recall' reminds us that while the human past cannot be called back and changed by man, the significance of that past can be changed by God's intervention in calling man back to him. Adam's inability to reverse the past leads at first to a despairing resignation of life, a recognition that it would be only just if he were to return to that dust from which he was first fashioned:

it were but right
And equal to reduce me to my dust,
Desirous to resigne, and render back
All I receav'd.³⁹

Adam envisages being reduced or led back again (from *reducere*, 'to lead back') to the dust from which he was created, willing now to resign (from *resignare*, 'to hand over') and render (from *reddere*, 'to give back') the life which he has received (from *recipere*, 'to accept'). Such a return would be a bleak version of Genesis iii 19: 'In the sweate of thy face shalt thou eate bread, till thou returne vnto the ground: for out of it wast thou taken, for dust thou *art*, and vnto dust shalt thou returne.' But such going back is a counsel of despair, a way of destroying God's creation and

³³ *PL* iv 38–9.

³⁷ *PL* ix 926.

³⁴ *PL* v 857–9.

³⁸ *PL* xi 330–1.

³⁵ *PL* iv 23–6.

³⁹ *PL* x 747–50. *equal*: equitable.

³⁶ *PL* vi 379; cf. i 362.

thwarting the operation of divine grace. So Satan envisages that he might 'reduce | To her original darkness'⁴⁰ God's newly created world, and Moloc imagines that God might 'reduce | To nothing this essential',⁴¹ which he thinks would be preferable to an eternity of miserable existence. But none of these instances of 'reduce' will come to fruition: God's creation moves on, not back, and for Adam there is to be redemption, while for Satan and his followers there is none.

Sometimes the movement back is illusory, as when Adam in Book IX ends his soliloquy 'as one from sad dismay | Recomforted... | Submitting to what seemd remediless';⁴² but the word 'seemd' should alert us and direct our attention to the likelihood that all is not as it seemed, for there is indeed a remedy, the divine remedy of the Son's self-sacrificial offering, rather than Adam's despairing acceptance of Eve's transgression. Against such misguided forms of return there emerges a true turning back which is a turning back to God. At the opening of Book XI Adam and Eve

in lowliest plight repentant stood
Praying, for from the Mercie-seat above
Prevenient Grace descending had remov'd
The stonie from thir hearts, & made new flesh
Regenerate grow instead.⁴³

They are now 'repentant' (from the Latin *re* + *paenitere*, 'to regret, or make someone regret'),⁴⁴ but only because divine grace has first (emphasized by the Latin prefix *pre-*, 'first', in 'prevenient', meaning 'coming before') removed their stony hearts and recreated new flesh which is 'Regenerate', a theological term⁴⁵ referring to the rebirth of the believer as a result of the action of the Holy Spirit. Milton wishes such a movement to be replicated day by day in the postlapsarian world through study, for 'The end... of Learning is to repair the ruines of our first Parents

⁴⁰ PL ii 983–4.

⁴¹ PL ii 96–7.

⁴² PL ix 917–19. *recomforted*: heartened, inspired with fresh courage (OED³ s.v. *recomfort* v. 2, citing this example). *remediless*: see Chapter 25 Not, p. 380.

⁴³ PL xi 1–5.

⁴⁴ In *De Doctrina* Milton says that repentance can be called a *conversio*, a turning back, 'when someone "turns back" from a state of sin to a state of grace' (*cum quis à statu peccati ad statum gratiae convertitur*) (OCW viii 572–3). Benjamin Myers notes that Reformation theologians emphasized that repentance is not a single but a continuous process (*Milton's Theology of Freedom* (Berlin, 2006), pp. 160ff).

⁴⁵ OED s.v. *regenerate* adj. 1; cf. Matthew xix 28 ('regeneration' in Geneva Bible and AV; *regeneratione* in the Vulgate and Tremellius); Titus iii 5 (AV; *regenerationis* Vulgate, Tremellius).

Henry More explains that

Regeneration is not a sleight tipping or colouring over with superficial qualities and habits, but is from a substantial principle of Life, that actuates the Soul as powerfully as the Soul doth the Body; is the Souls true form or *ἐντελέχεια*, as the Soul is the Bodies *ἐντελέχεια* and form. For what does *ἐντελέχεια* imply, but penetration and most intimate possession of the subject actuated or informed, and power, rule and command over the same to move it at pleasure? And doth not the Divine λόγος, the Eternal Word, thus penetrate and possess the Souls of Godly men; even as the subtle Light doth the Air, of it self but a dark and forlorn body?

('The Purification of a Christian Man's Soul', in *The Cambridge Platonists*, edited by C. A. Patrides (London, 1969; reissued Cambridge, 1980), p. 206)

ἐντελέχεια: full reality.

by regaining to know God aright'.⁴⁶ In the new spiritual life, he says, *intellectus magna ex parte luci suae, suae voluntas libertati in Christo restituitur*.⁴⁷



So far, we have principally been tracing the spiritual movements which are signalled by 're-' words, but the world imagined in *Paradise Lost* is one in which there is also much physical movement, backwards and forwards, vigorous and violent, and in this respect Milton's poetry is in part responding to, and revising, Lucretius' vision in *De Rerum Natura* of a wholly material universe in which the atoms are in continual motion.⁴⁸ Energy is expended in the flight of Satan through Chaos, and in the war in Heaven. Things collide, reacting against one another. Chaos 'with rebounding surge' attacks the causeway to Hell,⁴⁹ while Satan when moving through Chaos is hurled aloft by 'The strong rebuff of som tumultuous cloud'.⁵⁰ The gates of Hell open 'With impetuous recoile'.⁵¹ Both angels and men frequently 'retire' (there are two dozen examples) and 'return' (more than eighty instances). In Book IX the repeated use of 'return'⁵² becomes especially poignant: Adam waits for Eve to return, and yet when she does return, carrying a branch from the Tree of Knowledge, he sees that there can be no return to that happy state which they so recently enjoyed.

Sound and light are in motion: song, praise, applause, the noise of battle, and the shock at the appearance of death all 'resound' through Heaven and Hell,⁵³ while Adam and Eve hear 'Celestial voices... | Sole, or responsive each to others note | Singing thir great Creator'.⁵⁴ The heavenly host is 'refulgent',⁵⁵ the light being reflected ('refulgent' derives from the Latin *re* + *fulgere*, 'to shine', so the light is shining out and back) from their 'Golden Panoplie', and God himself radiates light. God the Father says that in the Son 'my glory I behold | In full resplendence',⁵⁶ a word which derives from the Latin *re* + *splendere*, 'to shine'; here the 're-' prefix seems to be functioning as an intensifier (the divine glory is fully shining in the Son) as well as showing that the glory of the Son is a reflection of the glory of the Father: it is, God says, 'my glory' which he sees in the Son, which subtly suggests that the Son is subsidiary to him. This is not quite a moment of Arian heresy, but neither is it comfortably orthodox: there is, after all, a difference between Milton's God seeing his glory in the Son, and St John saying of the incarnated Word that

⁴⁶ *Of Education: Works* iv 277.

⁴⁷ 'In Christ the intellect is in great part restored to its [original] enlightenment, and the will [is restored] to its freedom' (*De Doctrina: OCW* viii 598–9).

⁴⁸ For Milton's relation to Lucretius see Philip Hardie, 'The Presence of Lucretius in *Paradise Lost*', *Milton Quarterly* 29 (1995) 13–24; David Hopkins, *Conversing with Antiquity: English Poets and the Classics, from Shakespeare to Pope* (Oxford, 2010), pp. 106–8.

⁴⁹ *PL* x 417.

⁵⁰ *PL* ii 936. *rebuff*: the Latin *re*- prefix + 'buff' from mediaeval French and Italian words meaning 'to refuse'.

⁵¹ *PL* ii 880.

⁵² *PL* ix 250, 399, 401, 405, 839, 844, 850. There are also some painful uses of 'return' (and 'revisit') in the narrator's poem to Book III, for which see Chapter 18 I, p. 258.

⁵³ *PL* i 315, 579; ii 789; iii 149; v 178; vi 218; vii 561; viii 334; x 862.

⁵⁴ *PL* iv 682–4.

⁵⁵ *PL* vi 527.

⁵⁶ *PL* v 719–20.

'we beheld his glory, the glory as of the onely begotten of the Father',⁵⁷ where the Son's glory is explicitly presented as an analogy ('as': in the Greek, *ὡς*), since analogy is all that our human perception can manage when contemplating the divine mystery. There is a similarly precise use of 'resplendent' to define the relationship between the Father and the Son in Book X, when

the Father . . . unfolding bright
Toward the right hand his Glorie, on the Son
Blaz'd forth unclouded Deitie; he full
Resplendent all his Father manifest
Express'd.⁵⁸

It is once again the Father's glory which the Son radiates back to him. Divine light shines onto and back from other heavenly beings as well, for the angels have 'resplendent locks inwreath'd with beams'.⁵⁹ It is therefore with a significant choice of adjective that Satan courts Eve as 'resplendent *Eve*',⁶⁰ tempting her to accept quasi-divine honours.

As usual, there is a moral and spiritual dimension—an intermittent allegory—to Milton's use of the physical world and its energies. The angels 'back . . . recoil'd affraid'⁶¹ at the sudden appearance of Sin in Heaven. Satan when struck by Abdiel 'back recoil'd',⁶² and the Satanic army 'recoyld | Orewearyed'.⁶³ The rebels suffer 'repulse'.⁶⁴ These latter instances show diabolical power flinching and retreating from the impact of heavenly might, and contribute to the sense that evil is insubstantial.⁶⁵ Indeed, to some extent the physical battle between Messiah and Satan is, if not actually illusory, at least one in which the two powers are not commensurate, not ontologically comparable, for evil is not substantial as divine power is substantial. There is a thread of thinking that runs through the poem to the effect that 'the evil soon | Driv'n back redounded as a flood on those | From whom it sprung',⁶⁶ and that Satan's 'reveng . . . shall redound | Upon his own rebellious head',⁶⁷ an idea which can be traced further back in Milton's writing to the moment in *A Maske* when the Elder Brother declares that 'evil on it self shall back recoil',⁶⁸ for Satan himself acknowledges that 'Bitter ere long back on it self recoiles',⁶⁹ and his own inner turmoil 'like a devillish Engine back recoiles | Upon himself'.⁷⁰ Evil is self-thwarting and self-destructive.

Satan is frequently the subject or object of verbs in 're-' which chart his desire to recover his lost position. After 'reassembling' the 'rebel' angels in their 'refuge' he

⁵⁷ John i 14 (AV). Cf. 'we sawe the glorie thereof, as the glorie of the onely begotten Sonne of the Father' (Geneva), which offers a different perspective. The AV translation means that 'we saw his glory, which was as the glory of the only son', whereas the Geneva translation means that 'we perceived his glory to be the glory of the only son'. The AV translates the Greek more closely; Geneva also adds 'Sonne'. Moreover, the Greek text does not say 'the Father' but 'a father', without the definite article: *δόξαν ὡς μονογενοῦς παρὰ πατρός*.

⁵⁸ PL x 63–7.

⁵⁹ PL iii 361.

⁶⁰ PL ix 568.

⁶¹ PL ii 759.

⁶² PL vi 194.

⁶³ PL vi 391–2.

⁶⁴ PL i 630; ii 142; vi 600; ix 384.

⁶⁵ See Chapter 11 EVIL.

⁶⁶ PL vii 56–8.

⁶⁷ PL iii 85–6; the effect of 'redound' is discussed by Stanley Eugene Fish, *Surprised by Sin: The Reader in 'Paradise Lost'* (Berkeley, Calif., 1967), pp. 78–9.

⁶⁸ *Masque* l. 592: *Works* i 107.

⁶⁹ PL ix 172.

⁷⁰ PL iv 17–18; cp. i 214–20.

tells them that they can with 'reinforcement' 'reascend' to 'recover', 'resume', and 'regain' what they have lost, perhaps to 're-enter' and 'repossess' Heaven.⁷¹ But all this talk of recovering what they have lost is futile: Heaven is neither a place to be re-entered nor a possession to be recovered, but a condition of union with God which they have freely abandoned and have no intention of regaining in the only way which would be possible: repentance. Satan will not 'recant' or 'repent', which he maintains would only lead to a further 'relapse' (etymologically, a second Fall); he suppresses 'remorse', will not seek 'reconcilement' with Heaven or 'renounce' his ambition.⁷² Though 'remov'd' from God, he will maintain his 'resolve', 'resist', continue his 'revolt', and pursue 'relentless' 'revenge'.⁷³ But for all the energy which is invested in these indications of a Satanic counter-movement, the poem contains these 're-' words within a framework of a divine providence which assures us that God foresees that with 'reiterated crimes he might | Heap on himself damnation'.⁷⁴ This is reiterated, repeated damnation, not the forward and upward movement about which Satan and his peers fantasize. Mammon imagines that the fallen angels might 'regain | Our own right lost',⁷⁵ but there is no such right to be regained. Instead, as the narrator had promised at the outset, the story will culminate when 'one greater Man | Restore us, and regain the blissful Seat'.⁷⁶ But for Satan there is no way back.

And 'back' is itself a key word in the poem. Though we have been tracing the ways in which Milton's imagination operates through the Latinate 're-' prefixes, the simple English adverb 'back' does important work too. The rebel angels, instead of reascending, are frequently forced back in their revolt, 'Drivn backward', 'with horror backward', 'back to fire', 'Back to thy punishment'.⁷⁷ On a different plane, in the circumstances of Restoration England which globally and locally inform the poem, Milton's moral and political imagination is haunted by the possibility that some of his contemporaries may actually prefer to turn back, to relinquish what has been gained by the struggle of the Civil War. In Book XII the Israelites escaping from Egypt face this possibility, and nearly 'Return them back to *Egypt*, choosing rather | Inglorious life with servitude'.⁷⁸ There is a self-echo here in the phrase 'the readiest way' which alerts the reader to the political significance of the passage, implying that the people of England have themselves returned 'back to *Egypt*' by recalling Charles II, as Milton had warned that they would in *The Readie & Easie Way to Establish a Free Commonwealth* (1660), when he denounced their 'noxious humor of returning to bondage' and observed that 'they seem now chusing them a

⁷¹ 'reassembling', *PL* i 186; 'rebel', *passim*; 'refuge', ii 168; 'reinforcement', i 190; 're-ascend', i 633; 'recover'd', i 240, ii 22; 'resume', i 278; 'regain', ii 230; 'Re-enter', ii 397; 'repossess', i 634.

⁷² 'recant', *PL* iv 96; 'repent', i 96; 'relapse', iv 100; 'remorse', i 605, iv 109; 'reconcilement', iv 98; 'renounce', ii 312.

⁷³ 'remov'd', *PL* i 73; 'resolve', i 120; 'resist', i 162; 'revolt', i 611; 'relentless', ix 130; 'revenge', i 604 *et passim*. John Leonard explores the contemporary meanings of 'revolt' in 'The Troubled, Quiet Endings of Milton's English Sonnets', in *The Oxford Handbook of Milton*, edited by Nicholas McDowell and Nigel Smith (Oxford, 2009), pp. 136–51, at pp. 143–4.

⁷⁴ *PL* i 214–15.

⁷⁵ *PL* ii 230–1.

⁷⁶ *PL* i 4–5.

⁷⁷ 'backward', *PL* i 223, vi 863; 'back', ii 603, 699 *et passim*.

⁷⁸ *PL* xii 214–20.

captain back for *Egypt*.⁷⁹ This is backsliding. The second edition of *The Readie & Easie Way* appeared in April 1660; by June Dryden had published *Astræa Redux. A Poem On the Happy Restoration & Return of His Sacred Majesty Charles the Second* with the Virgilian epigraph *Jam Redit & Virgo, Redeunt Saturnia Regna*.⁸⁰ Milton's repeated word 'restore' evokes and contests the Restoration of the Stuart monarchy, promising those who had kept the faith that there is a higher form of restoration which God, in his providence, will bring about.

Of all these examples which imagine return, recovery, restoration, or redemption, none is more poignant than the use of the simple word 'back' at the end of the poem:

They looking back, all th' Eastern side beheld
Of Paradise, so late thir happie seat,
Wav'd over by that flaming Brand.⁸¹

Adam and Eve see that there is no going back. Instead, 'the World was all before them'.⁸²

⁷⁹ *Works* vi 111, 149.

⁸⁰ The epigraph comes from *Eclogues* iv 6: 'Now the Virgin [Astraea] returns, the reign of Saturn returns'.

⁸¹ *PL* xii 641–3.

⁸² *PL* xii 646.

See *and* Seem¹

Carnal desire enflaming, hee on *Eve*
 Began to cast lascivious Eyes, she him
 As wantonly repaid; in Lust they burne:
 Till *Adam* thus 'gan *Eve* to dalliance move,
Eve, now I see thou art exact of taste.

Paradise Lost ix 1013–17



This is a poem in which the blind poet makes searching use of the sense of sight. And Book IX of *Paradise Lost* is especially attentive to the work of the eye, its capacity for true discernment, and its vulnerability to deception.² The eye has traditionally been seen as the principal, the most valued, organ of the senses: Plato regarded sight as the source of the greatest benefit to us,³ and Aristotle said that we particularly value the sense of sight because ‘of all the senses sight best helps us to know things, and reveals many distinctions’.⁴ But the gateway of knowledge may also be the gateway of sin—the Fall is in part a failure to make vital distinctions—and we find in Augustine both a delight in the pleasures of vision and a wariness that such pleasures may corrupt the soul and deflect it from apprehending the true uncreated light:

pulchras formas et uarias, nitidos et amoenos colores amant oculi. non teneant haec animam meam; teneat eam deus...at ista corporalis, de qua loquebar, inlecebrosa ac periculosa dulcedine condit uitam saeculi caecis amatoribus. cum autem et de ipsa laudare te norunt, deus creator omnium, assumunt eam in hymno tuo, non assumuntur ab ea in somno suo: sic esse cupio. resisto seductionibus oculorum, ne implicentur pedes mei, quibus ingredior uiam tuam, et erigo ad te inuisibiles oculos, ut tu euellas de laqueo pedes meos.⁵

¹ ‘See’ and ‘seem’ are conceptually but not etymologically related: ‘see’ comes from a Common Germanic strong verb, whereas ‘seem’ is from the Middle English *sēme*, ‘to be fitting’.

² For Renaissance discussions of the work of eyesight see Stuart Clark, *Vanities of the Eye: Vision in Early Modern European Culture* (Oxford, 2007). The eye was particularly important in Renaissance theory as the channel for love or lust, as the beauty of the beloved entered the body through the eyes: cf. *FQ* II v 34.

³ ὁψις δὲ κατὰ τὸν ἐμὸν λόγον αἰτία τῆς μεγίστης ὠφελίας γέγονεν ἡμῖν (Plato, *Timaeus* 47a).

⁴ αἴτιον δ’ ὅτι μάλιστα ποιεῖ γνωρίζειν ἡμᾶς αὐτῇ τῶν αἰσθήσεων καὶ πολλὰς δηλοῖ διαφορὰς (Aristotle, *Metaphysics* 980a; Loeb translation).

⁵ ‘A delight to my eyes are beautiful and varied forms, glowing and pleasant colours. May these get no hold upon my soul; may God hold it!... The physical light of which I was speaking works by

Much of Milton's narrative in Book IX focuses on how characters see and are seen, and on the powerful influence of sight upon the judgement. Can they—as Aristotle thought—perceive distinctions? Can they—as Augustine prayed—resist the allurements of the eye, and instead raise to God those invisible eyes which discern his light? Are things truly as they seem? What would make faith 'pure-ey'd'?⁶

This is also a question for us as readers, and for our eyes, the gateways to physical and spiritual discernment. It is necessary for us also to 'guard the gateways to ear and eye', as Milton put it in his Italian Sonnet II.⁷ The reader begins by seeing alongside Satan's vision as his eyes become accustomed to the 'darkness visible'⁸ of Hell, and this is a perspective which we learn to judge by first empathizing with its discomforts. Dire though the vision of Hell is, its pain seems less acute than the pain which Satan experiences when he sees happiness from which he is excluded, excluded by his own revolt. In Book IV his 'grievd look'⁹ takes in Earth and Heaven from the top of Mount Niphates, and the sight of the sun causes him anguish as its light reminds him of the light of Heaven which he has lost.¹⁰ The passions which this realization arouses 'marred his borrow'd visage, and betraid | Him counterfet, if any eye beheld.'¹¹ The archangel Uriel does behold him, and perceives that, in a way which would not befit a true angel, passion has disfigured the countenance of this supposed cherub. So the passions which Satan's sight arouse in him make his true moral character visible to one who watches with a spiritually pure sight. Surveying Eden, Satan 'Saw undelighted all delight, all kind | Of living Creatures new to sight and strange',¹² and in particular the sight of Adam and Eve torments him: 'in gaze' at the couple he exclaims, 'O Hell! what doe mine eyes with grief behold',¹³ and 'with jealous leer maligne | Ey'd them askance, and to himself thus plained. | Sight hateful, sight tormenting!'¹⁴ It is the sight of others' pleasures which pains him, for 'the more I see | Pleasures about me, so much more I feel | Torment within me'.¹⁵

But Satan's anguish is not simply envy at another's delight, for his vision is still capable of moral discernment. Told by Zephon that he no longer has that shape or brightness which had characterized him when in Heaven,

abasht the Devil stood,
And felt how awful goodness is, and saw
Vertue in her shape how lovely, saw, and pin'd

a seductive and dangerous sweetness to season the life of those who blindly love the world. But those who know how to praise you for it, God creator of all things, include it in their hymn of praise to you, and are not led astray by it in a sleepy state. That is how I would wish myself to be. I resist the allurements of the eyes lest my feet are caught as I walk along your way. I lift up to you invisible eyes, that you may rescue my feet from the trap' (*Confessiones* x 34; *Confessions*, translated by Henry Chadwick (Oxford, 1991), pp. 209–10). Augustine contrasts the light received by the eyes with the inner, divine light seen by Tobit, Isaac, and Jacob.

⁶ Maske l. 213.

⁷ 'Guardi ciascun a gli occhi, ed a gli orecchi | L'entrata' (Sonnet II ll. 11–12: *Works* i 48).

⁸ *PL* i 63.

⁹ *PL* iv 28.

¹⁰ *PL* iv 32–9.

¹¹ *PL* iv 116–17.

¹² *PL* iv 286–7.

¹³ *PL* iv 356, 358.

¹⁴ *PL* iv 503–5.

¹⁵ *PL* ix 119–21. Cf. 'And tortures him now more, the more he sees | Of pleasure not for him ordain'd' (ix 469–70).

His loss; but chiefly to find here observd
 His lustre visibly impair'd; yet seemd
 Undaunted.¹⁶

The repeated 'saw' underlines the moral possibilities of eyesight, for even fallen sight is capable of recognizing the beauty of virtue. Satan's own lustre is 'visibly impair'd', an outward and visible sign of his inward impairment. Although he seemed undaunted, this appearance is only one of many misleading shows from the father of lies. And while he cannot deceive God, Satan is at first able to deceive even the most perceptive of angels when addressing Uriel, 'The sharpest sighted Spirit of all in Heav'n':

So spake the false dissembler unperceivd;
 For neither Man nor Angel can discern
 Hypocrisie, the only evil that walks
 Invisible, except to God alone.¹⁷

It will, therefore, be hard for mankind to see the distinction between true and false when Satan begins his temptation.



By contrast with Satan's pained contemplation of the sun, Adam and Eve show delight in what they see in the heavens, and by contrast with his solitary, jaundiced gaze, sight is important in linking Adam and Eve into a loving union. In Book IV Eve rejoices at the visual beauty of both day and night,¹⁸ expressing her delight in the sun's beams as they catch the morning dew, the mildness of evening light, and the beauty of moon and stars; and yet, she says, none of these is sweet to her without Adam's presence. A loving speech, and yet also a limited one, for Adam in his reply shows just as much sensuous pleasure in the vicissitude of day and night, but he understands that the heavenly bodies are engaged in an eternal round which prepares light for nations yet unborn, while the starlight gives nourishing heat to all plants and animals which live on earth, and thereby prepares them to receive the stronger beams of the sun. Moreover, the stars which are seemingly 'unbeheld'¹⁹ do not shine in vain, because they are seen and admired by millions of spiritual creatures unknown to the human pair. He sees further than Eve. Though his intuition here will later be amplified and corrected by Raphael's description of the heavens, Adam already has a vision of the providential design of the universe in which the greater and the lesser lights have their functions in nourishing life, and are part of an ordered universe which hymns its Creator. Two visions, then: both show reverent wonder at the visible majesty of the day and the night, but to Eve this is subordinate to her love for Adam, whereas to Adam all creation is visibly God's handiwork.²⁰

One of Eve's reasons for wishing to work on her own is that the loving looks and smiles which pass between them retard their labour.²¹ Adam in reply says that God

¹⁶ *PL* iv 846–51. ¹⁷ *PL* iii 691, 681–4. ¹⁸ *PL* iv 641–75.

¹⁹ *PL* iv 674. 'Unbeheld' is Milton's coinage, according to the *OED*.

²⁰ The later prayer at *PL* v 153–208 which includes substantial praise of God through admiration of the greater and lesser lights is voiced jointly.

²¹ *PL* ix 222–4.

has not imposed labour on them so strictly that they cannot find time for 'this sweet intercourse | Of looks and smiles'.²² Such exchange of looks gives more than erotic pleasure, for Adam tells Eve that

I from the influence of thy looks receive
Access in every Vertue, in thy sight
More wise, more watchful, stronger, if need were
Of outward strength; while shame, thou looking on,
Shame to be overcome or over-reacht
Would utmost vigor raise, and rais'd unite.
Why shouldst not thou like sense within thee feel
When I am present, and thy trial choose
With me, best witness of thy Vertue tri'd.²³

From her looks Adam receives an increase in his 'Vertue' (both moral strength and manly valour²⁴), and in her sight he would be ashamed to act immorally or feebly.²⁵ He thinks that the same should be true of her also, that she too should feel stronger when in his sight, with him as a witness to any moral challenge which she might face. It is, then, not simply that she would be safer in his company: each would be stronger—spiritually, morally—when in the sight of the other, receiving strength from the other's gaze, and feeling ashamed under that gaze were they to act in any weak or immoral way. But Eve's reply does not take up Adam's thoughts about mutual sight. Adam, however, returns to his concern with sight when he says that

Reason not impossibly may meet
Some specious object by the Foe suborn'd,
And fall into deception unaware,
Not keeping strictest watch.²⁶

He knows that the assault from their unknown enemy may come through the eye, and that objects which appear to be beautiful may actually be dangerous, for 'specious' means 'Fair or pleasing to the eye or sight; beautiful, handsome, lovely; resplendent with beauty' as well as 'Having a fair or attractive appearance or character, calculated to make a favourable impression on the mind, but in reality devoid of the qualities apparently possessed'.²⁷ The risk which Adam realizes they face is that their eyes may be presented with a superficially attractive object which is, in reality, a trap created by their enemy. So reason should keep watch. As Eve turns to leave Adam—having again failed to reflect on the hazards of perception—he follows her with his gaze, and 'Her long with ardent look his Eye pursu'd'.²⁸ Sight joins the lovers as they part; or, at least, sight joins Adam to Eve.

²² *PL* ix 238–9.

²³ *PL* ix 309–17.

²⁴ *OED*³ *s.v.* virtue *n.* 2, 4.

²⁵ Fowler (*ad PL* ix 310) points out that according to Renaissance Neoplatonism love inspires the lover to virtue, and that this effect is specifically ascribed to the sight of the beloved. He cites Sidney, *Astrophel and Stella*: 'O EYES . . . | Whose beames be joyes, whose joyes all vertues be' (Sonnet 42 ll. 1–2).

²⁶ *PL* ix 360–3.

²⁷ *OED s.v.* specious *adj.* 1, 2.

²⁸ *PL* ix 397.

When Satan notices Eve, the scene is carefully shaped by Milton into an unusual image:

Eve separate he spies,
Veild in a Cloud of Fragrance, where she stood,
Half spi'd, so thick the Roses bushing round
About her glowd.²⁹

'*Eve* separate he spies': the word 'spies' might only mean 'catches sight of', but it also means 'watches secretly or stealthily',³⁰ so in Satan's gaze there is an element of the underhand observer, the voyeur who is spying on someone. Eve herself is 'Veild in a Cloud of Fragrance', a lovely image which paradoxically envelops the naked Eve in a modest veil produced by the fragrance of the roses around her; scent becomes visible, making her body only partly vulnerable to any onlooker. She is, indeed, only 'Half spi'd', not wholly visible to the Satanic gaze but protected by the natural world. For a while her appearance disarms him, and her heavenly, nearly angelic form (these adjectives are, at this point, deserved, not the fallacious, seductive hyperbole which they will shortly become in the serpent's speeches to Eve) momentarily draws him away from his evil intention:

She . . . in her look summs all Delight.
Such Pleasure took the Serpent to behold
This Flourie Plat, the sweet recess of *Eve*
Thus earlie, thus alone; her Heav'nly forme
Angelic, but more soft, and Feminine,
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, of enmitie disarm'd.³¹

It is specifically the sight of her outward form, and the grace of that form, that detaches him from his own evil, and it is notable that 'Her graceful Innocence' is one of the attributes which is visible, and which makes him for a while 'Stupidly good', 'stupidly' here meaning 'because stupefied'.³² The sight of beauty can, it seems, have a moral influence, if only temporarily.

The serpent's own appearance is 'pleasing . . . | And lovely',³³ and as he approaches Eve he tries 'in sight of *Eve*, | To lure her Eye'.³⁴ Having gained her attention, his first speech of seduction is focused entirely on looks. First he begs her—in Petrarchan mode—not to 'arm | Thy looks, the Heav'n of mildness, with disdain' because displeased that he has begun to 'gaze | Insatiate' on her.³⁵ (Does 'Insatiate'

²⁹ *PL* ix 424–7.

³⁰ *OED* s.v. spy v. 4a, 1a (last example 1617).

³¹ *PL* ix 454–65.

³² *OED* s.v. stupidly adv. 1b, citing this example.

³³ *PL* ix 503–4.

³⁴ *PL* ix 517–18.

³⁵ *PL* ix 533–6.

not alert Eve?) All creatures gaze on her with admiration, he says, because she is the perfect image of her Creator (and does this hyperbole not alert her either?):

Fairest resemblance of thy Maker faire,
Thee all things living gaze on, all things thine
By gift, and thy Celestial Beautie adore
With ravishment beheld, there best beheld
Where universally admir'd; but here
In this enclosure wild, these Beasts among,
Beholders rude, and shallow to discern
Half what in thee is fair, one man except,
Who sees thee? (and what is one?) who shouldst be seen
A Goddess among Gods, ador'd and serv'd
By Angels numberless, thy daily Train.³⁶

This passage aims at what Satan supposes is Eve's vanity, at her presumed wish to be admired for her beauty not only by the animals ('Beholders rude and shallow'), and by Adam (who is only one man), but by 'Angels numberless'. The argument appeals to her wish to be seen. Indeed, this will later be the burden of Adam's bitter rebuke to her for causing their Fall through her 'longing to be seen | Though by the Devil himself'.³⁷ In this approach Satan is drawing upon an ominous characteristic which we find both in the account which Eve gave of her dawning consciousness, and in the dream which she had recounted to Adam in Book V, namely, her addiction to looking at herself. Immediately after her creation she had lain down on the banks of a pool

to look into the cleer
Smooth Lake, that to me seemd another Skie.
As I bent down to look, just opposite,
A Shape within the watry gleam appeerd
Bending to look on me, I started back,
It started back, but pleas'd I soon returnd,
Pleas'd it returnd as soon with answering looks
Of sympathie and love; there I had fixt
Mine eyes till now, and pin'd with vain desire,
Had not a voice thus warnd me, What thou seest,
What there thou seest fair Creature is thy self.³⁸

It is Eve's gaze (at herself reflected in this pool) that generates desire, and through it she becomes immersed in reciprocal gazing and longing, a version of the story of Narcissus.³⁹ She has to be led away from this self-absorption and directed towards Adam, though when she first sees him she thinks that his appearance is less attractive than the image with which she has just been so fascinated. Even though Eve at the side of the pool has only 'unexperienc't thought'⁴⁰ on which to draw in order

³⁶ *PL* ix 538–48.

³⁷ *PL* x 876–8.

³⁸ *PL* iv 458–68.

³⁹ For narcissism in early-modern literature see Eric Langley, *Narcissism and Suicide in Shakespeare and His Contemporaries* (Oxford, 2009).

⁴⁰ *PL* iv 457.

to understand what is happening, this instinctive self-obsession which is prompted and sustained through the eyesight is a warning, to her and to us.

In her dream, too, Eve is led by her eyesight.⁴¹ The voice of the tempter entices her by suggesting that beauty is ‘in vain, | If none regard’,⁴² and that all creation wishes to gaze upon her:

Heav’n wakes with all his eyes,
Whom to behold but thee, Natures desire,
In whose sight all things joy, with ravishment
Attracted by thy beauty still to gaze.⁴³

Approaching the Tree of Knowledge, she sees one who looks like an angel, and who ‘on that Tree . . . also gaz’d’.⁴⁴ The temptation to take the fruit is presented partly through persuasive speech and partly through the ‘pleasant savourie smell’ that ‘quick’nd appetite’,⁴⁵ so it is not wholly a visual seduction; but immediately after she has, as it seems, eaten the fruit,⁴⁶ she experiences a special, superhuman form of vision normally available only to God and the angels:

Forthwith up to the Clouds
With him I flew, and underneath beheld
The Earth outstretcht immense, a prospect wide
And various.⁴⁷

All this is by way of salutary preface to the seduction of the eye in Book IX.

The serpent’s story of how he had taken the fruit emphasizes that he was first led to the Tree by its rich appearance, and ‘nearer drew to gaze’,⁴⁸ before being attracted by the aroma of the fruit. The first result of eating it was, he says, that he

Considerd all things visible in Heav’n,
Or Earth, or Middle, all things fair and good;
But all that fair and good in thy Divine
Semblance, and in thy Beauties heav’nly Ray
United I beheld; no Fair to thine
Equivalent or second, which compel’d
Mee thus, though importune perhaps, to come
And gaze, and worship thee of right declar’d
Sovran of Creatures, universal Dame.⁴⁹

According to this account, it is the serpent’s vision which is transformed by eating the fruit, so that he is enabled to see all visible things in Heaven and Earth; but all the beauty that he sees, he sees united in Eve’s beauty: hence he is compelled to come and gaze upon her. Eve, he says, is ‘resplendent’—shining, brilliant.⁵⁰

⁴¹ *PL* v 28–93. For Puritan hesitations about the interpretation of dreams see Blair Worden, *God’s Instruments: Political Conduct in the England of Oliver Cromwell* (Oxford, 2012), p. 45 n. 94.

⁴² *PL* v 43–4. ⁴³ *PL* v 44–7. ⁴⁴ *PL* v 57. ⁴⁵ *PL* v 84–5.

⁴⁶ See Chapter 25 *Not*, p. 377. ⁴⁷ *PL* v 86–9. ⁴⁸ *PL* ix 578.

⁴⁹ *PL* ix 604–12.

⁵⁰ *PL* ix 568. ‘Resplendent’ derives from the Latin *resplendere*, to shine brightly, radiate light. See Chapter 26 *Re*-, pp. 393–4.

Though false, the narrative which the serpent offers presents what is in effect the Fall of sight.

The serpent leads Eve to the Tree of Knowledge like an *ignis fatuus*, the 'delusive Light' which misleads travellers.⁵¹ Although she recognizes that this is the forbidden Tree, 'Fixt on the Fruit she gaz'd, which to behold | Might tempt alone',⁵² though the temptation presented by the sense of sight is aggravated by the serpent's words and by the enticing smell of the fruit: three senses—sight, hearing, and smell—combine to draw her; only touch and taste await. The fruit 'Sollicited her longing eye',⁵³ and we should note the strong moral significance of 'solicit' at this period:

1. To disturb, disquiet, trouble. 2. a. To entreat or petition (a person) for, or to do, something; to urge, importune. 3. To incite or move, to induce or persuade, to some act of lawlessness or insubordination. 4. a. To incite, draw on, allure, by some specious representation or argument. b. To court or beg the favour of (a woman), *esp.* with immoral intention. c. To make immoral attempts upon.⁵⁴

The soliciting of the eye is a troubling disturbance of equanimity and true vision, an enticement to transgressive sight. At length she stretches out her hand to grasp the fruit which is so 'Fair to the Eye, inviting to the Taste'.⁵⁵

One of the initial results of the Fall for Eve—as it had only seemed to be for the serpent—is the corruption of her understanding of sight. This happens as she wonders how she now appears to God and how she will appear to Adam. She imagines, first, that God may not have seen her. In this fantasy she is attributing a debased form of sight, and an oppressive form of oversight, to God himself, for she imagines that he may be too distant to see her, too preoccupied to notice; this God is an oppressive forbinder who mounts continual watch with his angel spies:

And I perhaps am secret; Heav'n is high,
High and remote to see from thence distinct
Each thing on Earth; and other care perhaps
May have diverted from continual watch
Our great Forbinder, safe with all his Spies
About him.⁵⁶

'Secret': 'secluded from observation; hidden from sight, unseen';⁵⁷ but Milton the Latinist would have known that 'secret' derives from *secretum*, the past participle of *secernere*, meaning 'to cut off, separate, remove, isolate, discard'.⁵⁸ She may think (erroneously) that she is hidden from observation by God, but she has actually cut herself off from him.

Eve prefaces the account of her transgression which she offers to Adam by saying that she will not repeat 'The pain of absence from thy sight',⁵⁹ which is her first, oblique, acknowledgement of the arguments which Adam had put forward to

⁵¹ *PL* ix 639. For a discussion of the image see Chapter 13 *FANCY AND REASON*, pp. 160–2.

⁵² *PL* ix 735–6.

⁵³ *PL* ix 743.

⁵⁴ Abridged from *OED s.v. solicit v.*

⁵⁵ *PL* ix 777.

⁵⁶ *PL* ix 811–16.

⁵⁷ *OED s.v. secret adj.* 1c, 1i.

⁵⁸ *OLD s.v. secernere.*

⁵⁹ *PL* ix 861.

persuade her that they were both stronger when held within each other's sight. She assures him that the fruit has 'Divine effect | To open Eyes', and avouches for this effect herself: 'opener mine Eyes | Dimm erst, dilated Spirits, ampler Heart, | And growing up to Godhead.'⁶⁰ But no enlarged or enlightened vision has followed her actual taking of the fruit as it had in her dream. Indeed, to Adam quite another story appears in her 'Countenance blithe', for 'in her Cheek distemper flushing glowd', a clear visible sign of the distemper within.⁶¹ 'Distemper' signals her multiply disordered condition, a combination of physical, mental, and spiritual disorder:

3. Derangement or disturbance of the 'humour' or 'temper' (according to mediæval physiology regarded as due to disturbance in the bodily 'humours'). 4. Deranged or disordered condition of the body or mind (formerly regarded as due to disordered state of the humours). d. Intoxication.⁶²

The intoxicated, distempered state in which Eve returns clutching a branch from the Tree is shared by Adam once he too has tasted the fruit, and this leads to him eyeing her in a way which contrasts poignantly with his earlier loving gaze:

Carnal desire enflaming, hee on *Eve*
 Began to cast lascivious Eyes, she him
 As wantonly repaid; in Lust they burne:
 Till *Adam* thus 'gan *Eve* to dalliance move,
 ...
 never did thy Beautie since the day
 I saw thee first and wedded thee, adorn'd
 With all perfections, so enflame my sense
 With ardor to enjoy thee, fairer now
 Then ever, bountie of this vertuous Tree.
 So said he, and forbore not glance or toy
 Of amorous intent, well understood
 Of *Eve*, whose Eye darted contagious Fire.⁶³

Adam cast 'lascivious Eyes' on her; Eve's 'Eye darted contagious Fire'. This is the Fall of Adam's eyesight, which now sees Eve's beauty as a source only of sexual enticement; no longer does the sight of her give him that increase of virtue which he had spoken of earlier.

After their first postlapsarian sex, their eyesight changes once again; now,

each the other viewing,
 Soon found thir Eyes how op'nd, and thir minds
 How dark'nd; innocence, that as a veile
 Had shadow'd them from knowing ill, was gon.⁶⁴

It is when they see each other, truly see each other, as they awake from their disturbed sleep, that they find that their eyes are opened and their minds darkened, for they have lost the innocence which had previously been like a veil, shielding

⁶⁰ *PL* ix 865–6, 875–7.

⁶¹ *PL* ix 886–7.

⁶² Abridged from *OED* s.v. distemper n.¹.

⁶³ *PL* ix 1013–16, 1029–36.

⁶⁴ *PL* ix 1052–5.

them from seeing and so knowing evil. Instead they find all too visible 'in our Faces evident the signes | Of foul concupiscence'.⁶⁵ With this new knowledge Adam realizes that he will no longer be able to look God or angel in the face: that pure and original form of sight is now lost, for, he says,

How shall I behold the face
Henceforth of God or Angel, earst with joy
And rapture so oft beheld? those heav'nly shapes
Will dazle now this earthly, with thir blaze
Insufferably bright.

...

Cover me ye Pines,
Ye Cedars, with innumerable boughs
Hide me, where I may never see them more.⁶⁶

This is a terrible recognition for Adam, that he will no longer be able to see the face of God, and henceforth this will be the human condition, for God will say to Moses, 'Thou canst not see my face: for there shall no man see mee, and liue.'⁶⁷ That form of sight which had previously brought Adam such joy and rapture is now for ever impossible, since these heavenly beings would intolerably dazzle man's fallen eyes. But whereas Eve had crassly thought that God might be too busy or too short-sighted to notice her, Adam wishes to be covered by pines and cedars in order not to see—rather than not to be seen—for to see the divine light would be to recognize his own self-incurred darkness. In his imperfect way he has the theological insight that the full encounter of man with God would be an intolerable harrowing, a purgatorial scarifying, of sinful humanity. When Adam turns to Eve, he is now 'estrang'd in look';⁶⁸ he cannot bear to see her, exclaiming, 'Out of my sight, thou Serpent';⁶⁹ and he wants them 'to hide | The Parts of each for other, that seem most | To shame obnoxious, and unseemliest seem.'⁷⁰ Subsequently, when God seeks the pair in the garden, and they are afraid to be seen because of their nakedness; 'Love was not in thir looks, either to God | Or to each other',⁷¹ whereas their looks had previously been the medium of love. Eventually, when Michael comes to tell the couple of their expulsion from Eden he would have been 'A glorious Apparition, had not doubt | And carnal fear that day dimm'd *Adams* eye.'⁷² Fallen sight can no longer see glory in an angel.

But that eye is about to be educated. The lesson of the Fall is brought home to Adam when Michael purges the corruption of sight which has been brought about by the fruit, and ushers in a vision of the future of mankind:

So both ascend
In the Visions of God: It was a Hill
Of Paradise the highest, from whose top

⁶⁵ *PL* ix 1077–8.

⁶⁶ *PL* ix 1080–84, 1088–90.

⁶⁷ Exodus xxxiii 20.

⁶⁸ *PL* ix 1132.

⁶⁹ *PL* x 867.

⁷⁰ *PL* ix 1092–4. *for*: 1674; from 1667 (probably correctly). *seem*: are seen to be. *obnoxious*: liable, exposed to (*OED*³ *s.v.* *obnoxious adj.* 1 a).

⁷¹ *PL* x 111–12.

⁷² *PL* xi 211–12.

The Hemisphere of Earth in clearest Ken
 Stretcht out to amplest reach of prospect lay.

...

Michael from *Adams* eyes the Filme remov'd
 Which that false Fruit that promis'd clearer sight
 Had bred; then purg'd with Euphrasie and Rue
 The visual Nerve, for he had much to see;
 And from the Well of Life three drops instill'd.
 So deep the power of these Ingredients pierc'd,
 Eevn to the inmost seat of mental sight,
 That *Adam* now enforc't to close his eyes,
 Sunk down and all his Spirits became intransit:
 But him the gentle Angel by the hand
 Soon rais'd, and his attention thus recall'd.
Adam, now ope thine eyes, and first behold
 Th' effects which thy original crime hath wrought.⁷³

'In the Visions of God': the phrase comes from Ezekiel xl 2 in which the prophet is set upon a high mountain to receive a vision of the form of the restored temple for the people of Israel. It may seem at first as if the very opposite of a restored temple is shown to Adam, as the first vision which he sees is the murder of Abel by Cain, and yet gradually Michael's revelations do work towards restoration and redemption in his account of the death and resurrection of the Messiah. This is the vision which Michael, 'Seer blest',⁷⁴ makes available to Adam's inner sight, purged deeply now 'Eevn to the inmost seat of mental sight' by the application of euphrasy and rue, signifying joy and repentance.⁷⁵ Beyond the vision which is presented to Adam 'is all abyss, | Eternitie, whose end no eye can reach'.⁷⁶ The archangel adds three drops from the well of life, a form of baptism which recalls the promise held out by the Psalmist: 'For with thee *is* the fountaine of life: in thy light shall we see light'.⁷⁷ The Fall of man's sight is redeemed through the gift of divine grace which enables Adam to see the workings of providence in human history. 'In thy light shall we see light'.



The poem presents the whole narrative as something which happens in the sight of God.⁷⁸ God's sight is not, of course, limited in the way that Adam, Eve, and indeed Satan imagine. Satan thinks that when disguised as a young cherub, or in taking the form of a toad, he is able to evade detection, but when Ithuriel's spear touches

⁷³ *PL* xi 376–80, 412–24.

⁷⁴ *PL* xii 553.

⁷⁵ Fowler (*ad loc.*) notes that 'euphrasy' derives from *εὐφρασία*, meaning 'cheerfulness'. Euphrasy was also called 'eyebright' for its clearing properties. Rue was used in exorcisms and is called 'Herbe-Grace' by Shakespeare (*Hamlet* IV v 181) (Newton ap. Miner). 'Rue' as the name of the plant was frequently associated punningly with its homonym meaning 'repentance' (*OED*³ *s.v.* rue *n.*² 1b).

⁷⁶ *PL* xii 555–6.

⁷⁷ Psalm xxxvi 9.

⁷⁸ Cf. C. A. Patrides, *Milton and the Christian Tradition* (Oxford, 1966), p. 13; Stanley Eugene Fish, *Surprised by Sin: The Reader in 'Paradise Lost'* (Berkeley, Calif., 1967), p. 78; and for angelic sight see Joad Raymond, *Milton's Angels: The Early-Modern Imagination* (Oxford, 2010), pp. 291–9.

the toad it instantly becomes apparent to him that this toad is Satan.⁷⁹ God's vision sees what Satan is doing as he draws the rebel angels after him under cover of night:

His count'nance, as the Morning Starr that guides
 The starrie flock, allur'd them, and with lyes
 Drew after him the third part of Heav'ns Host:
 Mean while th' Eternal eye, whose sight discernes
 Abstrusest thoughts, from forth his holy Mount
 And from within the golden Lamps that burne
 Nightly before him, saw without thir light
 Rebellion rising, saw in whom, how spread
 Among the sons of Morn, what multitudes
 Were banded to oppose his high Decree.⁸⁰

There are various forms of true and false sight here, and distinguishable forms of dark and light. Satan's countenance draws after him the rebel angels, who are allured by the seeming light of his face (the simile in 'as the Morning Starr that guides | The starrie flock' is less a likeness than an unlikeness, because the Morning Star guides the other stars as part of the eternal order of creation, whereas Satan is seducing his followers to abandon their rightful places in that order). The word 'countenance'⁸¹ here has important resonances, for in English biblical usage it signifies the love and grace which God bestows upon his people in blessing, as in the book of Numbers:

The LORD blesse thee, and keepe thee:
 The LORD make his face shine vpon thee, and be gracious vnto thee:
 The LORD lift vp his countenance vpon thee, and giue thee peace.⁸²

and in the Psalms:

LORD lift thou vp the light of thy countenance vpon us.⁸³

and here in *Paradise Lost*:

Thee next they sang of all Creation first,
 Begotten Son, Divine Similitude,
 In whose conspicuous count'nance, without cloud
 Made visible, th' Almighty Father shines.⁸⁴

The Satanic countenance is a deceitful, parodic image of the divine countenance, its light only a form of darkness. Meanwhile, God's eye sees into 'Abstrusest thoughts', those which are most deeply hidden;⁸⁵ he is surrounded by burning

⁷⁹ *PL* iv 799–821. ⁸⁰ *PL* v 708–14.

⁸¹ *countenance*: not only 'face', but 'appearance', and often 'assumed, feigned appearance' (*OED* *s.v.* *countenance* *n.*¹ 2, 4, 5).

⁸² Numbers vi 24–7. ⁸³ Psalm iv 6.

⁸⁴ *PL* iii 383–6. *conspicuous*: clearly visible (*OED* *s.v.* *conspicuous* *adj.* 1).

⁸⁵ *abstruse*: concealed, hidden, secret (*OED*³ *s.v.* *abstruse* *adj.* 2).

lamps, as in the Book of Revelation, where we are told that 'there were seven lamps of fire burning before the Throne, which are the seven Spirits of God':⁸⁶ these are therefore no ordinary lamps giving no ordinary light, but even so they are not necessary in order to allow God to see the (now ironically named) 'sons of Morn'.

For God's sight is of a different order from human or Satanic vision:

Now had the Almighty Father from above,
From the pure Empyrean where he sits
High Thron'd above all highth, bent down his eye,
His own works and their works at once to view:
About him all the Sanctities of Heaven
Stood thick as Starrs, and from his sight receiv'd
Beatitude past utterance; on his right
The radiant image of his Glory sat,
His onely Son; On Earth he first beheld
Our two first Parents.

...

he then survey'd
Hell and the Gulf between, and *Satan* there
Coasting the wall of Heav'n.⁸⁷

This passage on divine sight follows, painfully but with hope, the long account of Milton's blindness, and his prayer for 'Celestial light' to 'Shine inward... | ...there plant eyes... | ...that I may see and tell | Of things invisible to mortal sight.'⁸⁸ Milton's prayer is that he may in some measure partake in the divine vision, a vision which is not merely sight but knowledge and wisdom. God's vision is all-encompassing, showing him all his works, along with the activities of Adam, and Eve, and Satan, but God's vision also sees past, present, and future, as is made clear in Book III when God watches what Satan is doing:

Him God beholding from his prospect high,
Wherein past, present, future he beholds,
Thus to his onely Son foreseeing spake.⁸⁹

It is because this temporally unrestricted vision sees without influencing (fore-knowledge is intransitive⁹⁰) that man's Fall is foreseen but not predestined, for

what can scape the Eye
Of God All-seeing, or deceive his Heart
Omniscient[?]⁹¹

⁸⁶ Revelation iv 5.

⁸⁷ *PL* iii 56–65, 69–71.

⁸⁸ *PL* iii 51–5.

⁸⁹ *PL* iii 77–9.

⁹⁰ *A Milton Encyclopedia*, edited by William B. Hunter, Jr., 9 vols (Lewisburg, Pa., 1978–83), iii 115.

⁹¹ *PL* x 5–7.

God's vision is also compassionate, as when he 'beheld | With pittie'⁹² Adam and Eve working in Eden, and as a result sent Raphael down to give them knowledge and understanding. A special characteristic of divine sight is that the angels around God 'from his sight receiv'd | Beatitude past utterance', but this wording is ambiguous: do the angels receive this blessedness by looking upon God, or by him looking upon them? The double duty served by the phrase 'from his sight' generates a grammatical ambiguity which is also a challenge to the limited perception of the reader, for this is not sight as we usually understand it—one person looking at an object—but the radiant presence of God which enfolds the attendant angels.

Sight is also used by Milton to express the inexpressible relationship between the Father and the Son. Were he to give any suggestion of visible form to God, Milton would risk producing a merely debased notion of the divine, for, as Calvin said,

the maiestie of god is defiled with vncomlye and folishe counterfaiting, when he beeyng without body is likened to bodily mater: being inuisible, to a uisible image: being a spirit, to a thing without life... God in dede, I graunt, somtyme in certayne sygnes hath geuen a presence of hys godhed, so as he was sayed to be beholden face to face, but all these sygnes that euer he shewed dyd aptly serue for meanes to teache, and wythall dyd playnly admonishe men of an incomprehensible essence. For the cloude and smoke and flame, although they wer tokens of the heauenly glory, yet did they as it were bridle and restraine the mindes of mē that they should not attempt to passe any further.⁹³

Though Calvin is writing here about painting and sculpture, the second commandment, which forbids graven images,⁹⁴ was often taken as a warning against the potential transgression in making any image of God. Much religious language therefore incorporates gestures which highlight its own inadequacy: the language of the mystics strains metaphor and grammar, whilst apophatic theology approaches God through a series of negations. In deploying the imagery of sight in order to figure the Father and the Son, Milton, who was not an orthodox Trinitarian,⁹⁵ is himself pressing at the limits of language and asking his readers to see, as the angels see, the true glory of the Son of God:

Beyond compare the Son of God was seen
Most glorious, in him all his Father shon
Substantially express'd, and in his face
Divine compassion visibly appeerd,
Love without end, and without measure Grace.⁹⁶

⁹² *PL* v 219–20.

⁹³ Jean Calvin, *The Institution of Christian Religion* (London, 1561), fol. 23^r. *mē*: men.

⁹⁴ Exodus xx 4. See Chapter 19 *IDOL AND IMAGE*, pp. 271–2.

⁹⁵ For Milton's understanding of the Son, see *De Doctrina* Book I ch. v, and see Chapter 15 *GOD*, pp. 220–5.

⁹⁶ *PL* iii 138–42.

The poetry appeals to us to join with the angels in truly seeing the Son of God, specifically in seeing in his face divine compassion, love, and grace. It is the Son who makes these divine attributes visible to man, as God says:

Son in whose face invisible is beheld
Visibly, what by Deitie I am.⁹⁷

The oxymoron here halts our reading for a moment.⁹⁸ The overall sense of the lines is clearly that in the face of the Son, God, who is 'the invisible',⁹⁹ is beheld visibly; but by suppressing the definite article in front of 'invisible' Milton makes us puzzle. Momentarily we wonder whether 'invisible' may be an adjective, so that the Son's face is a 'face invisible'. Not so; and yet the divine face of the Son is indeed not fully visible to mortal sight or understanding, is actually invisible in the sense 'that by its nature [it] is not an object of sight'.¹⁰⁰ So the misreading points to a truth. Momentarily we may also wonder whether 'invisible' may be being used adverbially, qualifying 'beheld', so that the Son's face is 'invisibly beheld'. Not so; and yet if man is truly to gaze upon the Son, and in so doing see the Father in him and through him, then man will have to learn to see in a way which is more than physical, a way which is a spiritual, inner seeing, and therefore indeed an 'invisible' looking. So the misreading points to a truth. The grammatical awkwardness of 'invisible' here points to the strange form of beholding which is involved in truly seeing the Son—which is seeing the Father through the Son.



Adam's sight was purified by Michael. Without such archangelic intervention, man nowadays has to be aware of his fallen sight, to rectify this as best he can through attentive study of scripture and by removing his gaze from false attractions: in such a way to approach the sight of Truth. Such is the message of Milton's first antiprelatical tract, *Of Reformation Touching Church-Discipline in England* (1641):

The very essence of Truth is plainnesse, and brightnes; the darknes and crookednesse is our own. The *wisdome of God* created *understanding*, fit and proportionable to Truth the object, and end of it, as the eye to the thing visible. If our *understanding* have a film of *ignorance* over it, or be blear with gazing on other false glisterings, what is that to Truth? If we will but purge with sovraign eyesalve that intellectual ray which *God* hath planted in us, then we would beleieve the Scriptures protesting their own plainnes, and perspicuity.¹⁰¹

⁹⁷ *PL* vi 681–2. Cf. 'Who is the image of the inuisible God, the first borne of euery creature' (Colossians i 15).

⁹⁸ Various interpretations of the complexities of the expression are assembled by Miner, *ad loc.*

⁹⁹ The *OED*'s first example for the noun 'the invisible' in the sense of 'the Deity' is from 1781 (*OED* s.v. invisible n. 1b).

¹⁰⁰ *OED* s.v. invisible adj. 1a.

¹⁰¹ *Reformation: Works* iii 33. Milton adds that godly ministers should confront the bishops with the gospel, 'and hold it ever in their faces like a mirror of Diamond, till it dazle, and pierce their misty ey balls' (iii 35). Moreover, the 'quick-sighted *Protestants* eye clear'd in great part from the mist of Superstition, may at one time or other looke with a good judgement into these their [Rome's] deceitfull Pedleries' (iii 56).

And if the nation were to manage such a self-purging, then Milton himself has a vision of what England might become, as he says in *Areopagitica*:

Methinks I see in my mind a noble and puissant Nation rousing herself like a strong man after sleep, and shaking her invincible locks: Methinks I see her as an Eagle muing her mighty youth, and kindling her undazl'd eyes at the full midday beam; purging and unscaling her long abused sight at the fountain it self of heav'nly radiance.¹⁰²

Milton would never himself see such a nation.



Two of far nobler shape erect and tall,
Godlike erect, with native Honour clad
In naked Majestie seemd Lords of all,
And worthie seemd, for in thir looks Divine
The image of thir glorious Maker shon.¹⁰³

Is all as it seems? Or rather, when and why is all not as it seems? Here in Book IV Adam and Eve seem to be lords of all, and so they are, because the image of God shines in them and guarantees that they are as they seem: there is a purity and a truthfulness in the relation between appearance and actuality, and their nakedness is a sign of the truthfulness of appearance. Later, man will be troubled by 'meer shews of seeming pure'¹⁰⁴ which are puritanical attitudes to the body. It is seeming that is truly impure. After the couple's first postlapsarian intercourse, Adam tells Eve that they should devise

What best may for the present serve to hide
The Parts of each from other, that seem most
To shame obnoxious, and unseemliest seen.¹⁰⁵

Their genitals now 'seem' exposed to shame, but only to the corrupted eye; only after the Fall are they 'seen' to be 'unseemliest', most indecent.

In *Paradise Lost* 'seem' and its cognates occur more than one hundred times. The meaning of the word moves between (i) to appear (in true accordance with reality), and (ii) to appear (but wrongly, or deceitfully so), and the reader is repeatedly challenged to determine which of these meanings applies at each point. In addition, 'seem' poses the recurring question, 'What is seemly?', 'What is appropriate and fitting in this context?' Here Milton shows himself to be a student of Spenser's *The Faerie Queene*, which often presents the reader with seemingly fair externals which conceal corruption behind an appealing façade: Duessa and the House of Pride in Book I, or the Bower of Bliss in Book II, offer visual pleasures which turn out to be deceitful. In his handling of such examples Spenser sometimes teases or tests the reader by postponing the revelation of the true moral nature of the person or the place, so that we enjoy the appearance temporarily before realizing just why that

¹⁰² *Areopagitica: Works* iv 344. *muing*: renewing its feathers (*OED* s.v. *mew* v.² 1).

¹⁰³ *PL* iv 288–92.

¹⁰⁴ *PL* iv 316.

¹⁰⁵ *PL* ix 1092–4. *obnoxious*: liable, exposed.

appearance is to be distrusted. Milton, though he called Spenser 'a better teacher than *Scotus* or *Aquinas*',¹⁰⁶ and told Dryden that 'Spenser was his original',¹⁰⁷ is often more direct in telling the reader the difference between 'seem' and 'seem', between true and deceitful appearances.

If true seeming is guaranteed by the presence of the undisfigured image of God, what are the characteristics of false seeming? Satan, of course, as the father of lies,¹⁰⁸ is the source of much deceitful seeming. When God declares the begetting of his Son, 'All seemd well pleas'd, all seem'd, but were not all',¹⁰⁹ and this dissimulation is the origin of Satan's revolt. In Hell Satan 'seemd | Alone th' Antagonist of Heav'n',¹¹⁰ but this 'seemd' warns us that although Satan has set himself up in this role, there is really no substance to his pose as God's antagonist, as if they were combatants of equal standing. The point is rapidly confirmed by the description of his pomp as 'God-like imitated State'.¹¹¹ He would 'seem | Patron of liberty' but is himself servile.¹¹² Satan speaks words 'that bore | Semblance of worth, not substance'.¹¹³ Similarly Beelzebub during the debate in Hell 'seem'd | A Pillar of State' but is in fact a duplicitous ally of Satan.¹¹⁴ Belial 'seemd | For dignity compos'd and high exploit: | But all was false and hollow'.¹¹⁵ Indeed, the outward appearance of all the fallen angels is no more than a seeming, as we learn when the poem shows us 'they but now who seemd | In bigness to surpass Earths Giant Sons | Now less then smallest Dwarfs'.¹¹⁶ In leading Eve to the Tree of Knowledge Satan 'swiftly rowld | In tangles, and made intricate seem strait',¹¹⁷ and exploited Eve's vulnerability to vanity of sight by offering her a purer form of vision, saying that if she were to eat the fruit of the Tree, 'your Eyes that seem so cleere, | Yet are but dim, shall perfetly be then | Op'nd and cleerd'.¹¹⁸

Yet Satan himself is deceived, or self-deceived, by appearances, as happens when he thinks that Abdiel is alone in his opposition to him. When Abdiel later confronts Satan surrounded by the faithful angels, he tells him:

but thou seest
All are not of thy Train; there be who Faith
Prefer, and Pietie to God, though then
To thee not visible, when I alone
Seemd in thy World erroneous to dissent
From all: my Sect thou seest, now learn too late
How few sometimes may know, when thousands err.¹¹⁹

Here 'Seemd' is enclosed and corrected by two occurrences of 'seest'. Abdiel had seemed to be alone because Satan, blinded by pride and self-confidence, had not been able to see the divine sources of support which sustained him; now they have been made visible and Satan sees Abdiel's strength, though still not with true

¹⁰⁶ *Areopagitica: Works* iv 311.

¹⁰⁷ Recorded in the Preface to *Fables Ancient and Modern* (1700): *The Poems of John Dryden*, edited by Paul Hammond and David Hopkins, 5 vols (London, 1995–2005), v 50.

¹⁰⁸ John viii 44.

¹⁰⁹ *PL* v 617.

¹¹⁰ *PL* ii 508–9.

¹¹¹ *PL* ii 511.

¹¹² *PL* iv 957–8.

¹¹³ *PL* i 528–9.

¹¹⁴ *PL* ii 301–2.

¹¹⁵ *PL* ii 110–12.

¹¹⁶ *PL* i 777–9.

¹¹⁷ *PL* ix 631–2.

¹¹⁸ *PL* ix 706–8.

¹¹⁹ *PL* vi 142–8.

clarity, for his answer is delivered 'with scornful eye askance'.¹²⁰ As for Satan's offspring, Sin and Death, both are presented as forms of seeming. In Spenserian fashion neither figure is immediately named, so that the reader is expected to work out their identities before the poetry confirms that reading by assigning names to the shapes. In an obvious allegory, Sin 'seem'd Woman to the waste, and fair, | But ended foul in many a scaly fould';¹²¹ does this 'seem'd' mean 'appeared so, and was indeed', or 'appeared so, but in fact was not'? Death is described as

The other shape,
If shape it might be call'd that shape had none
Distinguishable in member, joynt, or limb,
Or substance might be call'd that shadow seem'd,
For each seem'd either.

...

what seem'd his head
The likeness of a Kingly Crown had on.¹²²

Substance seems shadow, and shadow seems substance. Seems, and is so; or seems, but is not so? In the world shaped by Satan it seems that Death is a ruler, that Death does have absolute sovereignty. Yet the poetry's serious play with shadow and substance questions whether death does have any substance, any substantial power, for those who do not live in the kingdom of Satan. An insistent message of the New Testament is the defeat of death by the resurrection of Christ, for 'death hath no more dominion ouer him', as St Paul says.¹²³ So if—but only if—the reader of *Paradise Lost* is a citizen of the Kingdom of God, death indeed has no substance. And since the terminology echoes the theological debate as to whether evil has substance or is merely the privation of good,¹²⁴ we are offered a reminder that ultimately Satan too is mere seeming, his apparent power insubstantial and evanescent.

Can Adam and Eve distinguish true from false seeming? Sometimes the limitations of human sight are innocuous, for example when contemplating the heavenly bodies and their movements, which are, says Raphael, 'regular | Then most, when most irregular they seem',¹²⁵ and Raphael frequently uses 'seem' when narrating the war in Heaven in order to accommodate his description to the limitations of Adam's understanding.¹²⁶ Adam uses 'seem' with reverent agnosticism as to the veracity of his perception when he says that the stars 'seem to rowle | Spaces incomprehensible'.¹²⁷ Raphael tells Adam that the earth 'so stedfast though she seem'¹²⁸ may nevertheless herself move. Adam in return tells Raphael that in his company 'I seem in Heav'n',¹²⁹ which is more than an empty compliment; rather it is Adam's acknowledgement of the truth of Raphael's discourse. But sometimes

¹²⁰ *PL* vi 149.

¹²¹ *PL* ii 650–1.

¹²² *PL* ii 666–70, 672–3.

¹²³ Romans vi 9.

¹²⁴ See Chapter 11 *Evil*, pp. 106–12.

¹²⁵ *PL* v 623–4.

¹²⁶ *PL* vi 230, 232, 244, 301, 573, 667. In some of these instances he is also telling Adam how the war seemed to him as an observer.

¹²⁷ *PL* viii 19–20.

¹²⁸ *PL* viii 129.

¹²⁹ *PL* viii 210.

Raphael has to correct Adam's perceptions. Adam inadvertently betrays his inability to see clearly when telling Raphael of his total devotion to Eve:

when I approach
Her loveliness, so absolute she seems
And in her self compleat, so well to know
Her own, that what she wills to do or say,
Seems wisest, vertuousest, discreetest, best;
All higher knowledge in her presence falls
Degraded, Wisdom in discourse with her
Looses discount'nanc't, and like folly shewes;
Authority and Reason on her waite.¹³⁰

Adam uses 'seems' in the sense 'appears, and is indeed', but we realize from his hyperbole that the sense should be 'appears, but is not'. The double instance of 'seems... Seems', followed by the equally suspect verb 'shewes', indicates Adam's lack of discrimination in ascribing to Eve such perfection not simply of bodily form but of wisdom, authority, and reason. Whereas the image of God in man had been a guarantee of true vision, Adam is making Eve into an idol. In his reply, Raphael warns Adam that if sexual pleasure 'seem such dear delight', he should remember that it is a pleasure which he shares with the animals; here Raphael's 'seem' alerts Adam to his misperception, and there is an additional warning half-buried in the word 'dear': this physical devotion of Adam to Eve will indeed cost him—and us—dear. Too late, Adam says after the Fall, 'I also err'd in over-much admiring | What seemd in thee so perfet'.¹³¹ Seemed, but was not.

When God the Son appears to judge the pair, he reminds Adam of this error in his perception of Eve: her gifts, he says,

Were such as under Government well seem'd,
Unseemly to beare rule, which was thy part
And person, had'st thou known thy self aright.¹³²

Eve's gifts 'well seem'd' under government, that is, they (i) appeared advantageously and (ii) appeared in their true nature when Eve was under the authority of Adam—not *vice versa*. She was 'Unseemly' (unfitting) to rule him. And if Adam had had true self-knowledge, he would have been able to see Eve aright.

At one of the most poignant moments in the poem, Adam turns to address Eve after reflecting on the love for her which is leading him to share her Fall. He does so, says Milton, 'Submitting to what seemd remediless', seemed so according to limited human vision.¹³³ But we as readers know that all is not as it seems: there is a remedy, and for Milton the remedy for human sin comes in the form of Christ.¹³⁴



To see clearly is to distinguish between what seems and what is, a vital process in a world in which 'the knowledge of good is so involv'd and interwoven with the

¹³⁰ *PL* viii 546–54.

¹³¹ *PL* ix 1178–9.

¹³² *PL* x 154–6.

¹³³ *PL* ix 919.

¹³⁴ See Chapter 26 RE-; *OED*³ *s.v.* remedy *n.* 1 (a means of counteracting sin).

knowledge of evil, and in so many cunning resemblances hardly to be discern'd'.¹³⁵ This is not a task for individuals only, but a vocation for England itself which Milton sees 'purging and unscaling her long abused sight at the fountain it self of heav'nly radiance'.¹³⁶ The ultimate importance of such enlightenment of man's sight is explained by St Gregory of Nyssa, who wrote that in seeing God one possesses all things, 'for, in the language of scripture, to see means the same as to have': *Τὸ γὰρ ἰδεῖν ταῦτόν σημαίνει τῷ σchein ἐν τῇ τῆς Γραφῆς συνηθείᾳ*.¹³⁷ To see truly is truly to possess.

¹³⁵ *Areopagitica: Works* iv 310.

¹³⁶ *Areopagitica: Works* iv 344.

¹³⁷ St Gregory of Nyssa, *De Beatitudinibus* 6 (*Patrologia Graeca* xliv 1265), reflecting on the text *Beati puro corde, quoniam ipsi Deum videbunt* ('Blessed are the pure in heart: for they shall see God') (Matthew v 8).

28

Self-

For who can yet beleeeve, though after loss,
That all these puissant Legions, whose exile
Hath emptied Heav'n, shall faile to re-ascend
Self-rai's'd, and repossess thir native seat?

Paradise Lost i 631–4



The formations and deformations of the self (that is, of will, of reason, and, ultimately, of love) which the poem charts can be traced in part through the compounds of 'self-' which Milton deploys.¹ These compounds (many of which appear to be Milton's coinages²) sometimes denote a power which is attributed solely to the self (and therefore invite us to ask whether such an assumption about the power of the individual takes proper account of the power of God) and sometimes refer to a form of self-enclosure, the individual turned in on himself, perhaps to the neglect of others and of God. Reflecting on the question of whether God was in some sense the author of man's sin, Milton recalls 'the perfection wherein man was created, and might have stood', and affirms that 'mans own freewill self-corrupted is the adequat and sufficient cause of his disobedience'.³ *Paradise Lost* explores the process of self-corruption through self-will in Satan and in man.⁴ Ralph Cudworth explored the idea of self-will as the root of the Fall in a sermon to the House of Commons, telling the assembled members:

It was by reason of this *Self-will*, that Adam fell in Paradise; that those glorious Angels, those *Morning-starres*, kept not their first station, but dropt down from heaven like Falling Starres, and sunk into this condition of bitterness, anxiety, and wretchednesse in which now they are. They all intangled themselves with the length of their own wings, they would needs will more and otherwise then God would will in them... Now our

¹ William Poole discusses words with the 'self-' prefix in *Milton and the Idea of the Fall* (Cambridge, 2005), pp. 150–1. For the relevance to *PL* of the seventeenth-century practice of moral and spiritual self-examination see Stanley Eugene Fish, *Surprised by Sin: The Reader in 'Paradise Lost'* (Berkeley, Calif., 1967), pp. 50ff.

² These are recorded in the notes; in addition, the *OED* does not record the word 'self-pious' which Milton uses to define the self-scrutiny which leads the devout man to avoid sin (*Reformation: Works* iii 261).

³ *Divorce: Works* iii 441. This is the *OED*'s sole example of 'self-corrupted'.

⁴ For the debate over whether Milton's angels are self-corrupted see John Leonard, *Faithful Labourers: A Reception History of 'Paradise Lost', 1667–1970*, 2 vols (Oxford, 2013), pp. 508–9; see also John S. Tanner, "Say First What Cause": Ricoeur and the Etiology of Evil in *Paradise Lost*, *PMLA* 103 (1988) 45–56, esp. p. 53.

onely way to recover God & happiness again, is not to soar up with our Understandings, but to destroy this *Self-will* of ours: and then we shall find our wings to grow again, our plumes fairly spread, & our selves raised aloft into the free Aire of perfect Liberty, which is perfect Happinesse.⁵

If we begin with examples drawn from the Satanic concepts of selfhood, we find Satan rallying his fallen followers in Book I with the delusive prospect that they will 're-ascend | Self-rai'd'.⁶ Their own power is, they think, sufficient to raise them in defiance of God. Later Satan derides Abdiel's claim that all the angels were created by God and are therefore subordinate to him, asserting *per contra* that they are 'self-begot, self-rai'd | By our own quick'ning power'.⁷ This idea seems to lie close to the heart of Milton's analysis of sin—that sin is the reliance on oneself rather than the acknowledgement that one's powers come from God alone.⁸ The serpent, before Satan enters it, provides an image of such a self-enclosed state as it is 'In Labyrinth of many a round self-rowld',⁹ and therefore an appropriate vehicle for Satan. The Satanic selfhood is defined from a heavenly perspective in Book III when God says of the rebel angels that they are 'Self-tempted, self-deprav'd',¹⁰ thus making them take full responsibility for their own Fall, and in Book VII he says that he can repair the loss of the rebel angels 'if such it be to lose | Self-lost'.¹¹ They have lost themselves by attempting to raise themselves. Self-destruction characterizes the rebel angels, and indeed evil itself, for as the Elder Brother says in *A Maske*,

evil on it self shall back recoyl,
And mix no more with goodness, when at last
Gather'd like scum, and set'd to it self
It shall be in eternal restless change
Self-fed, and self-consum'd.¹²

It is virtually Milton's definition of evil that it is self-enclosed and thereby self-destructive: its 'self' is as insubstantial as scum, not open to God and thereby self-lost.

It is a form of Satanic egoism which leads Adam and Eve, at the end of Book IX, to spend their time 'in mutual accusation . . . | . . . but neither self-condemning',¹³ for at this stage neither is prepared to take that form of responsibility which would lead them to acknowledge their own, individual fault, and to forgive their partner. It betokens a move towards proper self-valuation and proper mutual valuation when Adam in Book X gently chides Eve for proposing suicide, for while he admires

⁵ Ralph Cudworth, *A Sermon Preached before the Honourable House of Commons, at Westminster, March 31, 1647* in *The Cambridge Platonists*, edited by C. A. Patrides (London, 1969; reissued Cambridge, 1980), pp. 98–9.

⁶ *PL* i 633–4.

⁷ *PL* v 860–1. This is the *OED*'s sole example of 'self-begot' before 1845.

⁸ See Chapter 11 *EVIL*, p. 113.

⁹ *PL* ix 183. This is the *OED*'s sole example of 'self-rolled'.

¹⁰ *PL* iii 130. This is the *OED*'s sole example of both 'self-tempted' and 'self-depraved'.

¹¹ *PL* vii 153–4. This is the *OED*'s second of only two examples, and the only one meaning 'lost through one's own action'.

¹² *Maske* ll. 592–6; see Chapter 11 *EVIL*, pp. 114–15. These are the *OED*'s only examples of 'self-fed' and 'self-consumed'.

¹³ *PL* ix 1187–8.

her 'contempt of life and pleasure' he will not accept 'self-destruction therefore sought'.¹⁴ Self-destruction would be another form of egoism because it would be an act which derived from reliance upon human judgement alone, with no account taken of the will of God for that individual; it would, in effect, be a dark form of narcissism.¹⁵ God sees that man's consistency of purpose and insight is fragile, for repentance in Adam is God's own movement within the heart, and 'His heart I know, how variable and vain | Self-left.'¹⁶ That formulation seems to fuse together two ideas: he is variable and vain (empty, ineffectual) when (i) left to himself, and when (ii) having abandoned his true self; or, more precisely, it is his heart which is variable and vain (without power or worth; empty, void; devoid of wisdom, foolish¹⁷) when left to itself, when the heart has taken leave of its own true nature.¹⁸

But other uses of the 'self-' compound are more positive, and indicate the appropriate relationship which man might have with himself. As Raphael says to Adam, rebuking him for a uxorious tendency to overvalue Eve's beauty, 'Oft times nothing profits more | Then self-esteem, grounded on just and right':¹⁹ if Adam values himself properly, he will value Eve properly. He does not, for which the Son rebukes him, since she was 'Unseemly to beare rule, which was thy part | And person, had'st thou known thy self aright'.²⁰ For man was originally created by God to know himself and to rule creation: he was created

self-knowing, and from thence
Magnanimous to correspond with Heav'n,
But grateful to acknowledge whence his good
Descends.²¹

There is a necessary link here between self-knowledge, the capacity to govern the created order, and the ability to correspond with Heaven;²² this is to be 'magnanimous', noble in spirit. However, such self-knowledge entails acknowledging that the upright man's good 'descends' from God as grace, which is indicated in the serious pun 'grateful'.

These 'self-' compounds form part of the extended definition which *Paradise Lost* offers of true and deformed selfhood. But such 'self-' words also recur prominently through *Samson Agonistes*,²³ marking out Samson's state of near despair over his own responsibility for the betrayal of the divine gifts that has

¹⁴ *PL* x 1013, 1016.

¹⁵ On the links between narcissism and suicide see Eric Langley, *Narcissism and Suicide in Shakespeare and his Contemporaries* (Oxford, 2009).

¹⁶ *PL* xi 92–3. This is the *OED*'s sole example of 'self-left'.

¹⁷ *OED s.v. vain adj.* 1–3. The dominant modern meaning 'having an excessively high opinion of one's own worth; conceited' (*OED* 4) is first documented in Dryden in 1692, but would not be out of place here.

¹⁸ In the OT and NT the heart is the seat of the reason, the will, and the emotions; it is the central place in man to which God turns, where religious experience has its root, and which determines conduct (Alan Richardson, *An Introduction to the Theology of the New Testament* (London, 1958), p. 145).

¹⁹ *PL* viii 571–2.

²⁰ *PL* x 155–6.

²¹ *PL* vii 510–13. This is the *OED*'s sole example of 'self-knowing' before 1745.

²² In *Eikonoklastes* Milton accused Charles I of being a deficient ruler because he was 'unself-knowing' (*Works* v 152); the *OED* records this as its only example of the word.

²³ As Thomas N. Corns notes, *Milton's Language* (Oxford, 1990), p. 59.

brought him to his current condition—a betrayal which the Chorus, in its account of his fatal submission to Dalila, analyses as partly generated by ‘self-love’.²⁴ While Samson is ‘self-severe’²⁵ in his judgement of himself, his father Manoa urges him to repent but not to punish himself:

if the punishment
Thou canst avoid, self-preservation bids.
Or th’ execution leave to high disposal,
And let another hand, not thine, exact
Thy penal forfeit from thy self.²⁶

For, he says, God approves more of

Him who imploring mercy sues for life,
Then who self-rigorous chooses death as due;
Which argues over-just, and self-displeas’d
For self-offence, more then for God offended.²⁷

Self-punishment would be a way of dealing only with the offence which Samson has committed against himself: so suicide would again be another form of narcissism, as it would take no account of his relationship to others and attendant responsibilities. To beg instead for mercy would be a way of acknowledging his offence against God, and hence would be the right way of relating to his own self. After Samson’s death, which Manoa fears may have been brought about by ‘Self-violence’,²⁸ the Chorus laments that he has been ‘self-kill’d’, though they immediately qualify the term so as to absolve Samson from the sin of suicide, by adding, ‘Not willingly, but tangl’d in the fold, | Of dire necessity’ (a formulation which could have come straight from Aeschylus or Sophocles).²⁹ The Chorus also says that Samson’s virtue is like the ‘self-begott’n’ phoenix³⁰ in that it rises again from the ashes, and that those who doubt the justice of God never find a ‘self-satisfying solution’ to their perplexities.³¹ The recurring ‘self-’ compounds in *Samson Agonistes* emphasize that to take action oneself, against oneself, on the basis solely of one’s own perspective of oneself, would be a denial of God: a failure to admit that the offence is primarily against God, and it is for God to judge—and to forgive. Truly righteous selfhood may require no self-generated judgement or self-motivated action, but only that patient attentiveness which Malebranche called the natural prayer of the soul.³² For ‘They also serve who only stand and waite’.³³

²⁴ SA l. 1031.

²⁵ SA l. 827. This is the *OED*’s sole example of ‘self-severe’.

²⁶ SA ll. 504–8. This is the *OED*’s second example of ‘self-preservation’.

²⁷ SA ll. 512–15. These are the *OED*’s sole examples of ‘self-rigorous’ and ‘self-displeas’d’, and only its second example (of two) for ‘self-offence’.

²⁸ SA l. 1584. This is the *OED*’s sole example of ‘self-violence’ before 1721.

²⁹ SA ll. 1664–6. This is the *OED*’s second of two examples of ‘self-kill’d’.

³⁰ SA l. 1699. This is the *OED*’s sole example of ‘self-begotten’ before 1797.

³¹ SA l. 306. This is the *OED*’s sole example of ‘self-satisfying’ before 1781.

³² ‘L’attention est une prière naturelle, que l’esprit me fait’ (Nicolas Malebranche, *Méditations chrétiennes et métaphysiques* xv 9, in *Œuvres*, edited by Geneviève Rodis-Lewis, 2 vols, Bibliothèque de la Pléiade (Paris, 1979–92) ii 351).

³³ Sonnet XIX l. 14: *Works* i 67.

29

Within

then wilt thou not be loath
To leave this Paradise, but shalt possess
A paradise within thee, happier farr.

Paradise Lost xii 585–7



This is, in effect, the goal towards which the poem moves, a ‘paradise within’ which is not a poorer substitute for the lost Eden but actually a happier state.¹ The loss of Eden as a specific geographical place² is a form of gain, because one of the lessons which Adam must learn is that ‘God attributes to place | No sanctitie, if none be thither brought’,³ and that what God truly prizes is ‘His living Temples, built by Faith to stand’.⁴ This rejection of the outward temple and the cultivation of the inward temple instead is an important idea for Milton, nonconformist scourge of the Anglican establishment. In ‘Il Penseroso’ Milton had imagined that the windows and music of a church might ‘Dissolve me into extasies, | And bring all Heav’n before mine eyes’,⁵ but that poem was an early work, written *c.*1632; in the anti-prelatical tracts of 1641 he derided Anglican ceremonial.⁶ He would probably have sympathized with the Quakers’ insistence on calling churches ‘steeple-houses’ because for them a church was a collection of people, not a building.⁷ In his invocation Milton calls upon the ‘Spirit, that dost prefer | Before all Temples th’ upright heart and pure’.⁸ In *A Maske* the Elder Brother speaks of ‘The unpolluted

¹ For the tradition of imagining an interior world see Charles Taylor, *Sources of the Self: The Making of the Modern Identity* (Cambridge, 1989), esp. Part II, and Jean-Louis Chrétien, *L'Espace Intérieur* (Paris, 2014). Philip C. Almond discusses ways in which Milton's contemporaries imagined a paradise within in *Adam and Eve in Seventeenth-Century Thought* (Cambridge, 1999), pp. 66–9. Introspection and a heightened awareness of the spirit within man were characteristics of Puritan thought, and of the Cambridge Platonists. But all Christians were summoned by various discourses of Jesus in the Gospels to attend to the inner rather than the outer man (e.g. Matthew xxiii 25–8), and St Paul also emphasized the purity and regeneration of the inner man (2 Corinthians iv 16, Romans ii 28–9, vii 22, Ephesians iii 16). For the varying notions of inwardness in Reformation theology see Erica Longfellow, ‘Inwardness and English Bible Translations’, in *The Oxford Handbook of the Bible in Early Modern England, c.1530–1700*, edited by Kevin Killeen, Helen Smith, and Rachel Judith Willie (Oxford, 2015), pp. 626–39.

² For mediaeval and early-modern mapping of Eden imagined as a geographical location see Alessandro Scafi, *Mapping Paradise: A History of Heaven on Earth* (London, 2006).

³ *PL* xi 836–7.

⁴ *PL* xii 527.

⁵ ‘Il Penseroso’ ll. 165–6: *Works* i 45.

⁶ e.g. *Reason: Works* iii 246–7. Cf. Chapter 19 *IDOL AND IMAGE*, p. 271 n. 3.

⁷ See *OED* s.v. steeple-house *n.*

⁸ *PL* i 17–18.

temple of the mind'.⁹ God's physical temples may be polluted by images of the pagan deities, for man has 'often plac'd | Within his Sanctuary it self thir Shrines, | Abominations'.¹⁰ These need not always be physical images for them to be pernicious: what Bacon called idols of the mind¹¹ also pollute the sacred space of the inward temple.

To possess a paradise within is truly to possess paradise, for which the temporary possession of Eden was an imperfect figure. But the paradise within, which Michael holds out to Adam as his spiritual goal, is conditional, for it will be the result of Adam first acknowledging the Son as his 'Redeemer ever blest';¹² then, says Michael,

only add
Deeds to thy knowledge answerable, add Faith,
Add vertue, Patience, Temperance, add Love,
By name to come call'd Charitie, the soul
Of all the rest: then wilt thou not be loath
To leave this Paradise, but shalt possess
A paradise within thee, happier farr.¹³

So the paradise within is the result first of acknowledging Christ's redemption of mankind, and then following the path which is mapped in the second letter of Peter: 'adde to your faith, vertue; and to vertue, knowledge; And to knowledge, temperance; and to temperance, patience; and to patience, godlinesse; and to godlinesse, brotherly kindnesse; and to brotherly kindnesse, charitie'. Then, says the Apostle, 'yee shall neither be barren, nor vnfruitfull'.¹⁴ Then there will be true fruit from this paradise within.

The trajectory which the poem traces through to this inward state involves Milton charting the inner world of several of his characters, often using a repertoire of words beginning with the prefix *in-*.¹⁵ Examples of Milton's *in-* words in *Paradise Lost* include: *imbrute*, *imparted*, *imputed*, *inbred*, *incarnate*, *incorporate*, *informed*, *infus'd*, *ingredients*, *ingraft*, *inmost*, *inrould*, *inspir'd*, *instill'd*, *internal*, *intoxicated*, *intransit*, *inward*, and *irradiate*, as well as *enclosure*, *engrave*, and *entrails*. Together these words create an activated inner state in which different faculties and passions are at work. For Adam and Eve before the Fall this is a state suffused by the divine spirit; afterwards, and for Satan, it resembles a landscape torn by storms or civil war. It is made clear to Adam and to the reader that prelapsarian man has been endowed by God with the inner resources which he needs in order to resist temptation: 'God on thee', says Raphael, 'Abundantly his gifts hath also pour'd | Inward and outward both, his image faire',¹⁶ so when man is

⁹ Maske l. 460: *Works* i 102.

¹⁰ *PL* i 387–9.

¹¹ Francis Bacon, *The 'Instauratio magna' Part II: 'Novum organum' and Associated Texts*, edited by Graham Rees and Maria Wakely (Oxford, 2004), pp. 78ff.

¹² *PL* xii 573.

¹³ *PL* xii 581–7.

¹⁴ 2 Peter i 5–8.

¹⁵ The prefix *in-* which is treated here is that classified by the *OED* as *in-* prefix¹ or prefix², expressing the concept 'in' or 'into'; words with *in-* prefix³ which is a prefix of negation or privation (cf. *un-*), are treated in Chapter 25 Not.

¹⁶ *PL* viii 219–21.

made in the image of God¹⁷ this is in part a matter of him being endowed inwardly with gifts which are in conformity to the divine will—including the gift of the capacity to act in conformity with that will. This is what theologians call ‘grace’.¹⁸

God himself defines one of these inward gifts as conscience:

And I will place within them as a guide
My Umpire *Conscience*, whom if they will hear,
Light after light well us’d they shall attain,
And to the end persisting, safe arrive.¹⁹

‘Conscience’ is one of the key words which Milton uses throughout his works when he is designating an inner spirit of obedience to God, and he defines it in *De Doctrina Christiana* as *mentis . . . iudicium de factis suis, et approbatio ex lumine vel naturae vel gratiae*.²⁰ He calls conscience God’s ‘Secretary’.²¹ Such rightly informed conscience often finds itself in opposition to worldly powers and their demands.²²

¹⁷ Genesis i 26–7. ¹⁸ See Chapter 16 GRACE.

¹⁹ *PL* iii 194–7. Cf. Benjamin Whichcote, who called Conscience ‘God’s Vice-gerent . . . the God, dwelling within us’ (*The Cambridge Platonists*, edited by C. A. Patrides (London, 1969; reissued Cambridge, 1980), p. 335).

²⁰ *OCW* viii 934–5: ‘the mind’s judgement of its own acts and approbation [of them], derived from the light of either nature or grace’.

²¹ *Reason: Works* iii 242.

²² Cf. the detailed definition in *OED*³ *s.v.* conscience *n.* 1a:

The internal acknowledgement or recognition of the moral quality of one’s motives and actions; the sense of right and wrong as regards things for which one is responsible; the faculty or principle which judges the moral quality of one’s actions or motives . . . Opinions as to the nature, function, and authority of conscience are widely divergent, including that it is: (i) practical reasoning about moral matters, which, though fallible, must be obeyed (Aquinas); (ii) the understanding which distinguishes between right and wrong and between virtue and vice; (iii) an infallible, God-given guide of conduct [and the *OED* adds other definitions from later writers].

Milton’s understanding is usually close to sense (iii), though sometimes he uses the word to mean ‘consciousness [of]’ (*OED*³ 7a; e.g. *PL* viii 502). There is a serious pun on two meanings of ‘conscience’ in his sonnet to Cyriack Skinner reflecting on his blindness, when he says of his eyes:

What supports me dost thou ask?
The conscience, Friend, to have lost them overpy’d
In liberties defence, my noble task.

(Sonnet XXII ll. 9–11: *Works* i 68)

Primarily ‘conscience’ here means ‘knowledge that’, ‘consciousness of’, but a secondary sense implies that in so defending liberty at such expense he has been following his God-given sense of what was right.

The Lady in *Maske* trusts to her ‘vertuous mind, that ever walks attended | By a strong siding champion Conscience’ (ll. 210–11: *Works* i 93). Milton repeatedly protests against the moral violence of those who would force the consciences of others: see ‘On the new forcers of Conscience under the Long PARLIAMENT’ (*Works* i 71), where he complains that some of those now in authority would ‘force our Consciences that Christ set free’ (l. 6), and the sonnet addressed to Cromwell which urges him, ‘Helpe us to save free Conscience from the paw | Of hireling wolves whose Gospell is their maw’ (Sonnet XVI ll. 13–14: *Works* i 65). The two uses of ‘free’ here are significant: an individual’s conscience is not ‘free’ in the sense of being a matter of an individual’s personal (and perhaps idiosyncratic) discretion, but ‘free’ in that it has been liberated by Christ; in that respect, it is subordinated to the Gospel. ‘What more binding then Conscience?’, he asks in *Reformation*; how cruel it is to ‘violate the strict necessity of Conscience’ (*Works* iii 50). Much of the argument of *Treatise* likewise insists upon the primacy of the individual conscience (*Works* vi 5, 7, 13ff).

It was precisely to ward off such individual claims to an infallible inner moral judgement that Hobbes was careful to define ‘conscience’ as shared knowledge (drawing on the etymology of the word

So when the officer of the Philistines warns Samson that his refusal to participate in their games may harm him, and says, 'Regard thy self', Samson replies: 'My self? my conscience and internal peace',²³ because for the true servant of God one's self is exactly that, one's 'conscience and internal peace', not a physical body which may be vulnerable to the threats of rulers and enemies. In the case of Satan, when 'conscience wakes despair' conscience is a truthful recognition which 'wakes the bitter memorie | Of what he was, what is, and what must be | Worse'.²⁴ Conscience is likewise a bitter goad to Adam after the Fall, who exclaims,

O Conscience, into what Abyss of fears
And horrors hast thou driv'n me; out of which
I find no way, from deep to deeper plung'd!²⁵

The last line echoes Satan's despairing recognition that within him 'in the lowest deep a lower deep | Still threatening to devour me opens wide',²⁶ so the inner world of fallen man and of rebel angel is a series of Dantean depths within depths. But at this point Adam's conscience is an 'evil Conscience' which 'represented | All things with double terror',²⁷ forcing upon him a recognition of the depth of his transgression but without holding out any means of remedy, which a conscience which was truly an image of God would have done.²⁸ Eventually, as Michael explains to Adam the future of his descendants, he understands that through

righteousness
To them by Faith imputed, they may finde
Justification towards God, and peace
Of Conscience, which the Law by Ceremonies
Cannot appease, nor Man the moral part
Perform, and not performing cannot live.²⁹

Peace of conscience cannot be attained by outward ceremony—another rejection of Anglican liturgy—but only by the righteousness of Christ which is imputed (that is, ascribed to) believers.³⁰ Such regeneration, says Milton in *De Doctrina Christiana*, recreates the inner man:

in the Latin *con + scientia*), and to deride the extension of the term to apply to what he considered to be mere individual opinion (Thomas Hobbes, *Leviathan*, edited by Noel Malcolm, 3 vols (Oxford, 2012), ii 100, 502).

For a summary of Milton's notion of conscience see Ruth Mohl, *John Milton and His Commonplace Book* (New York, 1969), pp. 64–6, and the entry on 'conscience' by Sharon Achinstein in *The Milton Encyclopedia*, edited by Thomas N. Corns (New Haven, Conn., 2012), pp. 70–1.

²³ *SA* ll. 1333–4. Subsequently the Chorus tells Samson that 'Where the heart joins not, outward acts defile not', and he agrees that 'Where outward force constrains, the sentence holds | But who constrains me to the Temple of *Dagon*, | Not dragging?' (*SA* ll. 1368–71).

²⁴ *PL* iv 23–6.

²⁵ *PL* x 842–4.

²⁶ *PL* iv 76–7.

²⁷ *PL* x 849–50.

²⁸ In Milton's notes for a dramatic treatment of the Fall in the Trinity MS, 'Conscience cites them to Gods examination' (p. 35), so drawing Adam and Eve to present themselves as penitents before God.

²⁹ *PL* xii 294–9.

³⁰ *OED* s.v. *impute* v. 2: 'To attribute or ascribe (righteousness, guilt, etc.) to a person by vicarious substitution'; etymologically from the Latin *imputare* (*im + putare*), to bring into the reckoning. Theologically, through 'imputed righteousness' the righteousness of Christ—specifically the atonement through the Cross—is imputed to (i.e. lent to or conferred upon) man to redeem him from his sin.

Supernaturalis renovationis ratio, non solum naturales hominis facultates rectè nimirum intelligendi liberèque volendi plenius adhuc restituit, sed etiam internum praesertim hominem quasi novum creat, novasque etiam facultates supernaturales renovatorum mentibus divinitus infundit, estque **regeneratio et insitio in Christum**.

Regeneratio est qua per verbum et spiritum homo interior vetere abolito rursus totas mente ad imaginem Dei veluti creatura nova ex Deo regeneratur.³¹

Regeneration creates the inner man anew by pouring in (*infundit*) new spiritual faculties, and we see this at work in Book XI when Adam says that through his prayer of repentance, ‘perswasion in me grew | That I was heard with favour; peace returnd | Home to my brest’.³²

Within man is God’s spirit. Adam is ‘earths hallowd mould, | Of God inspir’d’,³³ and God himself tells Adam that in recognizing his needs he has shown self-knowledge, ‘Expressing well the spirit within thee free, | My Image, not imparted to the Brute’,³⁴ so it is the ‘spirit within’ which is the divine image. Therefore, as Raphael makes clear,

to stand or fall
Free in thine own Arbitrement it lies.
Perfet within, no outward aid require.³⁵

But Eve misunderstands the nature and strength of their inward resources when she argues with Adam about gardening alone, maintaining that by resisting the tempter they will

double honour gaine
From his surmise prov’d false, find peace within,
Favour from Heav’n, our witness from th’ event.³⁶

‘Peace within’ sounds like a laudable goal for Eve to propose, but Adam understands better than she that man is ‘Secure from outward force; within himself | The danger lies’.³⁷ The true danger to man’s possession of this outward paradise comes from within himself, from what Milton would later call man’s ‘blindness internal’.³⁸

Eden and its inhabitants are indeed ‘Secure from outward force’—though not from outward guile and seduction—and the garden is enclosed like a *hortus conclusus*.³⁹

³¹ ‘The manner of supernatural renewal not only restores man’s natural faculties—obviously, those of understanding rightly and willing freely—more fully than before, but also, outstandingly, creates the inward man anew as it were, and further yet it infuses the minds of the renewed by divine means with new supernatural faculties. [The process] is **regeneration** and **ingrafting into Christ**.

Regeneration is that [process] whereby through word and spirit the old [man] is abolished and the inner man is again in his whole mind regenerated out of God after God’s image as if he were a new creature’ (*De Doctrina* I xviii; *OCW* viii 558–9; emphasis in the original MS). Cf. Chapter 26 RE-, pp. 388–90.

³² *PL* xi 152–4.

³³ *PL* v 321–2; Eve speaking. Here ‘inspir’d’ refers to Genesis ii 7: ‘And the LORD God formed man of the dust of the ground, & breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and man became a living soule.’

³⁴ *PL* viii 440–1.

³⁵ *PL* viii 640–2.

³⁶ *PL* ix 332–4.

³⁷ *PL* ix 348–9.

³⁸ *SA* I. 1686.

³⁹ The *hortus conclusus* (‘enclosed garden’; from Song of Songs iv 12) is both a mediaeval ideal of garden design and an image for the Blessed Virgin Mary, who is thought of as an enclosed garden when she carries Christ in her womb. When Satan hopes to find ‘The onely two of Mankinde, but in them | The whole included Race, his purposd prey’ (*PL* ix 415–16) this phrasing suggests that Eve is a type for Mary.

Not only is Eden surrounded by a high 'verdurous wall', and 'higher then that Wall a circling row | Of goodliest Trees loaden with fairest Fruit',⁴⁰ but there is a special, sacred quality to inner spaces within Eden itself. Adam and Eve say their evening prayers and then 'into thir inmost bowre | Handed they went'.⁴¹ Satan, however, suggests to Eve that she is wasted in such an 'enclosure'.⁴² There are recesses, forms of inwardness, in Heaven too: there is a

Chrystal wall of Heav'n, which op'ning wide,
Rowld inward, and a spacious Gap disclos'd
Into the wastful Deep.⁴³

God has 'inmost counsels';⁴⁴ the angels are enclosed within their own ranks, 'Orb within Orb', as if in a miniature version of Dante's *Paradiso*;⁴⁵ light and darkness are lodged in 'a Cave | Within the Mount of God',⁴⁶ while God himself dwells 'within the golden Lamps that burne | Nightly before him'.⁴⁷ An implicit analogy is built up here between the inner, inaccessible quasi-spaces⁴⁸ which are figures for the hiddenness of God from mortal sight, and the paradise within, where Adam and Eve may find God.

But inner spaces can be penetrated, for both good and evil purposes. In creation,

His brooding wings the Spirit of God outspred,
And vital vertue infus'd, and vital warmth
Throughout the fluid Mass, but downward purg'd
The black tartareous cold Infernal dregs
Adverse to life.⁴⁹

⁴⁰ *PL* iv 143, 146–7. ⁴¹ *PL* iv 738–9. ⁴² *PL* ix 543. ⁴³ *PL* vi 860–2.

⁴⁴ *PL* i 168. ⁴⁵ *PL* v 596. ⁴⁶ *PL* vi 4–5. ⁴⁷ *PL* v 713–14.

⁴⁸ Cf. 'Amidst the glorious brightness where thou sit'st | Thron'd inaccessible' (*PL* iii 376–7). Here 'brightness' is not quite sufficiently spatial for us to take 'sit'st' too literally, so we realize that the physical and the spatial are imperfect metaphors. The necessarily paradoxical uses of spatial ideas when attempting to comprehend God are classically exemplified in Augustine's *Confessiones* I ii–iii.

⁴⁹ *PL* vii 235–9. *infus'd*: often used specifically of the work of God in the imparting of grace to man (*OED* s.v. *infuse* v. 2a). Cf. Nicholas Breton, *The Passion of a Discontented Minde* (London, 1601), sig. A2^v:

Thou deepest Searcher of each secret thought,
Infuse in me thy all-affecting grace;
So shall my workes to good effects be brought,
While I peruse my vgly sinnes a space.

Infernal: etymologically from the Latin *infernus*, lower, which is also used of those, esp. devils, inhabiting the underworld (*OLD* 2). *Infernus* derives in turn from *inferus*, whose comparative *inferior* provides the English word 'inferior'. *Inferus* does not contain the prefix *in-* but comes from the Sanskrit *ādharah*. Ernout and Meillet say (s.v. *inferus*) that it may nevertheless have been felt to contain the prefix *in-*, as *infero* ('carry in') actually does. So while 'infernal' and 'inferior' do not etymologically contain the prefix *in-*, these words may nevertheless contribute to the poem's evocation of literal and metaphorical depths (see Chapter 12 FALL). Satan often thinks others are inferior to him (e.g. *PL* ii 26); he is obsessed with hierarchy, but the link between *infernus* and *inferus* reminds the reader that what he presides over is inescapably an infernal hierarchy. When the fallen Eve asks, 'for inferior who is free?' (*PL* ix 825), she is already thinking infernally.

The Sun, 'informd | With radiant light' warms 'Earths inmost womb, more warmth
then *Adam* needs', and

gently warms
The Univers, and to each inward part
With gentle penetration, though unseen,
Shoots invisible vertue even to the deep.⁵⁰

By contrast with such infusion of spirit and light into creation, there are examples of a corrupting Satanic influence which infiltrates unwary subjects: Satan 'infus'd | Bad influence into th' unwarie brest | Of his Associate';⁵¹ he enters the serpent, 'and his brutal sense, | In heart or head, possessing soon inspir'd | With act intelligential';⁵² he has 'instill'd | ... malice into thousands';⁵³ he squats at the ear of the sleeping Eve so that by 'inspiring venom, he might taint | Th' animal Spirits that from pure blood arise',⁵⁴ and the resulting dream stirs the unconscious within Eve to imagine the half-willed transgression of taking the forbidden fruit. When he finally tempts her, 'his words replete with guile | Into her heart too easie entrance won'.⁵⁵ Ironically, when Satan berates Abdiel, saying that his 'tongue | Inspir'd with contradiction durst oppose | A third part of the Gods',⁵⁶ the verb 'Inspir'd' inadvertently carries with it the implication that Abdiel is indeed divinely inspired in speaking against (*contra* + *dicere*) Satan's rebellion. And when Adam and Eve repent in Book XI, they are enabled to do so by divine inspiration rather than their own resources: they 'sighs now breath'd | Unutterable, which the Spirit of prayer | Inspir'd'.⁵⁷

But while some instances of infusion and penetration are clearly Satanic and corrupting, and others clearly godly and creative, what of the influence which Eve has over Adam? He tells Raphael that at first sight he admired

her looks, which from that time infus'd
Sweetness into my heart, unfelt before,
And into all things from her Aire inspir'd
The spirit of love and amorous delight.⁵⁸

The sweetness and love which Eve infuses and inspires in Adam may seem innocent, but she also inspires in him an 'amorous delight' which leads Raphael to warn him against being overly influenced by the sensual pleasure which Eve provides, and which

⁵⁰ *PL* iii 593–4; v 302; iii 583–6.

⁵¹ *PL* v 694–6.

⁵² *PL* ix 188–90.

⁵³ *PL* vi 269–70.

⁵⁴ *PL* iv 804–5. Raphael also warns Adam that in future some of his descendants 'inspir'd | With dev'lish machination' might devise deadly weapons (*PL* vi 503–4).

⁵⁵ *PL* ix 733–4.

⁵⁶ *PL* vi 154–6.

⁵⁷ *PL* xi 5–7. The phrase 'Spirit of prayer' is an example of the way in which Milton sometimes words his references to God's Spirit in such a way as to avoid specifically conceptualizing the Holy Spirit as a person of the Trinity. Cf. Milton's invocation of the 'Spirit, that dost prefer | Before all Temples th' upright heart and pure' (*PL* i 17–18); God saying to the Son 'My overshadowing Spirit and might with thee | I send along' (vii 165); and 'The King of Glorie in his powerful Word | And Spirit coming to create new Worlds' (vii 208–9).

⁵⁸ *PL* viii 474–7.

should not be allowed 'to subdue | The Soule of Man'.⁵⁹ The two verbs with the prefix 'in-' offer a muted warning that Eve's influence—the in-flowing both of her physical attractiveness and what will prove to be her mental and spiritual limitations—may be insidious. Adam subsequently acknowledges to Raphael that Nature has

on her bestow'd
Too much of Ornament, in outward shew
Elaborate, of inward less exact.
For well I understand in the prime end
Of Nature her th' inferiour, in the mind
And inward Faculties, which most excell,
In outward also her resembling less
His Image who made both.⁶⁰

If Eve is a lesser image of her Maker in respect of her 'inward Faculties', then her penetration of Adam's heart is liable to corrupt the divine image which is lodged within. And Adam will conceive of his own interiority as being profoundly linked to Eve when he tells her of his resolution to die with her:

So forcible within my heart I feel
The Bond of Nature draw me to my owne,
My own in thee, for what thou art is mine.⁶¹

The bond within now draws him outwards towards her, towards himself in her, and so towards her Fall.

The danger of infusing some power from outside into man's inner world is symbolized when Satan leaps over the wall into Eden like a wolf 'into Gods Fould',⁶² and is developed when he tells Eve that the fruit of the Tree of Knowledge has transformed him within. In the guise of the serpent he assures Eve that as a result

⁵⁹ *PL* viii 584–5. *generous*: noble. In *Divorce* Milton says that a bad marriage will 'imbase the mettle of a generous spirit' (*Works* iii 492).

⁶⁰ *PL* viii 537–44. Cf. the Chorus in *SA* which, prompted by the example of Dalila, generalizes thus about women:

Is it for that such outward ornament
Was lavish't on thir Sex, that inward gifts
Were left for hast unfinish't, judgment scant,
Capacity not rais'd to apprehend
Or value what is best
In choice, but ofttest to affect the wrong?

(*SA* ll. 1025–30)

It would be rash to see this as Milton's own view of women's capacities, partly because the Chorus' question would attribute hasty and careless workmanship to God in creating woman.

⁶¹ *PL* ix 955–7.

⁶² *PL* iv 192. When Satan enters Eden,

of pure now purer aire
Meets his approach, and to the heart inspires
Vernal delight and joy, able to drive
All sadness but despair.

(*PL* iv 153–6)

This purely natural inspiration cannot drive away despair, because despair is a sin against God, and can only be countered by hope and faith, neither of which Satan has.

of eating the fruit he has acquired 'Reason in my inward Powers', and has become 'Internal Man'.⁶³ He apostrophizes the Tree:

O Sacred, Wise, and Wisdom-giving Plant,
Mother of Science, Now I feel thy Power
Within me cleere.⁶⁴

Then Eve herself, having eaten the fruit, bows to the Tree,

as to the power

That dwelt within, whose presence had infus'd
Into the plant sciential sap, deriv'd
From Nectar, drink of Gods.⁶⁵

It is a power associated with pagan gods which she assumes has infused 'sciential sap' into this tree. She thinks that she has exercised, or achieved, an 'inward freedom',⁶⁶ but her new state is only an inner servitude.

By contrast with these examples of a corrupting influence which deforms the image of God within, there are several instances where Milton writes of the creative inspiration which, as a poet, he receives from God. At the beginning of the epic he invokes the

Heav'nly Muse, that on the secret top
Of *Oreb*, or of *Sinai*, didst inspire
That Shepherd, who first taught the chosen Seed,
In the Beginning how the Heav'ns and Earth
Rose out of *Chaos*.⁶⁷

and then

that sweet Grove
Of *Daphne* by *Orontes*, and th' inspir'd
Castalian Spring.⁶⁸

and then

my Celestial Patroness, who deignes
Her nightly visitation unimplor'd,
And dictates to me slumb'ring, or inspires
Easie my unpremeditated Verse.⁶⁹

Milton subordinates himself to the sacred Muse, a surrender to inspiration and inward illumination:

So much the rather thou Celestial light
Shine inward, and the mind through all her powers
Irradiate, there plant eyes.⁷⁰

⁶³ *PL* ix 600, 711.

⁶⁴ *PL* ix 679–81. *science*: knowledge.

⁶⁵ *PL* ix 835–8.

⁶⁶ *PL* ix 762.

⁶⁷ *PL* i 6–10.

⁶⁸ *PL* iv 272–4.

⁶⁹ *PL* ix 21–4.

⁷⁰ *PL* iii 51–3. *irradiate*: the 'ir-' prefix is the assimilated form of the prefix 'in-' before an initial 'r' (as in the word's Latin root, *irradiare*).

Milton also develops the idea of internal sight, an inner faculty by which man is able to perceive more than his imperfect bodily faculties permit. So Adam in sleep is led by God into the Garden of Eden, and

suddenly stood at my Head a dream,
Whose inward apparition gently mov'd
My fancy to believe I yet had being.⁷¹

The dream is at once something outside him standing at his head, and an 'inward' apparition which affects his fancy, another instance of Milton stretching our imagination when he writes of any physical manifestation of God, who is both within and without.⁷² When God creates Eve from the rib of Adam,

Mine eyes he clos'd, but op'n left the Cell
Of Fancie my internal sight, by which
Abstract as in a transe methought I saw.⁷³

Later, Adam's faculty of sight needs to be purged in order for him to see the course of human history, which requires an inner purgation. Michael

from the Well of Life three drops instill'd.
So deep the power of these Ingredients pierc'd,
Eevn to the inmost seat of mental sight.
That *Adam* now enforc't to close his eyes,
Sunk down and all his Spirits became intrans.⁷⁴

Through 'instill'd', 'Ingredients', 'inmost', and 'intrans' Milton maps the quasi-physical divine intervention which purges Adam's interior world.

After the Fall the inner world of the pair is transformed, and the Fancy which had previously allowed them to be aware of the creative activity of God now produces delusions of power:

As with new Wine intoxicated both
They swim in mirth, and fansie that they feel
Divinitie within them breeding wings.⁷⁵

But this feeling of 'Divinitie within' is fallacious, for the effect of the fruit has been to make their 'inmost powers' err.⁷⁶ Their resulting state of mind is like a turbulent kingdom:

⁷¹ PL viii 292–4.

⁷² As Augustine says in the *Confessiones* I ii: *Et quomodo invocabo deum meum, deum et dominum meum, quoniam utique in me ipsum eum invocabo, cum invocabo eum? et quis locus est in me, quo veniat in me deus meus? ... non ergo essem, deus meus, non omnino essem, nisi esses in me. an potius non essem, nisi essem in te, ex quo omnia, per quem omnia, in quo omnia?* ('How shall I call upon my God, my God and Lord? Surely when I call upon him, I am calling upon him to come into me. But what place is there in me where my God can enter into me? ... Accordingly, my God, I would have no being, I would not have any existence, unless you were in me. Or rather, I would have no being if I were not in you, "of whom are all things, through whom are all things, in whom are all things"' (Saint Augustine, *Confessions*, translated by Henry Chadwick (Oxford, 1991), pp. 3–4)).

⁷³ PL viii 460–2.

⁷⁴ PL xi 416–20.

⁷⁵ PL ix 1008–10.

⁷⁶ PL ix 1048.

They sate them down to weep, nor onely Teares
 Rained at thir Eyes, but high Winds worse within
 Began to rise, high Passions, Anger, Hate,
 Mistrust, Suspicion, Discord, and shook sore
 Thir inward State of Mind, calm Region once
 And full of Peace, now tost and turbulent:
 For Understanding rul'd not, and the Will
 Heard not her lore, both in subjection now
 To sensual Appetite, who from beneath
 Usurping over sovran Reason claimd
 Superior sway.⁷⁷

This passage maps in detail the disturbed inner state of the pair, as the passions take over and ravage the once calm landscape, allegorically subjecting Understanding and Will to Appetite, and deposing sovereign Reason. Adam turns on Eve and wishes that her outward shape—which had once so delighted him—would now reflect her ‘inward fraud’,⁷⁸ so that those who look upon her external form might be warned of her inner corruption. Finally, some calm is brought to this inner turmoil when the Son covers the couple’s ‘inward nakedness’ with his ‘Robe of righteousness’.⁷⁹ The inward nakedness—that is to say, the weakness of their now fallen faculties, and the brokenness of the divine image in them—still persists, but by their being clothed through imputed righteousness the way to salvation is now open before them.

In recounting the human history which evolves from the Fall, Milton through Michael draws attention to the inner qualities which good men will need in order to survive—and to preserve their integrity—in the postlapsarian world. Michael explains the inner workings of the mind and heart which lead men astray, as these fallen faculties replicate the inner chaos which we have just seen in Adam and Eve:

Reason in man obscur'd, or not obeyd,
 Immediately inordinate desires
 And upstart Passions catch the Government
 From Reason, and to servitude reduce
 Man till then free. Therefore since hee permits
 Within himself unworthie Powers to reign
 Over free Reason, God in Judgement just
 Subjects him from without to violent Lords;
 Who oft as undeservedly enthrall
 His outward freedom.⁸⁰

Man ‘permits’ these passions to reign over ‘free Reason’, so evidently for Milton reason remains free after the Fall, presumably being one of the faculties which are recreated through divine regeneration, and some will obey it. But inward servitude to passion enables, and is punished by, outward servitude to tyranny. In particular, some rulers

⁷⁷ *PL* ix 1121–31. See Chapter 13 *FANCY AND REASON*, p. 164 n. 93.

⁷⁹ *PL* x 221–2.

⁸⁰ *PL* xii 86–95.

⁷⁸ *PL* x 871.

Spiritual Lawes by carnal power shall force
 On every conscience; Laws which none shall finde
 Left them inrould, or what the Spirit within
 Shall on the heart engrave.⁸¹

But Michael promises that in the face of such attempts to bind man's conscience by force and impose laws which the spirit within does not acknowledge, those who preserve and nurture the image of God within them will be

With inward consolations recompenc't,
 And oft supported so as shall amaze
 Thir proudest persecuters.⁸²

These inward consolations take the form of the gift of the Holy Spirit which will dwell within the faithful and write the inner law of faith on their hearts for them to follow, no matter what laws may be devised by their external masters.⁸³

from Heav'n
 Hee to his own a Comforter will send,
 The promise of the Father, who shall dwell
 His Spirit within them, and the Law of Faith
 Working through love, upon thir hearts shall write.⁸⁴

But as for those who enslave themselves,

Justice, and some fatal curse annex
 Deprives them of thir outward libertie,
 Thir inward lost.⁸⁵

Milton was aware that some people (perhaps the majority) actually prefer servitude to freedom because the latter condition makes too many demands upon them,⁸⁶ requiring them to exercise their inward liberty, as he had observed in *The Tenure of Kings and Magistrates* in 1649.⁸⁷ Consequently, as he maintained in *Tetrachordon* (1645), the commonwealth begins to decay 'when men cease to doe according to the inward and uncompell'd actions of vertue, caring only to live by the outward constraint of law'.⁸⁸ Inner freedom, which is obedience to the Spirit, is the necessary condition of true liberty for both individual and state.

⁸¹ *PL* xii 521–4. ⁸² *PL* xii 495–7

⁸³ For Milton's possible antinomianism see Chapter 14 *FREE*, p. 186 n. 96.

⁸⁴ *PL* xii 485–9.

⁸⁵ *PL* xii 99–101. Cf. the Son's retort to Satan in *PR*:

What wise and valiant man would seek to free
 These thus degenerate, by themselves enslav'd,
 Or could of inward slaves make outward free?

(*PR* iv 143–5)

⁸⁶ See my *Milton and the People* (Oxford, 2014), esp. pp. 118–19, 133, 232–3.

⁸⁷ *Tenure: Works* v 1; quoted in Chapter 14 *FREE*, p. 173.

⁸⁸ *Tetrachordon: Works* iv 137.

Michael finally says to Adam, 'Let us descend now',

and they both descend the Hill:
Descended, *Adam* to the Bowre where *Eve*
Lay sleeping.⁸⁹

This descent is no Fall, but a literal movement downwards to the inner bower which presages the inner journey to come. For 'The longest journey | Is the journey inwards'.⁹⁰



For Satan the inner journey is one which takes him through the depths of his inner Hell. Poised to take on the form of the serpent, Satan first soliloquizes, recognizing that

other Powers as great
Fell not, but stand unshak'n, from within
Or from without, to all temptations arm'd.⁹¹

He, however, was one of those

who while they feel
Vigour Divine within them, can allow
Omnipotence to none.⁹²

So there had been in Satan no lack of the 'Vigour Divine within', and he could, had he so chosen, have been among the faithful angels who resisted external and internal temptations and who 'came forth | Spontaneous, for within them Spirit livd, | Attendant on thir Lord.'⁹³ Instead, Satan's inwardness is a state of despair, for 'from inward grieffe | His bursting passion into plaints thus pour'd':⁹⁴

the more I see
Pleasures about me, so much more I feel
Torment within me, as from the hateful siege
Of contraries.⁹⁵

Unlike the human soul besieged by Satan,⁹⁶ or by warring good and bad angels such as beset Marlowe's Faustus, Satan is here tormented inwardly by the prospect of the unattainable pleasures of Eden. This is a renewed encounter with the Hell within which was described in Book IV:

horror and doubt distract
His troubl'd thoughts, and from the bottom stirr
The Hell within him, for within him Hell
He brings, and round about him, nor from Hell
One step no more then from himself can fly
By change of place.⁹⁷

⁸⁹ *PL* xii 588, 606–8.

⁹⁰ Dag Hammarskjöld, *Markings*, translated by Leif Sjöberg and W. H. Auden (London, 1964), p. 65.

⁹¹ *PL* iv 63–5.

⁹² *PL* vi 157–9.

⁹³ *PL* vii 203–5.

⁹⁴ *PL* ix 97–8.

⁹⁵ *PL* ix 119–22.

⁹⁶ Fowler, *ad loc.*

⁹⁷ *PL* iv 18–23. Cf. *PR* iii 203, where Satan is 'inly rackt'.

As Benjamin Whichcote explained,

It is a most gross Mistake...that that State which we call *Hell*, is an *incommodious place*, only; and that God, by his Sovereignty, throws Men therein. For Hell arises *out of a Man's self*. And Hell's Fewel is *the Guilt of a Man's Conscience*...both Hell, and Heaven, have their Foundation *within* Men...God is more inward to us then our very Souls.⁹⁸

Satan himself exclaims:

which way shall I flie
Infinite wrauth, and infinite despaire?
Which way I flie is Hell; my self am Hell;
And in the lowest deep a lower deep
Still threatning to devour me opens wide,
To which the Hell I suffer seems a Heav'n.
O then at last relent: is there no place
Left for Repentance, none for Pardon left?⁹⁹

'No place': 'place' here primarily means 'a fitting time or juncture; an opportune moment, a suitable occasion; an opportunity', and also 'reasonable occasion or ground'.¹⁰⁰ In this respect the question is whether there is, for Satan, either opportunity or grounds for repentance and for pardon. Satan's reply is, 'None left but by submission',¹⁰¹ which his own pride forbids. But 'place' also invites reflection on the spatiality of Satan's condition: there is no ground for repentance because his inner world is a series of regressive Hells, giving him no place to stand, no ground for 'self-standingness'.¹⁰² However much he may appear before his followers as a confident leader,

they little know
How dearly I abide that boast so vaine,
Under what torments inwardly I groane.¹⁰³

And so the particular form of interiority which Satan exhibits is a condition of perpetual self-affliction. Though the rhetoric of the Satanic 'I' may appear confident and combative when addressing others, the language of Satan in soliloquy is that of one who recognizes the radical emptiness of his self, an inner world which torments him with the recognition of what he has lost—and of what he refuses—and which offers him no alternative mode of stability.

⁹⁸ Benjamin Whichcote, 'The Use of Reason in Matters of Religion', in Patrides, *The Cambridge Platonists*, pp. 46, 57; cf. similar observations by Ralph Cudworth (pp. 113, 123) and John Smith (p. 196).

⁹⁹ *PL* iv 73–80. This speech is almost a diabolic parody of Psalm cxxxix 7–8: 'Whither shall I goe from thy spirit? or whither shall I flie from thy presence? If I ascend vp into heauen, thou art there: if I make my bed in hell, behold, thou art there.'

¹⁰⁰ *OED*³ s.v. place n.¹ 12b, c. ¹⁰¹ *PL* iv 81.

¹⁰² I take the term 'self-standingness' from Antonio López, 'Vatican II's Catholicity: A Christological Perspective on Truth, History, and the Human Person', *Communio: International Catholic Review* 39 (2012) 82–116, at p. 95.

¹⁰³ *PL* iv 86–8.

A form of inner torment, this time physical, afflicts Satan's daughter, Sin, who gives birth to Death, her 'inbredemie' who 'breaking violent way | Tore through my entrails',¹⁰⁴ and whose hell-hounds

when they list, would creep,
If aught disturb'd thir noyse, into her womb,
And kennel there, yet there still bark'd and howl'd
Within unseen.¹⁰⁵

Allegorically this speaks of the self-destructiveness of sin,¹⁰⁶ of its offspring gnawing away at their progenitor, and is one of the poem's dark parodies of divine creation, in this case a parody of the Incarnation.



Though Milton's theology has a markedly Arian cast,¹⁰⁷ incarnation is an important idea within the poem. To become incarnate is to be in the flesh (Latin *incarnatus*, from *in* + *carnis*, 'flesh'), and God promises the Son that after his life and death on earth,

Here shalt thou sit incarnate, here shalt Reign
Both God and Man, Son both of God and Man.¹⁰⁸

Man's redemption will entail the engrafting of humanity onto the Son:

all his works on mee
Good or not good ingraft, my Merit those
Shall perfer, and for these my Death shall pay.¹⁰⁹

Meanwhile, Satan resents the form of incarnation to which he will have to subject himself in order to seduce Eve:

O foul descent! that I who erst contended
With Gods to sit the highest, am now constraind
Into a Beast, and mixt with bestial slime,
This essence to incarnate and imbrute.¹¹⁰

Unlike the Son, whose redemptive Incarnation is a free offering of himself which raises human flesh towards the divine, Satan is now 'constrained' (that is, constricted¹¹¹) into a beast, and the incarnation of his heavenly essence into the flesh of a serpent is a grotesque parody of the Incarnation of the Son. Satan is about to

¹⁰⁴ *PL* ii 785, 782–3. Cf. the self-destructive brood of Error in *FQ* I i. ¹⁰⁵ *PL* ii 656–9.

¹⁰⁶ Self-destructiveness is also a characteristic of evil in Milton's thought: cf. *Maske* ll. 592–6: *Works* i 107; and Chapter 28 *SELF*, p. 418.

¹⁰⁷ For the Arian tendency of Milton's thought see Chapter 15 *GOD*, p. 220 n. 108.

¹⁰⁸ *PL* iii 315–16. ¹⁰⁹ *PL* xi 34–6.

¹¹⁰ *PL* ix 163–6. *slime*: applied figuratively in a disparaging way to the human body (*OED* 3a); cf. Spenser's reference to the Incarnation: 'What time th'eternall Lord in fleshly slime | Enwombed was' (*FQ* II x 50).

¹¹¹ *OED* *s.v.* *constrain* *v.* 9; but the resentful passive 'I am constraind' implies that he has been compelled or forced (*OED* 1) to do this. There is also a hint that Satan is thereby imprisoned and kept within bounds (*OED* 8a, d). For Satan's denial of his own agency cf. Chapter 18 I, p. 264.

'imbrute' this essence. 'Imbrute' is a rare word, and is perhaps Milton's coinage.¹¹² Although the *Oxford English Dictionary* glosses its meaning here as 'to degrade to the level of a brute; to make bestial, brutalize',¹¹³ the work of the prefix 'in-' (which occurs twice in this line) is stronger than this definition suggests, and emphatically charts Satan's revulsion at entering into the flesh of an animal. Subsequently, as a result of the Fall, Death will become incarnate, that is, will become incorporated into human flesh, as Adam says:

both Death and I
Am found Eternal, and incorporate both,
Nor I on my part single, in mee all
Posteritie stands curst.¹¹⁴

Adam's word 'incorporate' (from Latin *in* + *corpus*, 'body') carries multiple meanings. Adam and Death are now united together in one body,¹¹⁵ but are also embodied:¹¹⁶ in Adam's case man is confined to the flesh rather than capable of being transformed into spirit, while Death is incorporate, intrinsically embedded, in his flesh, and henceforth in the flesh of all mankind. But Adam's perception is only partly true, for, as Job avouched, 'though after my skin, wormes destroy this body, yet in my flesh shall I see God'.¹¹⁷ Milton believed in the resurrection of the body. Nor is paradise altogether lost, for, as the Son promises in *Paradise Regain'd*, God

sends his Spirit of Truth henceforth to dwell
In pious Hearts, an Inward Oracle
To all truth requisite for men to know.¹¹⁸

The paradise within has its inner oracle, a divine illumination. For as Jesus told his disciples, 'the kingdom of God is within you'.¹¹⁹

¹¹² The *OED* cites Milton for the first example of the verb used intransitively: 'when lust | ... Lets in defilement to the inward parts, | The soul grows clotted by contagion, | Imbodies, and imbrutes, till she quite loose | The divine property of her first being' (*Maske* ll. 462–8; *Works* i 102). After one example from 1640 of the verb used transitively, *OED* cites this passage in *PL*.

¹¹³ *OED s.v.* imbrute *v.* 1. ¹¹⁴ *PL* x 815–18.

¹¹⁵ *OED s.v.* incorporate *adj.* 1; cf. the quotation from *SA* in n. 118.

¹¹⁶ *OED s.v.* incorporate *adj.* 3. ¹¹⁷ Job xix 26.

¹¹⁸ *PR* i 462–4. For the political implications of inwardness, esp. in *PR*, see David Loewenstein, 'The Kingdom Within: Radical Religious Culture and the Politics of *Paradise Regained*', *Literature and History*, third series, 3 ii (1994) 63–89. *SA* may also be read as the discovery by Samson of the inward oracle. He is in blindness and despair at the beginning of the poem, when the Chorus laments that Samson:

In real darkness of the body dwells,
Shut up from outward light
To incorporate with gloomy night;
For inward light alas
Puts forth no visual beam.

(*SA* ll. 159–63)

There is, anyway, little sign of inward light at this stage. Later, Samson experiences a dawning realization of God's will as he says, 'I begin to feel | Some rouzing motions in me' (ll. 1381–2). Finally the Chorus proclaims that Samson, though physically blind, was 'With inward eyes illuminated' (l. 1689). The Son in *PR* exemplifies a godly and thoughtful inwardness, e.g. i 183ff.

¹¹⁹ Luke xvii 21.

But say,
 What meant that caution joind, *if ye be found*
Obedient? can we want obedience then
 To him, or possibly his love desert
 Who formd us from the dust, and plac'd us here
 Full to the utmost measure of what bliss
 Human desires can seek or apprehend?

Paradise Lost v 512–18



To conclude, we consider not a word but a punctuation mark, the sign of a question. Not all the questions in *Paradise Lost* are signalled by means of a question mark, and some questions are really exclamations, as Adam's second question is in this epigraph.¹ He intends it as an exclamatory insistence on their absolute faithfulness which takes the form of a rhetorical question expecting the answer 'no', since any other response is unthinkable. But we know that the answer is 'yes', they can and they will lack obedience. In this poem questions take several forms. Some seek knowledge, and such questions may be asked in quite different tones, some hesitantly or respectfully, as Adam asks Raphael about the creation and the war in Heaven, others resentfully or aggressively as Adam challenges both Eve and God after the Fall. Some of the questions which seek knowledge seem designed primarily to teach the reader by eliciting an appropriate answer either from another character or, *sotto voce*, from the reader himself, and so these might be called catechetical questions as they seek to produce truth in the reader.² Others are rhetorical questions, the figure known as *erotema*, and these often form part of a strategy of manipulation: they are not questing for knowledge (and often do not even seek a response) from the interlocutor, but seek rather to persuade, deceive, and corrupt, to manipulate the hearer into hasty, unconsidered agreement. Moreover, *erotema* is one of the modes through which Satan deceives himself, or locks himself into a state of mind from which there is no way out: because the rhetorical question always implies its answer, and does not invite alternative paths, it becomes in

¹ In printed texts of the early-modern period the question mark was often used in exclamatory sentences (Percy Simpson, *Shakespearian Punctuation* (Oxford, 1911), pp. 85–6).

² For Milton's educative use of rhetorical questions in *De Doctrina* see Gordon Campbell, Thomas N. Corns, John K. Hale, and Fiona J. Tweedie, *Milton and the Manuscript of 'De Doctrina Christiana'* (Oxford, 2007), p. 139.

soliloquy a mode of self-enclosure, and therefore a form of despair. In this respect, its opposite is the openness of prayer.

Though sometimes its victim, Satan is usually the master of the rhetorical question, which usefully thwarts any attempt by his hearers to examine its terms or to formulate alternative responses. He uses the figure as a way of cajoling and inspiring the rebel angels into accepting his direction, and subsequently as a way of seducing Eve into taking the fruit of the Tree of Knowledge. But for Satan *erotema* is also a prime means of self-discovery and, sometimes, of self-deception, for his soliloquies are characteristically built from *erotema*, self-interrogations which are intermittently perceptive. We meet Satan's use of *erotema* early in the poem, when he addresses Beelzebub:

What though the field be lost?
All is not lost; the unconquerable Will,
And study of revenge, immortal hate,
And courage never to submit or yield:
And what is else not to be overcome?³

Such rhetorical questions are the first step in the assertion of Satan's power, which is often the power to define. But they also show Satan's inability—or perhaps it is a refusal—to understand the relationship between himself and God, which he repeatedly construes as one of power. What the rhetorical question here conceals (while simultaneously it implicitly invites the reader to recognize) is that all is indeed lost by the very act of self-alienation from God which was the Satanic rebellion, and that 'Will', 'revenge', 'hate', and the refusal to submit only compound not reverse this loss. He characteristically thinks principally in terms of military strength:

what power of mind
Foreseeing or presaging, from the Depth
Of knowledge past or present, could have fear'd,
How such united force of Gods, how such
As stood like these, could ever know repulse?
For who can yet beleave, though after loss,
That all these puissant Legions, whose exile
Hath emptied Heav'n, shall fail to re-ascend
Self-rais'd, and repossess thir native seat?⁴

But despite the confident assertions expressed through these rhetorical questions—which all imply the reassuring answer, 'no one could have foreseen defeat or doubt ultimate victory'—we know that such confidence is unfounded: the angels, once fallen, will not reascend and repossess Heaven. We see Satan's limited understanding of his condition in another *erotema*:

Is this the Region, this the Soil, the Clime,
Said then the lost Arch-Angel, this the seat

³ PL i 105–9.

⁴ PL i 626–34.

That we must change for Heav'n, this mournful gloom
For that celestial light?⁵

Momentarily this appears to be the kind of topographical question which a 'lost' traveller might ask ('Is this the Region...?') though we know that the space which Satan inhabits is not fundamentally a geographical space but an existential condition of separation from the ground of being, from God; this archangel is much more profoundly lost than any traveller who has simply missed his way. Here Satan is thinking of Hell as an alternative location, attending to its physical characteristics, instead of realizing (as he does later) that Hell is now his existential condition.

Satan also uses rhetorical questions to wield control over his followers, as an officer employing sarcasm to keep his subalterns in their place:

have ye chos'n this place
After the toyl of Battel to repose
Your wearied vertue, for the ease you find
To slumber here, as in the Vales of Heav'n?
Or in this abject posture have ye sworn
To adore the Conquerour?⁶

Self-dramatization as an heroic and even self-sacrificing warrior is manifested in another rhetorical question:

who here
Will envy whom the highest place exposes
Formost to stand against the Thunderers aim
Your bulwark, and condemns to greatest share
Of endless pain?⁷

The clearly implicit answer, 'no-one', asserts Satan's mastery, and prevents free speech. But some of Satan's rhetorical questions show only the simulacrum of power:

But first whom shall we send
In search of this new world, whom shall we find
Sufficient? who shall tempt with wandring feet
The dark unbottom'd infinite Abyss
And through the palpable obscure find out
His uncouth way, or spread his aerie flight
Upborn with indefatigable wings
Over the vast abrupt, ere he arrive
The happy Ile; what strength, what art can then
Suffice, or what evasion bear him safe
Through the strict Senteries and Stations thick
Of Angels watching round?⁸

The passage begins as an exercise in manipulation, as Satan, who has already decided that he alone will venture on this expedition, uses his greatly extended question to map out the hazardous quest in order to deter potential rivals. But his

⁵ *PL* i 242–5.

⁶ *PL* i 318–23.

⁷ *PL* ii 26–30.

⁸ *PL* ii 402–13.

last question ('what strength, what art can then | Suffice'), which is designed to exalt by implication his own strength and art above anything to which his followers might lay claim, elicits from the reader the recognition that there is no art (Satanic or human) which could suffice to thwart divine providence.

Satan's followers are likewise addicted to this rhetorical device: Moloc, for instance, asks,

Who but felt of late
When the fierce Foe hung on our brok'n Rear
Insulting, and pursu'd us through the Deep,
With what compulsion and laborious flight
We sunk thus low?⁹

This is an attempt to reconfigure memory, to persuade the rebel angels that it was only with difficulty that they were defeated and pursued down to Hell. Once again the diabolical understanding of time and place, of physicality and causation, is false. The fallen angels do not inhabit a world where physical force wins the day, or a time in which defeats can be regarded as temporary setbacks. Their condition is eternal. Sometimes what is intended as an unanswerable rhetorical question is unexpectedly answered: Moloc's series of questions,

what can be worse
Then to dwell here, driv'n out from bliss, condemn'd
In this abhorred deep to utter woe;
Where pain of unextinguishable fire
Must exercise us without hope of end
The Vassals of his anger, when the Scourge
Inexorably, and the torturing hour
Calls us to Penance? More destroy'd then thus
We should be quite abolisht and expire.
What fear we then? what doubt we to incense
His utmost ire?¹⁰

is answered by Belial with even more rhetorical questions:

who would loose,
Though full of pain, this intellectual being,
Those thoughts that wander through Eternity,
To perish rather, swallowd up and lost
In the wide womb of uncreated night,
Devoid of sense and motion? and who knows,
Let this be good, whether our angry Foe
Can give it, or will ever? how he can
Is doubtful; that he never will is sure.
Will he, so wise, let loose at once his ire,
Belike through impotence, or unaware,
To give his Enemies thir wish, and end

⁹ *PL* ii 77–81.

¹⁰ *PL* ii 85–95.

Them in his anger, whom his anger saves
 To punish endless? wherefore cease we then?
 Say they who counsel Warr, we are decreed,
 Reserv'd and destin'd to Eternal woe;
 Whatever doing, what can we suffer more,
 What can we suffer worse? is this then worst,
 Thus sitting, thus consulting, thus in Arms?¹¹

Belial's proliferation of rhetorical questions—and they continue for another thirty lines—is designed to discourage adventure. His memory is different from that of Moloc when he recalls the way in which they 'fled amain'¹² rather than being laboriously forced down to Hell, and even though his argument may be based upon self-preservation, Belial appears to understand, where Satan and Moloc (and, later, Eve) do not, that there is no hiding place from God's omniscience, and no virtue in either force or guile, for 'what can force or guile | With him, or who deceive his mind, whose eye | Views all things at one view?'.¹³

All such questions form part of the reader's education into a greater understanding of the ways of God, and when it is Mammon's turn to speak we meet a perverse view of obedience to the divine will:

what place can be for us
 Within Heav'ns bound, unless Heav'ns Lord supream
 We overpower? Suppose he should relent
 And publish Grace to all, on promise made
 Of new Subjection; with what eyes could we
 Stand in his presence humble, and receive
 Strict Laws impos'd, to celebrate his Throne
 With warbl'd Hymns, and to his Godhead sing
 Forc't Halleluiah's; while he Lordly sits
 Our envied Sovran, and his Altar breathes
 Ambrosial Odours and Ambrosial Flowers,
 Our servile offerings.¹⁴

Although there is no question mark at the end of this passage, the syntax is that of a question, and the fallen angels are clearly supposed to agree with this account of praise and obedience, which should encourage the reader to formulate his own rejoinder, perhaps to quote the Book of Common Prayer, which says that God's 'service is perfect freedom'.¹⁵ As Mammon's rhetorical questions continue, he shows that by being rooted in the physical world he cannot understand the difference between the darkness which shields God from our sight and the darkness which expresses the state of the fallen angels:

This deep world
 Of darkness do we dread? How oft amidst
 Thick clouds and dark doth Heav'ns all-ruling Sire

¹¹ *PL* ii 146–64.

¹² *PL* ii 165.

¹³ *PL* ii 188–90.

¹⁴ *PL* ii 235–46.

¹⁵ The Collect for Peace in Morning Prayer (1662): *The Book of Common Prayer: The Texts of 1549, 1559, and 1662*, edited by Brian Cummings (Oxford, 2011), p. 248.

Choose to reside, his Glory unobscur'd,
 And with the Majesty of darkness round
 Covers his Throne; from whence deep thunders roar
 Must'ring thir rage, and Heav'n resembles Hell?
 As he our darkness, cannot we his Light
 Imitate when we please? This Desart soile
 Wants not her hidden lustre, Gemms and Gold;
 Nor want we skill or Art, from whence to raise
 Magnificence; and what can Heav'n shew more?¹⁶

Heaven does not show more, it shows something totally other than the darkness and the light—or rather, the ‘darkness visible’¹⁷—of Hell: the darkness and the light of Heaven are alike manifestations and necessary concealments of God, whereas the darkness of Hell (which it is of course absurd to think that God imitates), and the futile efforts of Mammon to mimic heavenly light from stones and minerals, only serve to reinforce their exile from true light. The rapid questions half-disguise the fallacious reasoning. In effect this passage poses more catechetical questions to the reader: What is divine light? What is the darkness of God? What is this darkness into which the rebel angels have plunged themselves?

Questions may reveal powerlessness when they sound most assured. On Satan's journey through Chaos towards the Earth he encounters Death, and asks:

Whence and what art thou, execrable shape,
 That dar'st, though grim and terrible, advance
 Thy miscreated Front athwart my way
 To yonder Gates?¹⁸

Satan's question is really a challenge, and only secondarily a request for information. It is couched as a threat (‘How dare you cross me!’) but incorporates a question which seeks to know just what power he has in the face of this unknown obstacle. Death replies:

Art thou that Traitor Angel, art thou hee,
 Who first broke peace in Heav'n and Faith, till then
 Unbrok'n, and in proud rebellious Arms
 Drew after him the third part of Heav'n's Sons
 Conjur'd against the highest, for which both Thou
 And they outcast from God, are here condemn'd
 To waste Eternal dayes in woe and pain?
 And reck'n'st thou thy self with Spirits of Heav'n,
 Hell-doom'd, and breath'st defiance here and scorn
 Where I reign King, and to enrage thee more,
 Thy King and Lord?¹⁹

Although he begins with the question, ‘Art thou that Traitor Angel’, Death is not seeking information: his questions confront Satan with his true identity (ironically,

¹⁶ *PL* ii 262–73.

¹⁷ *PL* i 63.

¹⁸ *PL* ii 681–4.

¹⁹ *PL* ii 689–99.

Death is the first figure in the narrative of *Paradise Lost* who really tells the truth) and mark out the limits of Satanic power.

Amongst these rhetorical questions which are part of a tussle for control, there is one passage where the questions have a different function. This is the soliloquy of Satan on Niphates' top, in Book IV. Alone, and so not for the moment staging a performance, except one for which he is his own audience, he reflects:

lifted up so high
 I sdeind subjection, and thought one step higher
 Would set me highest, and in a moment quit
 The debt immense of endless gratitude,
 So burthensome still paying, still to ow;
 Forgetful what from him I still receivd,
 And understood not that a grateful mind
 By owing owes not, but still pays, at once
 Indebted and dischargd; what burden then?
 O had his powerful Destiny ordaind
 Me some inferiour Angel, I had stood
 Then happie; no unbounded hope had rais'd
 Ambition. Yet why not? som other Power
 As great might have aspir'd, and me though mean
 Drawn to his part; but other Powers as great
 Fell not, but stand unshak'n, from within
 Or from without, to all temptations arm'd.
 Hadst thou the same free Will and Power to stand?
 Thou hadst: whom hast thou then or what to accuse,
 But Heav'ns free Love dealt equally to all?
 Be then his Love accurst, since love or hate,
 To me alike, it deals eternal woe.
 Nay curs'd be thou; since against his thy will
 Chose freely what it now so justly rues.
 Me miserable! which way shall I flie
 Infinite wrauth, and infinite despaire?
 Which way I flie is Hell; my self am Hell;
 And in the lowest deep a lower deep
 Still threatning to devour me opens wide,
 To which the Hell I suffer seems a Heav'n.
 O then at last relent: is there no place
 Left for Repentance, none for Pardon left?
 None left but by submission.²⁰

Whereas elsewhere in the poem rhetorical questions are so often devious evasions of the truth because they cut off lines of reasoning and substitute untested hypotheses, here Satan's questions to himself form a gradual grammar of self-knowledge, as he leads himself into accepting responsibility for his own Fall. First he turns back on his own idea that gratitude is a burden, and corrects himself: 'a grateful mind | By owing

²⁰ *PL* iv 49–81.

owes not, but still pays, at once | Indebted and dischargd; what burden then?'.²¹ 'By owing owes not' is both *polyptoton* (the use of different forms of the same word) and *oxymoron*; 'Indebted and dischargd' is another *oxymoron*; and 'what burden then?' is an *epanorthosis* or *correctio*, where the speaker corrects what he has just said. Satan struggles to accept that gratitude is not a sign of an ignominious subjection but a state in which the creature continually worships the Creator. Then he momentarily blames divine providence for his Fall, though he uses a term, 'Destiny', which has more pagan resonances than 'providence' (which would have fitted the metre and alliterated neatly with 'powerful', but which he cannot bring himself to utter), but moves quickly on to correct himself on this point too, recognizing that he alone carries responsibility for his revolt. He had the same 'free Will and Power to stand' as the other angels who remained loyal, since 'Heav'ns free Love' was dealt equally to all. These recognitions, in which Satan gives himself clear-sighted answers to what appear at first to be exculpatory rhetorical questions, culminate in the important perception that, contrary to what he and his associates had said in Books I and II, Hell is not a physical location from which there might be some escape if they could only muster enough military strength:

which way shall I flie
Infinite wrauth, and infinite despaire?
Which way I flie is Hell; my self am Hell.

Answering his own question, he acknowledges that Hell is a state of existence separated from God, and such separation is not physical location but a willed spiritual state. His last question to himself is perhaps the most important of all: 'is there no place | Left for Repentance, none for Pardon left?' Is this a real question or a rhetorical question? Is the answer pre-determined? In a sense he has already answered this question earlier in his speech by cursing divine love, and it is symptomatic of his state of mind that he should characterize the path back to God by the term 'submission'—the acknowledgement that someone else has superior power. Satan cannot ever, it seems, escape from a vision of the world as a hierarchy of power in which one can only rule or be ruled, exploit or submit.

It was such a vision of Heaven as a coercive hierarchy which Satan had put before his followers as he tempted them into their Fall, supplying the desired answers to his own questions as he denounced

Knee-tribute yet unpaid, prostration vile,
Too much to one, but double how endur'd,
To one and to his image now proclaim'd?
But what if better counsels might erect
Our minds and teach us to cast off this Yoke?
Will ye submit your necks, and chuse to bend
The supple knee? ye will not, if I trust

²¹ On the idea of the gifts of God as a 'burden' we might compare St Bernard: *sic enim onerat me miserationibus suis Deus, sic concludit, sic obruit beneficiis suis, ut onus aliud sentire non possim* ('For God has so laden me with his tender mercies, so encompassed, so overwhelmed me with his benefits, that I am unable to feel any other burden': *Sermo de septem misericordiis: Patrologia Latina* clxxxiii 939).

To know ye right, or if ye know your selves
Natives and Sons of Heav'n.²²

'If ye know your selves': but knowing yourself is not one of the fallen angels' qualities; they practise not self-scrutiny but rather self-deception, so often maintained by rhetorical questions which permit no steady quest for the truth. We see this technique again when Satan uses a glib, parenthetical *erotema* to encourage his troops,

Who have sustaind one day in doubtful fight
(And if one day, why not Eternal dayes?)²³

Why not? Because 'Eternal dayes' betrays Satan's misunderstanding of time and eternity, in that eternity is the *nunc stans* in which God exists, not an endless succession of days which are available for war. However, Abdiel confronts Satan with rhetorical questions of his own:

Shalt thou give Law to God, shalt thou dispute
With him the points of libertie, who made
Thee what thou art, and formd the Pow'rs of Heav'n
Such as he pleasd, and circumscrib'd thir being?²⁴

Abdiel uses questions as challenges to hold up the truths of obedience before Satan, who then replies with further questions:

That we were formd then saist thou? and the work
Of secondarie hands, by task transferd
From Father to his Son? strange point and new!
Doctrin which we would know whence learnt: who saw
When this creation was? rememberst thou
Thy making, while the Maker gave thee being?²⁵

But Satan's questions rely upon an implicit deduction which is false: because we do not remember our creation, we were not created. The reader, standing in for Abdiel, knows how to answer the questions which Satan imagines to be unanswerable.



Rhetorical questions form a crucial part of Satan's strategy for corrupting Eve. We have a foretaste of this when he muses to himself on the prohibition about which he has learnt:

Knowledge forbidd'n?
Suspicious, reasonless. Why should thir Lord
Envie them that? can it be sin to know,
Can it be death? and do they onely stand
By Ignorance, is that thir happie state,
The proof of thir obedience and thir faith?²⁶

²² *PL* v 782–90.

²³ *PL* vi 423–4.

²⁴ *PL* v 822–5.

²⁵ *PL* v 853–8.

²⁶ *PL* iv 515–20.

strongly attracted by his account that she immediately asks for information from the one whose veracity she has just suspected:

Serpent, thy overpraising leaves in doubt
The vertue of that Fruit, in thee first prov'd:
But say, where grows the Tree, from hence how far?³⁴

Satan pursues his seduction of Eve through questions which imply a muted opposition to what God has commanded, and Eve's initial response is the right one, for she simply quotes what God has said to them:

To whom the Tempter guilefully repli'd.
Indeed? hath God then said that of the Fruit
Of all these Garden Trees ye shall not eate,
Yet Lords declar'd of all in Earth or Aire?
To whom thus *Eve* yet sinless. Of the Fruit
Of each Tree in the Garden we may eate,
But of the Fruit of this fair Tree amidst
The Garden, God hath said, Ye shall not eate
Thereof, nor shall ye touch it, least ye die.³⁵

In reply, Satan makes a long speech which relies on *erotema* to elaborate an argument which Eve has no chance to ponder. His questions sound confident and plausible:

Queen of this Universe, doe not believe
Those rigid threats of Death; ye shall not Die:
How should ye? by the Fruit? it gives you Life
To Knowledge?³⁶ By the Threatner, look on mee,
Mee who have touch'd and tasted, yet both live,
And life more perfet have attaind then Fate
Meant mee, by ventring higher then my Lot.
Shall that be shut to Man, which to the Beast
Is open? or will God incense his ire
For such a petty Trespass, and not praise
Rather your dauntless vertue, whom the pain
Of Death denounc't, whatever thing Death be,
Deterred not from atchieving what might leade
To happier life, knowledge of Good and Evil;
Of good, how just? of evil, if what is evil
Be real, why not known, since easier shunnd?
God therefore cannot hurt ye, and be just;
Not just, not God; not feard then, nor obeyd:
Your feare it self of Death removes the feare.
Why then was this forbid? Why but to awe,
Why but to keep ye low and ignorant,
His worshippers; he knows that in the day

³⁴ *PL* ix 615–17.

³⁵ *PL* ix 655–63.

³⁶ Here the question mark seems to have the force of an exclamation mark.

Ye Eate thereof, your Eyes that seem so cleere,
 Yet are but dim, shall perfetly be then
 Op'nd and cleerd, and ye shall be as Gods,
 Knowing both Good and Evil as they know.
 That ye should be as Gods, since I as Man,
 Internal Man, is but proportion meet,
 I of brute human, yee of human Gods.
 So ye shall die perhaps, by putting off
 Human, to put on Gods, death to be wisht,
 Though threat'nd, which no worse then this can bring.
 And what are Gods that Man may not become
 As they, participating God-like food?
 The Gods are first, and that advantage use
 On our belief, that all from them proceeds;
 I question it, for this fair Earth I see,
 Warm'd by the Sun, producing every kind,
 Them nothing: If they all things, who enclos'd
 Knowledge of Good and Evil in this Tree,
 That whoso eats thereof, forthwith attains
 Wisdom without their leave? and wherein lies
 Th' offence, that Man should thus attain to know?
 What can your knowledge hurt him, or this Tree
 Impart against his will if all be his?
 Or is it envie, and can envie dwell
 In heav'nly breasts? these, these and many more
 Causes import your need of this fair Fruit.³⁷

Satan is adroit at answering his own questions with further questions which seem to reassure Eve, who is given no opportunity to identify and analyse these snares.

But when she does muse on the choice which the serpent has set before her, she ensnares herself in her own rhetorical questions. She worries away at the simple concept 'forbid' until she convinces herself that it is without force:

Thy praise hee also who forbids thy use,
 Conceales not from us, naming thee the Tree
 Of Knowledge, knowledge both of good and evil;
 Forbids us then to taste, but his forbidding
 Commends thee more, while it inferrs the good
 By thee communicated,
 ...
 In plain then, what forbids he but to know,
 Forbids us good, forbids us to be wise?
 Such prohibitions binde not.³⁸

In those last lines Eve is making a basic error in assuming that knowledge is synonymous with the good and with wisdom; she is adopting Satanic definitions of these key words, and is also beginning to copy the Satanic method of avoiding

³⁷ *PL* ix 684–731.

³⁸ *PL* ix 750–5, 758–60.

argument—avoiding the careful analysis of key terms—by means of rhetorical questions, a form of debate with herself which now becomes characteristic of her.

There are seven rhetorical questions in the speech during which Eve decides to take the fruit, and such questions lead her into territory where she is necessarily ignorant ('For us alone | Was death invented?'³⁹) or where she knows the answer but chooses to ignore it: 'what hinders then | To reach, and feed at once both Bodie and Mind?'⁴⁰ What hinders? Divine prohibition. She entangles herself in her own questions:

In plain then, what forbids he but to know,
Forbids us good, forbids us to be wise?
Such prohibitions binde not.

Some of her questions are indeed apposite:

But if Death
Bind us with after-bands, what profits then
Our inward freedom?

and the conclusion which she draws is correct:

In the day we eate
Of this fair Fruit, our doom is, we shall die.

But her subsequent questions about what death might be are vitiated by being founded upon the supposition that the serpent is telling the truth:

How dies the Serpent? hee hath eat'n and lives,
And knows, and speaks, and reasons, and discerns,
Irrational till then. For us alone
Was death invented? or to us deni'd
This intellectual food, for beasts reserv'd

She even asks:

What fear I then, rather what know to feare
Under this ignorance of good and Evil,
Of God or Death, of Law or Penaltie?

Here the phrasing is ambiguous, for 'What fear I then?' means both 'What do I fear?' and 'Why should I fear anything?'. She has forgotten that 'The feare of the LORD is the beginning of wisdom' as the Psalmist says,⁴¹ and this glib dismissal of fear (the word means both 'dread' and 'reverence') leads her to ask the final, fatal question:

what hinders then
To reach, and feed at once both Bodie and Mind?⁴²

What hinders should be that obedience which Adam so confidently promised Raphael.

³⁹ PL ix 766–7.

⁴⁰ PL ix 778–9.

⁴¹ Psalm cxi 10. For fear or dread associated with the Deity see Michael Lieb, *Theological Milton: Deity, Discourse and Heresy in the Miltonic Canon* (Pittsburgh, Penn., 2006), pp. 186–90.

⁴² PL ix 758–79.

The false arguments and the accompanying self-willed obliviousness which *erotema* encourages are evident again in Eve's soliloquy after she has taken the fruit:

But to *Adam* in what sort
 Shall I appeer? shall I to him make known
 As yet my change, and give him to partake
 Full happiness with mee, or rather not,
 But keep the odds of Knowledge in my power
 Without Copartner? so to add what wants
 In Femal Sex, the more to draw his Love,
 And render me more equal, and perhaps,
 A thing not undesireable, sometime
 Superior: for inferior who is free?
 This may be well: but what if God have seen
 And Death ensue? then I shall be no more,
 And *Adam* wedded to another *Eve*,
 Shall live with her enjoying, I extinct;
 A death to think.⁴³

These questions, which form an inner dialogue of Eve with herself, are in large measure a meditation on power, on the new form of power which she thinks that she has acquired over Adam. The first question marks an ominous change in her, for in asking 'But to *Adam* in what sort | Shall I appeer?' she is considering her role, devising the character which she is going to perform, 'sort' meaning 'character' or 'rank':⁴⁴ this is a calculated move towards the establishment of a new hierarchy between the couple, in which Eve will be able to choose her role and to determine that of Adam. The second question asks whether she should keep this new-found knowledge to herself, since knowledge is, she realizes, a form of power. These are genuine questions to herself, in that she has to decide on the answer before appearing in front of Adam. But the third question is an *erotema*, 'for inferior who is free?'. This is a question which she seems to have learnt from Satan, for she has absorbed his perspective on the world, a perspective which sees hierarchy as a form of tyranny, service as servitude, and obedience as oppression. The Miltonic answer to her question, 'for inferior who is free?', would probably be that a lower position in a God-given hierarchy is commensurate with freedom precisely because that hierarchy allows choice; but if the hierarchy is man-made and tyrannical, then almost by definition the subordinate role is one in which true freedom of choice is denied.⁴⁵ Here in Eden Eve is inferior to Adam in certain respects, while the couple are inferior to the angels but superior to the beasts, but they have complete free will. Eve's question moves too quickly over different forms of inferiority and of freedom. Her final question, 'what if God have seen | And Death ensue?', is inflected by her liking for 'if' and 'perhaps',⁴⁶ words which often launch comforting hypotheses; only this time the hypothesis is correct.

⁴³ *PL* ix 816–30. Is it as a result of taking the fruit that Eve now has some intuition as to what 'death' means when she says 'A death to think'?

⁴⁴ *OED* s.v. sort n.² 2.

⁴⁵ See Chapter 14 FREE.

⁴⁶ See Chapter 20 IF AND PERHAPS.

Adam's questions when he is confronted with Eve's act are at first interior questions to himself, and are really exclamations rather than actual queries:

How art thou lost, how on a sudden lost,
Defac't, deflour'd, and now to Death devote?

...

How can I live without thee, how forgoe
Thy sweet Converse and Love so dearly joynd,
To live again in these wilde Woods forlorn?⁴⁷

'How art thou lost, how on a sudden lost?' is both a question ('How did this come about, and so suddenly?') and an exclamation ('How suddenly and how thoroughly you are lost!'). His second question, 'How can I live without thee', contemplates the scenario that Eve herself considered when she realized that she might die and Adam might live on with another Eve, but Adam's question is wholly different from Eve's in its tone, for it is filled with the memory—as it now must be—of her 'sweet Converse and Love so dearly joynd', so different from Eve's concern with power and hierarchy.

After Adam too has taken the fruit, his questions, like Eve's, take on the hues of despair and recrimination. Eve attempts to exculpate herself and to shift the blame onto Adam, rebuking him (ironically) for not exercising his proper hierarchical authority over her:

thou couldst not have discern'd
Fraud in the Serpent, speaking as he spake;
No ground of enmitie between us known,
Why hee should mean me ill, or seek to harme.
Was I to have never parted from thy side?
As good have grown there still a liveless Rib.
Being as I am, why didst not thou the Head
Command me absolutely not to go,
Going into such danger as thou saidst?⁴⁸

Implicitly the answer to this question is 'love': Adam did not command her absolutely not to go because such a response would have been an exercise of power and a removal of her freedom, both incompatible with love. The poem often expects readers to reflect on the limitations of the perspectives and assumptions which these questions reveal, so when Adam exclaims despairingly,

But past who can recall, or don undoe?
Not God Omnipotent, nor Fate.⁴⁹

the response which the poem invites from us is to testify that the past cannot indeed be recalled or undone but it can be redeemed, and in the scheme of salvation which the poem has already outlined in Book III it will be redeemed by the Son, the second Adam. And when the first Adam asks,

⁴⁷ *PL* ix 900–1, 908–10.

⁴⁸ *PL* ix 1149–57. Adam's reply is similarly sharp and unloving: *PL* ix 1162–70.

⁴⁹ *PL* ix 926–7.

How shall I behold the face
Henceforth of God or Angel, earst with joy
And rapture so oft beheld?⁵⁰

we might reassure him that while the vision of God may no longer be vouchsafed to ordinary mortals, God will not leave his faithful comfortless.

This conclusion seems rather distant, however, when Adam makes his long speech of despair which questions God's treatment of him and is also haunted by what are as yet unanswered questions about his future and the future of the human race:

O voice once heard
Delightfully, *Encrease and multiply*,
Now death to heare! for what can I encrease
Or multiplie, but curses on my head?⁵¹
...
Did I request thee, Maker, from my Clay
To mould me Man, did I sollicite thee
From darkness to promote me, or here place
In this delicious Garden?
...
To the loss of that,
Sufficient penaltie, why hast thou added
The sense of endless woes?

Now Adam's questions change from being indictments of God to being a partial acceptance of his own responsibility:

yet to say truth, too late,
I thus contest; then should have been refusd
Those terms whatever, when they were propos'd:
Thou didst accept them; wilt thou enjoy the good,
Then cavil the conditions?⁵²
...
his doom is fair,
That dust I am, and shall to dust returne:
O welcom hour whenever! why delays
His hand to execute what his Decree
Fixd on this day? why do I overlive,
Why am I mockt with death, and length'nd out
To deathless pain?⁵³

His questions are such as seek responses from the reader: they are invitations to formulate the faith at which he himself has not yet arrived:

Yet one doubt
Pursues me still, least all I cannot die,
Least that pure breath of Life, the Spirit of Man
Which God inspir'd, cannot together perish
With this corporeal Clod; then in the Grave,
Or in some other dismal place who knows

⁵⁰ PL ix 1080–2.

⁵¹ PL x 729–32.

⁵² PL x 743–59.

⁵³ PL x 769–75.

But I shall die a living Death? O thought
 Horrid, if true! yet why? it was but breath
 Of Life that sinn'd; what dies but what had life
 And sin? the Bodie properly hath neither.
 All of me then shall die:

Will the spirit perish along with the body? That, for Adam at this point, would be a form of mercy, as he seeks in death total oblivion. What he fears most is that this may not happen, and that the spirit will continue to suffer in a form of everlasting death. What he cannot yet understand is the resurrection, first of Christ and then of all mankind; and the harrowing of Hell, in which, according to Christian tradition, Christ led Adam up from his imprisonment. He continues:

let this appease
 The doubt, since humane reach no further knows.
 For though the Lord of all be infinite,
 Is his wrauth also?

His wrath is not infinite, at least, not on those who repent: for them, there is infinite grace and mercy.⁵⁴

be it, man is not so,
 But mortal doom'd. How can he exercise
 Wrath without end on Man whom Death must end?
 Can he make deathless Death?⁵⁵

In due course the Son will overcome and destroy death.

Ah, why should all mankind
 For one mans fault thus guiltless be condemn'd,
 If guiltless?

Now Adam answers his own question:

But from mee what can proceed,
 But all corrupt, both Mind and Will deprav'd,
 Not to do onely, but to will the same
 With me? how can they then acquitted stand
 In sight of God?

They can only stand acquitted through the Son's atonement. But Adam's bitter questions are not finished:

O why did God,
 Creator wise, that peopl'd highest Heav'n

⁵⁴ Cf.

How all his malice serv'd but to bring forth
 Infinite goodness, grace and mercy shewn
 On Man by him seduc't, but on himself
 Treble confusion, wrath and vengeance pour'd.

(*PL* i 217–20)

⁵⁵ *PL* x 782–98.

With Spirits Masculine, create at last
 This noveltie on Earth, this fair defect
 Of Nature, and not fill the World at once
 With Men as Angels without Feminine,
 Or find some other way to generate
 Mankind? this mischief had not then befall'n.⁵⁶

There are many answers which the poem offers to this question, ranging from the encomium of wedded love to the promise of a world redeemed through the Son of Mary.



One reason why we hear these anguished postlapsarian questions so acutely is that the speeches of Adam and Eve had previously been full of reverential questions, questions which asked for knowledge of God and his world in a spirit of humility. 'But wherefore all night long shine these, for whom | This glorious sight, when sleep hath shut all eyes?'⁵⁷ asks Eve. Such a question is a form of worship, and Adam's enquiry to Raphael about angelic love is also informed by wonder:

Love not the heav'nly Spirits, and how thir Love
 Express they, by looks onely, or do they mix
 Irradiance, virtual or immediate touch?⁵⁸

Unlike Satan arrogantly asserting that he was self-created, Adam more humbly tells Raphael,

For Man to tell how human Life began
 Is hard; for who himself beginning knew?⁵⁹

He recalls how after the first dawning of consciousness he had asked the natural world around him for answers to this great mystery, before answering the question himself by discovering a form of natural theology:

Ye Hills and Dales, ye Rivers, Woods, and Plaines,
 And ye that live and move, fair Creatures, tell,
 Tell, if ye saw, how came I thus, how here?
 Not of my self; by some great Maker then,
 In goodness and in power præeminent.⁶⁰

When addressing God himself to request a companion to relieve his solitude, Adam's questions are again posed in a reverent spirit:

Let not my words offend thee, Heav'nly Power,
 My Maker, be propitious while I speak.
 Hast thou not made me here thy substitute,
 And these inferiour farr beneath me set?

⁵⁶ PL x 822–8, 888–95. *noveltie*: frequently with negative connotations in this period (*OED*³ s.v. *novelty* n. 1a).

⁵⁷ PL iv 657–8.

⁵⁸ PL viii 615–17.

⁵⁹ PL viii 251–2.

⁶⁰ PL viii 275–9.

Among unequals what societie
Can sort, what harmonie or true delight?⁶¹

Such a spirit of reverence—albeit now chastened into a more sombre humility—eventually returns to his questions after the Fall when Adam urges the couple to repentance:

What better can we do, then to the place
Repairing where he judg'd us, prostrate fall
Before him reverent, and there confess
Humbly our faults, and pardon beg, with tears
Watering the ground, and with our sighs the Air
Frequenting, sent from hearts contrite, in sign
Of sorrow unfeign'd, and humiliation meek.
Undoubtedly he will relent and turn
From his displeasure; in whose look serene,
When angry most he seem'd and most severe,
What else but favor, grace, and mercie shon?⁶²

But once the couple realize that the consequence of their disobedience is the loss of Eden, Eve's questions become exclamations of dismay:

O unexpected stroke, worse then of Death!
Must I thus leave thee Paradise? thus leave
Thee Native Soile, these happie Walks and Shades,
Fit haunt of Gods? where I had hope to spend,
Quiet though sad, the respite of that day
That must be mortal to us both. O flours,
That never will in other Climate grow,
My early visitation, and my last
At Eev'n, which I bred up with tender hand
From the first op'ning bud, and gave ye Names,
Who now shall reare ye to the Sun, or ranke
Your Tribes, and water from th' ambrosial Fount?
Thee lastly nuptial Bowre, by mee adornd
With what to sight or smell was sweet; from thee
How shall I part, and whither wander down
Into a lower World, to this obscure
And wilde, how shall we breath in other Aire
Less pure, accustomed to immortal Fruits?⁶³

All the implied answers to these questions are negatives or recognitions of loss: no paradise for her, no one to tend the flowers of Eden, no way to avoid leaving their bower, no option but to breathe the impure air of the world after the Fall. And yet when Adam asks where he shall in future find God, what seem to him rhetorical questions which carry the answer 'nowhere' are for the reader real questions: where is God to be sought?

⁶¹ *PL* viii 379–84.

⁶² *PL* x 1086–96.

⁶³ *PL* xi 268–85.

In yonder nether World where shall I seek
His bright appearances, or foot step-trace?⁶⁴

This opens up the opportunity for Michael to provide the important explanation that God is not confined to specially designated places, and holiness does not attach to specific sites: 'surmise not then | His presence to these narrow bounds confin'd | Of Paradise or *Eden*.'⁶⁵

Adam is then shown various forms of death, which lead him to another series of dismayed exclamations which take the form of protesting questions:

Why is life giv'n
To be thus wrested from us? rather why
Obtruded on us thus? who if we knew
What we receive, would either not accept
Life offer'd, or soon beg to lay it down,
Glad to be so dismiss in peace. Can thus
Th' Image of God in man created once
So goodly and erect, though faultie since,
To such unsightly sufferings be debas't
Under inhuman pains? Why should not Man,
Retaining still Divine similitude
In part, from such deformities be free,
And for his Makers Image sake exempt?⁶⁶

Here we have another passage which invites the reader to compose his own response, and therefore, in effect, to align his voice with the voice of the archangelic teacher, so that we teach ourselves. Adam's idea that, if we knew what it would entail, we would refuse life or lay it down immediately, is a version of the Greek saying attributed to Silenus, that not to be born is best, and the second best is to die as soon as possible.⁶⁷ Against this the Christian reader would reply that life is the gift of God, and not to be surrendered except in his own time and according to his will. When Adam asks why man, who is made in the divine image, should be subjected to such wretchedness, we note now glibly Adam slides over the Fall in the almost incidental phrases 'though faultie' and 'in part', for his speech comprised of angry questions is still deflecting blame from himself onto God. His education is only gradual.

Towards the end of his instruction from Michael he asks the question which Milton himself must have asked with increasing frequency in the years during which he composed *Paradise Lost*:

But say, if our deliverer up to Heav'n
Must reascend, what will betide the few
His faithful, left among th' unfaithful herd,
The enemies of truth; who then shall guide
His people, who defend? will they not deale
Wors with his followers then with him they dealt?⁶⁸

⁶⁴ *PL* xi 328–9.

⁶⁵ *PL* xi 340–2.

⁶⁶ *PL* xi 502–14.

⁶⁷ Plutarch, *Consolatio ad Apollonium* 27.

⁶⁸ *PL* xii 479–84.

Michael's reply is the reply with which Milton must often have consoled himself:

Be sure they will, said th' Angel; but from Heav'n
Hee to his own a Comforter will send,
The promise of the Father, who shall dwell
His Spirit within them, and the Law of Faith
Working through love, upon thir hearts shall write,
To guide them in all truth.⁶⁹



What sort of questions does God ask? The exchanges between God and the Son in Book III are a peculiar kind of speech, and when questions are exchanged between the two speakers (or we might say, exchanged as if they were separate speakers) this seems even stranger, since divine omniscience would surely make questions redundant. One might, however, consider some of these questions to be ways of highlighting different aspects of God: Father and Son, Creator and Redeemer, sources of justice and of mercy. Once again the reader encounters questions which are really catechetical:

So will fall,
Hee and his faithless Progenie: whose fault?
Whose but his own?
...
Not free, what proof could they have givn sincere
Of true allegiance, constant Faith or Love,
Where onely what they needs must do, appeard,
Not what they would? what praise could they receive?⁷⁰

These are questions addressed to the reader, questions which form the reader's understanding. And when the Son asks the Father,

For should Man finally be lost, should Man
Thy creature late so lov'd, thy youngest Son
Fall circumvented thus by fraud, though joynd
With his own folly?⁷¹

this may be a question grammatically, and seems rhetorically to be an attempt by the Son to persuade the Father, but it is more radically a disclosure of the divine mercy. In pondering such speeches we need to put aside assumptions about the origin of speech in a specific quasi-dramatic character, and instead hear the questions and answers fugally or antiphonally. The nature of divine speech is explained when we understand that the Son speaks the Father's thoughts: 'All hast thou spok'n as my thoughts are', says the Father.⁷² Likewise, when the Father asks the assembled company of Heaven,

⁶⁹ *PL* xii 485–90.

⁷⁰ *PL* iii 95–7, 103–6.

⁷¹ *PL* iii 150–3; cf. 156–64.

⁷² *PL* iii 171.

Say Heav'nly Powers, where shall we find such love,
 Which of ye will be mortal to redeem
 Mans mortal crime, and just th' unjust to save,
 Dwels in all Heaven charitie so deare?⁷³

this is not an invitation to volunteer but a disclosure of the divine love, and an opportunity for the reader to make the question into a devotional exclamation: 'Dwels in all Heaven charitie so deare?' It is also a corrective reprise of Beelzebub's question to his compeers when daring them to undertake the dangerous mission to earth.⁷⁴ Two contrasting forms of self-sacrifice, one loving and one egoistical, are set before the reader.

Later in the poem God challenges Adam with questions which search him out:

Where art thou *Adam*, wont with joy to meet
 My coming seen far off?

...

Or come I less conspicuous, or what change
 Absents thee, or what chance detains?

...

My voice thou oft hast heard, and hast not fear'd,
 But still rejoyc't, how is it now become
 So dreadful to thee? that thou art naked, who
 Hath told thee? hast thou eaten of the Tree
 Whereof I gave thee charge thou shouldst not eat?⁷⁵

Such questions draw Adam into confessing what he has done and acknowledging the state in which he now finds himself, where nakedness, fear, and dread replace the joy which once marked their encounters. God continues:

Was shee thy God, that her thou didst obey
 Before his voice, or was shee made thy guide,
 Superior, or but equal, that to her
 Thou did'st resign thy Manhood [?]

...

So having said, he thus to *Eve* in few:
 Say Woman, what is this which thou hast done?⁷⁶

To these questions Adam replies by blaming Eve, and Eve by blaming the serpent.



Questions in *Paradise Lost* have been ways of articulating doubt and seeking knowledge, but they have also been ways of revealing how the speaker stands in relations of power. Satan's love of the rhetorical question indicates his need to control others

⁷³ PL iii 213–16.

⁷⁴ PL ii 402–16.

⁷⁵ PL x 103–4, 107–8, 119–23.

⁷⁶ PL x 145–8, 157–8.

by pre-empting replies, whether it is the other fallen angels or Eve whom he is seeking to manipulate. Satan's followers use *erotema* to multiply speculative scenarios to their own false comfort. Eve seduces herself by her own use of rhetorical questions which blot out from her consciousness the simple divine injunction. And many of these rhetorical questions make assumptions about the nature of divine, Satanic, or human power which, we come to understand, provide an unstable ground upon which to build. For even when, inside the poem, questions are unanswered or confidently imply their speakers' own preferred answers, the reader is being drawn into a dialogue with the speakers *in pectore*, a dialogue which clarifies our own understanding. Ultimately, the questions in *Paradise Lost* are a catechesis of the reader, asserting eternal providence and justifying the ways of God to men; and leading us to do the same.

Afterword

Word



*Ἐν ἀρχῇ ἦν ὁ λόγος, καὶ ὁ λόγος ἦν πρὸς τὸν θεόν, καὶ θεὸς ἦν ὁ λόγος.*¹

The λόγος is the divine Word,² who is Christ himself according to St John, and also the creative principle by and through which the world was made. The divine Word stands behind all the words in *Paradise Lost*, upholding, testing, judging, correcting; there is always a tension between ‘Word’ and ‘words’. For Milton there was indeed a ‘signifié central, originaire ou transcendantale’³ from which all things have their being, and which expresses itself through holy scripture. Since Milton’s words are often used in ways which activate their connections with other texts, especially the Bible, the Bible as the word of God acts as a governing intertextual presence.

The poem is based upon the difference between meanings for words which are divinely authorized and sustained, and on the other hand the wresting of words away from their transcendental meanings, which we observe happening in the speeches first of Satan, then of Eve, and then of Adam. If not exactly a post-structuralist *avant la lettre*, Satan is (when it suits him) a quasi-Hobbesian nominalist who makes words mean what he wants; his linguistic philosophy seems to be that of the sage of Malmesbury, who had argued that ‘these words of Good, Evill, and Contemptible, are ever used with relation to the person that useth them: There being nothing simply and absolutely so; nor any common Rule of Good and Evill, to be taken from the nature of the objects themselves’.⁴ It is crucial to Satan’s seduction of his followers, and then to his seduction of Eve, that words such as ‘free’ and ‘wise’ should be accepted according to the definitions which he assigns to them. And yet we cannot consider Satan to be purely a nominalist, for sometimes (for instance in his soliloquy on the top of Mount Niphates in Book IV) he uses ‘good’ and ‘evil’ in full recognition that these words do have transcendent meanings—meanings which define him even as he turns himself against them.

¹ ‘In the beginning was the Word, & the Word was with God, and the Word was God’ (John i 1).

² For the significance of λόγος here see C. K. Barrett, *The Gospel According to St John: An Introduction with Commentary and Notes on the Greek Text* (London, 1955, second edition 1978), pp. 152–6.

³ ‘central, originary, or transcendental signified’ (Jacques Derrida, *L’Écriture et la Différence* (Paris, 1967, reissued 1979) p. 411).

⁴ Thomas Hobbes, *Leviathan*, edited by Noel Malcolm, 3 vols (Oxford, 2012), ii 80–2.

The God of *Paradise Lost* is a God who is the Word, and whose word conveys grace to mankind; as the Son says,

O Father, gracious was that word which clos'd
Thy sovran sentence, that Man should find grace.⁵

The Son himself is often figured as the expression of the thoughts or the will of the Father, who says:

O Son, in whom my Soul hath chief delight,
Son of my bosom, Son who art alone
My word, my wisdom, and effectual might,
All hast thou spok'n as my thoughts are.⁶

And when God creates the world he does so by means of his Word, that is, his Son:

my Word, begotten Son, by thee
This I perform, speak thou, and be it don:
My overshadowing Spirit and might with thee
I send along, ride forth, and bid the Deep
Within appointed bounds be Heav'n and Earth.

...

So spake th' Almighty, and to what he spake
His Word, the Filial Godhead, gave effect.⁷

So the gates of Heaven open

to let forth
The King of Glorie in his powerful Word
And Spirit coming to create new Worlds.⁸

and the Word speaks the words of creation, which are performative instruments of peace and order:

Silence, ye troubl'd waves, and thou Deep, peace,
Said then th' Omnific Word, your discord end.⁹

Playing out a different and disordered drama, often in defiance of the Word, there are unstable and destabilizing words, and the narrative of the Fall might almost be charted by assembling some of the occasions on which Milton uses the word 'words'. The world of the fallen angels is characterized by 'bold words',¹⁰ 'high words',¹¹ 'Words interwove with sighs',¹² 'words cloth'd in reasons garb',¹³ 'words so strange',¹⁴ 'words at random',¹⁵ 'Ill matching words and deeds',¹⁶ 'Ambiguous words and jealousies',¹⁷ and 'Words which no ear ever to hear in Heav'n | Expected'.¹⁸ Satan is shown 'scoffing in ambiguous words'¹⁹ to Abdiel, and then addresses Eve with 'words replete with guile',²⁰ so that 'Into the Heart of *Eve* his words made way',²¹ for these are 'perswasive words, impregn'd | With

⁵ *PL* iii 144–5.

⁶ *PL* iii 168–71.

⁷ *PL* vii 163–7, 174–5.

⁸ *PL* vii 207–9.

⁹ *PL* vii 216–17.

¹⁰ *PL* i 82; v 66.

¹¹ *PL* i 528.

¹² *PL* i 621.

¹³ *PL* ii 226.

¹⁴ *PL* ii 737.

¹⁵ *PL* iv 930.

¹⁶ *PL* v 113.

¹⁷ *PL* v 703.

¹⁸ *PL* v 810–11.

¹⁹ *PL* vi 568.

²⁰ *PL* ix 733.

²¹ *PL* ix 550.

Reason, to her seeming, and with Truth'.²² Such uses create the impression of lively but corrupt and corrupting words which constitute the diabolical milieu; such words have no truth, but much potency. Perhaps they have no truth and therefore much potency. After the Fall the words of postlapsarian man take on these diabolical characteristics, for henceforth Sin will 'His thoughts, his looks, words, actions all infect'.²³ Eve approaches Adam to offer him the fruit 'with bland words',²⁴ and the couple soon degenerate into arguments about who said what: 'Would thou hadst heark'nd to my words',²⁵ says Adam, and Eve replies, 'What words have past thy Lips, *Adam* severe'.²⁶ Later Eve attempts to redeem words through recovered love, as 'Soft words to his fierce passion she assay'd',²⁷ confessing 'How little weight my words with thee can finde',²⁸ and Adam 'with peaceful words uprais'd her soon'.²⁹ Now Adam's words to Eve are 'welcome words'.³⁰ But man still does not have the words wherewith to address God in penitence, and so these are provided for him by the Word itself, as the Son says to God, 'Unskilful with what words to pray, let mee | Interpret for him, mee his Advocate'.³¹ Adam addresses Michael with 'humble words',³² and when he returns to Eve after receiving instruction from the archangel, 'with words not sad she him receav'd'.³³ The Fall of man is in part the Fall of his words, as we see at Babel when God, as punishment for the inhabitants' hubristic ambition,

in derision sets
Upon thir Tongues a various Spirit to rase
Quite out thir Native Language, and instead
To sow a jangling noise of words unknown.³⁴

But the poem which charts the Fall of language also records its recovery, through mutual love and forgiveness between Adam and Eve, and through the gift of inspired language through which man may address God even in a world which is full of the 'jangling noise of words unknown'. In the poem, and in the world of the poem's readers, the speech of man addressed to God is best couched in words which reverently acknowledge human ignorance:

O by what Name, for thou above all these,
Above mankinde, or aught then mankinde higher,
Surpasest farr my naming, how may I
Adore thee, Author of this Universe.³⁵

Those were the words of Adam before the Fall; it is the vocation of *Paradise Lost* to recover such speech, and to make those words our words.



²² *PL* ix 737–8.

²⁶ *PL* ix 1144.

³⁰ *PL* xi 140.

³⁴ *PL* xii 52–5.

²³ *PL* x 608.

²⁷ *PL* x 865.

³¹ *PL* xi 32–3.

³⁵ *PL* viii 357–60.

²⁴ *PL* ix 855.

²⁸ *PL* x 968.

³² *PL* xi 295.

²⁵ *PL* ix 1134.

²⁹ *PL* x 946.

³³ *PL* xii 609.

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