

## ABSTRACT

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This dissertation reframes the debate about whether *Paradise Lost* is an allegorical poem by focusing on Milton's assertion that all language is allegorical because it reflects the difference-from-Himself that God has inscribed into language and built into human ontology. Milton emphasizes this allegorical difference in two ways in *Paradise Lost*. First, he points out the difference between the logic of language and the landscape by which we try to describe and apprehend it, even ascribing the fall to Eve's decision to ignore this difference and to embrace the logic of language as if it captured truth. Second, he forces the allegorical figures of Sin and Death to contend with and participate in Christian history, thereby destabilizing their figurations as representations of abstract ideas, and displaying the impossibility of fusing word and thing (i.e., of collapsing allegorical difference) in the historical context of pre-apocalyptic time. This dissertation argues that Milton uses both of these strategies to oppose the universal language ideology of the late seventeenth century, whose proponents promised to speak the world exactly as it is, to fuse word and thing. From Milton's perspective, these proponents threatened to write over God's truth with a language that reflected their desire for intellectual domination of the world more than

it reflected the natural world they supposedly sought to describe. Thus, *Paradise Lost* reminds us that word and thing cannot be fused, that other-speaking not only reflects human ontology—that is, humankind's suspension in a state of difference from and similarity to God—but also represents the only kind of speaking that refers to God. Language that does not admit its difference from truth, in contrast, writes over the sublime truth with a verbal idol that purports to embody what it can only allegorically represent.

THE ETHICS OF ALLEGORY IN *PARADISE LOST*

By

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## Dedication

This dissertation is dedicated to my father,

Pat Rice.

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I would not have been able to write this dissertation without the support and guidance of a great number of people, including family, friends, and academic mentors. Although I find it impossible to express sufficiently my gratitude and admiration to the people who helped me achieve this goal, I will try my best here to offer some small token of my thanks.

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## Introduction

Citing the dissimilarity between Spenserian allegory—which engages the (ideal) reader in a sophisticated interpretation of a complex narrative that, according to Maureen Quilligan, develops out of the multiple meanings of a single, polysemic word—and Enlightenment allegory—which, as Gordon Teskey describes it, functions as a “geometric demonstration” of an abstract idea—critics have concluded that allegory undergoes a tectonic shift in the seventeenth century.<sup>1</sup> And they have noted that *Paradise Lost* lies at the historical cusp between these two forms of allegory. Yet, because they have not been able to agree on whether *Paradise Lost* is an allegory, they have not been able to determine whether the poem represents allegory in a transitional form, and thus whether it might elucidate precisely how the shift from Spenserian to Enlightenment allegory occurs.

Much of this disagreement has turned on how individual critics define allegory. For example, Maureen Quilligan asserts that all allegory depends on a “‘suprarealist’ attitude towards words”—an attitude which takes “abstract names...to be as real and as powerful as the things named...to have a potency as solidly meaningful as physical fact” (156). She concludes that Milton would have found it “virtually impossible” (183) to write an allegorical poem in the late seventeenth

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<sup>1</sup> Maureen Quilligan, *The Language of Allegory: Defining the Genre* (Ithaca, NY:

Cornell University Press, 1979); and Gordon Teskey, *Allegory and Violence* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1996), p. 98.

century, when “[t]he profound kinship of language with the world was...dissolved” (173). In fact, Milton writes *Paradise Lost* to be “almost designedly unallegorical” (179).<sup>2</sup>

Building on Quilligan, Gordon Teskey argues that allegory must be defined according to a number of strict requirements, one of which is incoherence: “an allegory must be, unlike a parable or a fable, incoherent on the narrative level, forcing us to unify the work by imposing meaning on it” (5). This leads Teskey to conclude that the figures of Sin and Death—the most overt, and the most hotly debated personifications in *Paradise Lost*—simply cannot be allegorical: because “Sin and Death are not signs pointing to forces that are more real than they are,” because “they precede and are the causes of what their names tell us they are,” they do not compel constant interpretative activity. Because they are accounted agents within the poem’s historical narrative, Sin and Death cannot be allegorical figures (42-43), and their presentation does not signal that *Paradise Lost* is an allegory.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>2</sup>Quilligan here echoes Christopher Ricks and Anne Ferry, who argue that allegory in *Paradise Lost* is a demonic mode, reflecting the fall into arbitrary language from which Milton aims poetically to recover. See Christopher Ricks, *Milton’s Grand Style* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1963), p. 110; and Anne Ferry, *Milton’s Epic Voice: The Narrator in Paradise Lost* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1963), p. 133.

<sup>3</sup>For Teskey’s other criteria for determining whether a text is an allegory, see pages 1-4 of *Allegory and Violence*. It is worth noting that Teskey and Quilligan offer these strict criteria in part to amend Angus Fletcher’s 1964 reclamation of allegory as a

These accounts of the poem's supposedly un-allegorical status have been challenged most recently by Kenneth Borris and Catherine Gimelli Martin. Martin, who distinguishes *Paradise Lost* from what she calls "normative allegory," calls the notion of allegory's disappearance in the late seventeenth century a "barely examined cliché."<sup>4</sup> She argues that in *Paradise Lost*, the sense of the numinous in language, which was tied up with a hieratic conception of the universe, gets transferred to an animated materialism, and a monistic and historical conception of the world: Milton's allegory, she argues, penetrates "into the grounds of a new synthesis of vitalistic physics and organic metaphysics that would conserve divine immanence within the

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"mode" worthy of critical attention. Instead of offering a precise definition of the allegorical mode, he sets out on what he calls a "mapping expedition" (23), outlining some of the qualities that he finds common among early modern and twentieth-century allegories, including the persistence of the daemonic agent in allegorical texts, and the suppression of the real or mimetic in favor of the idea, the abstraction, out of which allegory is born (105). From Quilligan's perspective, which Teskey endorses, this broad characterization of allegory as a persistent "mode" is not useful because it makes almost every text allegorical. See Quilligan, pgs. 14-15, and Angus Fletcher, *Allegory: The Theory of a Symbolic Mode* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1964).

<sup>4</sup> Catherine Gimelli Martin, *The Ruins of Allegory: Paradise Lost and the Metamorphosis of Epic Convention* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1998), p. 13.

largely secular grounds of the new scientific universe” (13), thereby replacing “the vertical hierarchies generally governing normative allegory” with natural, historical, and materialist processes, where matter is “the plastic medium in which mankind discovers and shapes his relation to God, whose vitalism he shares” (36, 87).

Allegorical difference in *Paradise Lost*, then, is not negotiated through numinous words, but rather through the monistic and active material of the universe.

Kenneth Borris, in *Allegory and Epic in English Renaissance Literature* (2000), follows Martin’s excavation of allegory in the new world of empiricism, focusing on “the role of allegory in Milton’s representation of heroic identity.”<sup>5</sup> Borris’s monograph develops the argument of his 1991 article, “Allegory in *Paradise Lost*: Satan’s Cosmic Journey,” in which he observes that Raphael must accommodate his account of the war in heaven in order to explain it to humankind’s “variously limited perspectives” (102). Arguing, contra Teskey, that *Paradise Lost* is indeed an allegorical poem, he makes the simple yet important point that “where there is any scope for that approach [i.e., for accommodation], there is potential for allegory.”<sup>6</sup>

As this brief synopsis reveals, critical debates about whether *Paradise Lost* is an allegorical text have been prompted by two contradictory motivations: on the one

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<sup>5</sup> Kenneth Borris, *Allegory and Epic in English Renaissance Literature* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2000), p. 184.

<sup>6</sup> Kenneth Borris, “Allegory in *Paradise Lost*: Satan’s Cosmic Journey,” *Milton Studies* 26 (1991): p. 102.

hand, the desire to establish a specific and useful definition of the genre of allegory, and on the other, the desire to expose the limitations of that definition, and the historical shifts that it appears to ignore. Indeed, these opposed drives are perhaps best articulated by Teskey, who, in reviewing Martin's book, alleges that she expands the definition of allegory beyond practical bounds:

...Martin sees *Paradise Lost* as an allegory because Milton's material universe is described by the angel Raphael as growing upward toward its origin in its Creator. It therefore has a structure broadly analogous to the referential one of an allegory, in which all the signs are believed, by convention, to point to a transcendental "other," an *alloy*, that gathers them into one ineffable truth.<sup>7</sup>

This is clearly at odds with Teskey's own definition of the genre, which states that an allegory "contain[s] clear, iconographic instructions for its own interpretation," and "declares the status of everything we encounter in it as belonging to the order of signs.... [thus] demand[ing] continual, localized acts of interpretation" (418). In his review of Martin, then, Teskey not only rearticulates his position that where something is "true and ontologically solid," that thing cannot be "allegorical" (418), but also reasserts his position that the definition of allegory must be more specific than Martin (and, for that matter, Borris) allege.

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<sup>7</sup> Gordon Teskey, Review of *The Ruins of Allegory: Paradise Lost and the Metamorphosis of Epic Convention*, *Modern Language Quarterly* 61, no. 2 (June 2000): p. 417.

I agree with Martin and Borris that such overly stipulative definitions of allegory are not helpful for understanding what is happening in *Paradise Lost*, or what is happening to the allegorical genre in the seventeenth century. Thus, I want to propose a new framework for understanding the allegorical status of *Paradise Lost*—one which, I believe, will not only answer (with a definitive yes) the question of whether the poem is allegorical, but perhaps more importantly, will explain how and why the poem motivates such contradictory responses on the part of literary critics. I will argue that we can understand Milton's presentation of his accommodating speech and his allegorical figures if we take into account what I will call the ethics of Milton's treatment of allegory. These ethics, as I will demonstrate, are expressed in Milton's resolve to uphold allegorical speaking—i.e., speaking that is other to what it means—as the only apt linguistic condition for human beings suspended in a state of similarity to and difference from God, out of whom they originate. In brief, by placing his allegorical figures in conversation with the Christian history in which they play a significant role, a history that makes other-speaking a necessary aspect of the human condition, Milton at once violates expectations of the genre of allegory—especially expectations as articulated by Samuel Johnson, Joseph Addison, and even Teskey—and upholds the allegorical difference that he takes to be the defining characteristic of signification. He does this, I will argue, in order to ensure that the difference inscribed into speaking, the necessary difference between word and thing, is not lost to verbal idolatry—that idolatry which, in purporting to fuse word and thing, writes over the sublime truth that is the original source of all meaning, and from which all signification stands in suspended and attenuated difference.

The potential for this verbal idolatry appears in *Paradise Lost* in two forms: in Adam and the serpent's shared tendency to speak over truth, to submit indecipherable truth to the logic of the language they speak, and in Satan's production of the first personification, Sin, who appears at first to fuse word and thing, to be the perfect embodiment of the abstraction she represents. By dissolving this supposed embodiment, by dividing the abstraction from the figure, and by revealing the difference between language and truth, Milton displays his allegorical ethics.

Moreover, I will show that Milton's ethics have an iconoclastic force, and that in sustaining allegorical difference throughout *Paradise Lost*, Milton resisted the very ideology of the recovered, perfect language with which Quilligan aligns him. For from Milton's perspective, the proponents of perfect, recovered, universal languages threatened to construct their own verbal idols, to project an illusive fusion of word and thing onto the world, rather than writing a language that referred to the unfathomable world from which language necessarily departs. Thus, as I will conclude, they threatened to halt the hermeneutic activity, the exercise of right reason, which Milton took to be provoked by allegorical difference. By convincing readers to forget the difference between word and thing, universal language proponents threatened to obscure God from the reader's view.

As Kenneth Borris notes, in Book 5 of *Paradise Lost*, the angel Raphael provides us with perhaps the clearest and most concise explanation of the accommodation theory that backs the poet's allegorical speaking:

High matter thou injoin'st me, O prime of men,  
Sad task and hard, for how shall I relate  
To human sense th' invisible exploits  
Of warring Spirits; how without remorse  
The ruin of so many glorious once  
And perfet while they stood; how last unfold  
The secrets of another World, perhaps  
Not lawful to reveal? Yet for thy good  
This is dispens't, and what surmounts the reach  
Of human sense, I shall delineate so,  
By lik'ning spiritual to corporal forms,  
As may express them best...

(5.563-73)<sup>8</sup>

Raphael promises to honor Adam's request that he explain the war in heaven, but with a significant disclaimer. He will have to accommodate truths to human ears and understanding. How else can he explain events and ontologies that precede and surpass Adam's understanding?

Raphael's caveat succinctly clarifies the poet's more gradual characterization of his own accommodating speech. For example, in the opening lines to Book 7, the poet invokes "Urania," and claims that with her guidance he has accessed divine truths:

Descend from Heav'n *Urania*, by that name  
If rightly thou art call'd, whose Voice divine

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<sup>8</sup> This and all subsequent references to *Paradise Lost* are from the Merritt Hughes edition, *John Milton: Complete Poems and Major Prose* (Upper Saddle River, NJ: Prentice Hall, 1957).



Following, above th' *Olympian* Hill I soar,  
Above the flight of Pegasean wing.  
The meaning, not the Name I call: for thou  
Nor of the Muses nine, nor on the top  
Of old *Olympus* dwell'st, but Heav'nly born,  
Before the Hills appear'd, or Fountain flow'd,  
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.

(7.1-12)

The poet here echoes the invocations to the holy muse which appear in Books 1 and 3, in which he calls on the muse to inspire his prophetic speech:

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.

(1.6-10)

Hail holy Light, offspring of Heav'n first-born,  
Or of th' Eternal Coeternal beam  
May I express thee unblam'd?

(3.1-3)

And yet, the invocation of Book 7 differs significantly from these two, for while Books 1 and 3 express insecurity about how to place or describe the heavenly muse, in Book 7 the poet has made a choice—one about which he is not entirely sure—to give the heavenly muse a name, and a pagan one at that.

But why does he need to make such a choice? Because she precedes all of his knowledge, because she is sublime, “Heav’nly born.” Thus, despite the fact that Urania’s voice has brought him above the “Olympian Hill,” the poet’s language is insufficient to its “meaning,” grounded in the very pagan register he claims to have surpassed. The name, then, is an accommodation of a sublime being who exceeds language, just as she dwells above the mountain of the pagan gods. To call the heavenly muse by the name of the goddess of astronomy—rather than, say, Gaia, the goddess of the earth—is as close to naming her as Milton’s language can get.

But the need for accommodation rests not just in the poet’s inability to capture verbally a sublime being, to collapse the difference between the meaning and the name. The poet’s speech, like Raphael’s, must make accommodations for human ontology:

Up led by thee  
Into the Heav’n of Heav’ns I have presum’d  
An Earthly Guest, and drawn Empyrean Air,  
Thy temp’ring; with like safety guided down  
Return me to my Native Element;  
Lest 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 forlorn.  
Half yet remains unsung, but narrower bound  
Within the visible Diurnal Sphere;  
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 days,

On evil days though fall'n, and evil tongues;  
In darkness, and with dangers compass round,  
And solitude.

(7.11-28)

Urania hospitably tempers the “Empyrean Air” so that the earthly Milton might presume to breathe it, but Milton nevertheless finds a kind of natural safety net in singing “with mortal voice,” even though that voice has “fall'n on evil days and evil tongues.” Though it speaks in a register that does not capture the sublime truths he aims to tell, the poet’s “mortal voice” is amenable to his mortal ontology. His allegorical speaking, then, is necessitated by language’s inability to overcome difference and capture the sublime, and by the difference that divides humankind, and especially a humankind that has fallen “On evil days,” from sublime truth.

And yet, as I will demonstrate in the following chapters, Milton attributes this allegorical difference, the difference between speaking and the truth to which it refers, not only to linguistic insufficiencies and spiritual and ontological dissimilarities, but to God’s will, which is expressed in His decision, first, to proclaim His Son king, and second, to create humankind. That is, when God proclaims the Son, He voluntarily submits His infinite, atemporal being to the chronological process of signification (a temporal process displayed, for example, in the sequential movement from subject to verb to object). And when He creates the earth and humankind, He contracts His omnipresent self from the universe He naturally fills, so that human beings are individuated from Him, and thus free to express their own, individual wills. Allegorical difference, in reflecting both the historical difference that God has inscribed into signification, and the ontological difference which He has built into

creation, is a necessary condition of created being, of living in the historical time that is framed by the proclamation of the Son and by God's assimilation of all being back into His omnipresent self, into the unity of the "All in All" (3.341), at the end of days. Thus, allegorical language upholds the free will that God accommodates when He contracts Himself, when He differentiates Himself from the humans He has created, and, more importantly, when He individuates creation from Himself.

This, I believe, is the foundation of Milton's allegorical ethics, his stubborn insistence that difference is inscribed into all language. Paradoxically, it also explains why Milton violates many readers' expectations of what allegory should be. Take, for example, Joseph Addison's note that the allegorical figures of *Paradise Lost* do not display the aptness of Homer's allegory. Addison observes that "[w]hen *Homer* makes use of other such Allegorical Persons, it is only in short Expressions, which convey an ordinary Thought to the Mind in the most pleasing manner, and may rather be looked upon as Poetical Phrases than Allegorical Descriptions." With Sin and Death, however, Milton gives us allegorical figures who, in the end, stop being allegorical at all:

It is plain that these I have mentioned, in which Persons of an imaginary Nature are introduced, are such short Allegories as are not designed to be taken in the literal Sense, but only to convey particular Circumstances to the Reader after an unusual and entertaining Manner. But when such Persons are introduced as principal Actors, and engaged in a Series of Adventures, they take too much upon them, and are by no means proper for an Heroick

Poem, which ought to appear credible in its principal Parts.<sup>9</sup>

Samuel Johnson, in his *Life of Milton*, expresses a similar discomfort with the figures of Sin and Death:

Milton's allegory of Sin and Death is undoubtedly faulty. Sin is indeed the mother of Death, and may be allowed to be the portress of hell ; but when they stop the journey of Satan, a journey described as real, and when Death offers him battle, the allegory is broken. That Sin and Death should have shewn the way to hell might have been allowed ; but they cannot facilitate the passage by building a bridge, because the difficulty of Satan's passage is described as real and sensible, and the bridge ought to be only figurative. The hell assigned to the rebellious spirits is described as not less local than the residence of man. It is placed in some distant part of space, separated from the regions of harmony and order by a chaotick waste and an unoccupied vacuity ; but Sin and Death worked up a 'mole of aggregated soil,' cemented with asphaltus ; a work too bulky for ideal architects.

This unskilful allegory appears to me one of the greatest faults of the poem ; and to this there was no temptation, but the author's opinion of its beauty.<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> Joseph Addison, *Spectator*, Vol II, no. 357, ed Henry Morley (1891; Project Gutenberg), <http://www.gutenberg.org/files/12030/12030-h/12030-h/SV2/Spectator2.html#section357>.

<sup>10</sup> Samuel Johnson, "Milton," in *Lives of the English Poets*, ed. George Birkbeck Hill, vol. 1 (Hildesheim: Georg Olms Verlagsbuchhandlung, 1968), p. 185-6, sec. 257-8.

Attributing all of this aesthetic dismay in part to a neoclassical sense of decorum, which required that the Romantic mode of allegory remain separate from the epic genre, and in part to an “urbane,” disinterested aesthetic that sought to treat literature as an object separate from real life, Steven Knapp argues that *Sin and Death* perplex Addison and Johnson for different, but related, reasons.<sup>11</sup> While Addison is offended at the mixing of the figurative and the real, which would seem to destabilize “the boundary between rhetoric and agency... [so that] figurative language seems more violent and opaque, [while] agents may seem more transparent and abstract” (60), Johnson takes *Sin and Death* to “threaten the human credibility which the poem already lacks” (65). Milton’s primary offense then, is that he challenges both critics’ notions of literary credibility—their “neoclassical” urge to distinguish the figurative from the real, and to write an epic poem whose credibility catches the reader’s interest, and does not take on the incredible characteristics of an allegorical fiction.

However, in addition to complaining that Milton has mixed two discordant modes of poetic representation, Addison and Johnson’s ruminations betray a specific hermeneutic expectation, one that we can most readily excavate by looking at how Johnson, in his *Dictionary of the English Language*, defines allegory:

Allegory: A figurative discourse, in which something other is intended, than is contained in the words literally taken; as, wealth is

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<sup>11</sup> Steven Knapp, *Personification and the Sublime* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1985).

the daughter of diligence, and the parent of authority.<sup>12</sup>

As Lisa Berglund points out, “[t]his definition does not distinguish allegory from other kinds of non-literal writing; indeed, the term ‘figurative discourse’ suggests that an allegory is simply an extended metaphor. Nowhere does the Dictionary state that an allegory may resemble what Spenser calls a ‘darke conceit,’ an elaborate system of figures, with multiple or hidden significations”<sup>13</sup> Moreover, in defining allegory, and in offering two tiny examples of what allegory should do—examples that, not coincidentally, echo Addison’s description of Homer’s *Discord*—Johnson defines his expectations for the allegorical genre. As Berglund notes, he reads allegories “as extended metaphors that focus our thoughts and reinforce and secure our understanding of abstract subject matter” (148).

This, I think, elucidates both Addison and Johnson’s invectives against the allegories of *Sin* and *Death*, for they reveal a shared concern that the actions of these figures do not conform to the logic of allegorical personification as they see it:

to exalt causes into agents, to invest abstract ideas with form, and animate them with activity has always been the right of poetry. But

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<sup>12</sup>“allegory,” Samuel Johnson, *A dictionary of the English language: in which the words are deduced from their originals, and illustrated in their different significations by examples from the best writers*, vol. 1 (London: W. Strahan, 1755; New York, AMS Press, 1967).

<sup>13</sup> Lisa Berglund, “Allegory in *The Rambler*,” *Papers on Language & Literature* 37, no. 2 (Spring 2001): 147.

such airy beings are for the most part suffered only to do their natural office and retire. Thus Fame tells a tale and Victory hovers over a general or perches on a standard; but Fame and Victory can do no more. To give them any real employment or ascribe to them any material agency is to make them allegorical no longer, but to shock the mind by ascribing effects to non-entity.

(Johnson, *Life of Milton*, 185)

Johnson's assertion that allegorical figures cannot engage in "real employment" or "material agency" confirms Knapp's diagnosis of eighteenth-century critical aversions to Milton's personifications, and Teskey's claim that the allegorical and the ontologically real cannot mix. But Johnson's description of the ideal personification as a figure that only does its "natural office," and both Addison and Johnson's urgings that an allegory must be "short," also suggest that, as Berglund puts it, "Milton's characters are faulty because they alarm readers with their inconsistency and, presumably, distract us from the moral lesson they should impart" (149). Milton's personifications, by refusing to uphold what Teskey describes as the "geometric" exactness of Johnson's aesthetic, by engaging in activities that cannot be explained as narrative and psychological manifestations of the abstract notions they are supposed to represent, do not confirm the reader's (or at least Addison and Johnson's) comprehension of what Sin and Death mean.

I am not sure whether Milton was aware that such aesthetics were emerging, or would emerge, out of the neo-classical age, or that he consciously violated expectations aroused by his personifications of Sin and Death. But it is clear to me



that Addison and Johnson's preference for allegorical personifications that behaved in full accordance with their status as embodiments, or at least as static and logically rigorous representations of abstract idea echo (and perhaps even owe much to) an ideology that Milton purposefully resisted: the ideology of the universal language schema.

Proponents of universal language schemas promised to create a language that reflected the world exactly as it is. The most prominent of these proponents was John Wilkins, who, in *An Essay Towards a Real Character, and a Philosophical Language*, projected that his perfect language could serve as a model for understanding the design of all of the things in the natural world, "a frame, as may express their natural order, dependence, and relations."<sup>14</sup> His optimism was premised on the notion that human thinking about the world was perfectly correspondent with truth, and that the only barrier to humankind's intellectual domination of the world was the great variety of expression (i.e., the various languages) which did not correspond with truth, and which somehow confused people, convincing them to believe in falsehoods.

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<sup>14</sup> John Wilkins, *An Essay Towards a Real Character, and a Philosophical Language* (London: Sa. Gellibrand and John Martin, 1668), in Early English Books Online, [http://gateway.proquest.com.proxyum.researchport.umd.edu/openurl?ctx\\_ver=Z39.88-2003&res\\_id=xri:eebo&rft\\_id=xri:eebo:citation:12295865](http://gateway.proquest.com.proxyum.researchport.umd.edu/openurl?ctx_ver=Z39.88-2003&res_id=xri:eebo&rft_id=xri:eebo:citation:12295865), Part 1, chapter 1, section 2.

Thus, Wilkins and his supporters (namely, Cowley and Sprat) sought to establish intellectual “dominion” over the world by constructing a system of signs that corroborated their thinking, their naturally apt notions of how the world really is.<sup>15</sup> But this corroborating language, as their contemporaries complained (and, as I will argue, Milton pointed out) did not capture, or even correspond with, the world, for the design of the natural world had not been deciphered, and thus could not be coded perfectly into a system of signs. The natural world, and truth itself, could not be captured by Wilkins’s language because nature, like “Urania,” was incomprehensible, and could not be captured verbally, especially not in human terms.

Strikingly, Wilkins discounts this challenge to his schema and, in so doing, exhibits the very tendency toward violence that Teskey ascribes to allegory, and especially to personification. Teskey, who reads allegory as the expression of the desire to see the self in the world, and to contain the world within the self, alleges that this desire is realized through violence. That is, allegory validates and apparently realizes the drive to see the self in the world by “categoriz[ing] bodies as the material basis of an order of signs” (16) and violently suppressing the resistance that the material world offers to its inscription into verbal order. Moreover, Teskey argues

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<sup>15</sup> Thomas Sprat, *The History of the Royal-Society of London, For the Improving of Natural Knowledge* (London: J.R. for J. Martyn and J. Allestry, 1667), in Early English Books Online, [http://gateway.proquest.com.proxyum.researchport.umd.edu/openurl?ctx\\_ver=Z39.88-2003&res\\_id=xri:eebo&rft\\_id=xri:eebo:citation:13362760](http://gateway.proquest.com.proxyum.researchport.umd.edu/openurl?ctx_ver=Z39.88-2003&res_id=xri:eebo&rft_id=xri:eebo:citation:13362760), p. 63.

that this violence reaches its apex in personification, which represents “the sine qua non of allegorical expression...not because personification reveals what is essential to allegory but because it hides what is essential so well” (22). Personification is the sine qua non because it obscures the violence that is at allegory’s core, because it offers readers a material being who seems to correspond exactly with her name, to conform perfectly (and naturally) to the logic of the abstract noun which it imposed upon her.

I want to argue that the analogy between personification as Teskey describes it and Wilkins’s proposal for a universal language schema as I have read it was not lost on Milton. For this, I think, helps us to understand why Milton’s allegory violates Addison, Johnson, and even Teskey’s expectations for what an allegory should do. Not, as Knapp alleges, because Milton was indifferent to the distinction between the figurative and the real, but rather because in forcing these figures to participate in Christian history, Milton splits the abstract idea from the figure with which it is verbally (and metonymically) associated. Thus, he refuses to do the violence that Teskey describes. Moreover, by this refusal, Milton exposes the impossibility of the word-thing fusion, or even the perfect correspondence of word and thing, in the context of the historical time, and the ontological difference, that God voluntarily initiated when He proclaimed the Son to be king, and when He created humankind out of matter that He had individuated from Himself.

Thus, by reading Milton’s allegory in light of what I am calling Milton’s allegorical ethics, his insistence that difference is inscribed into signification and Christian history, we get a clearer understanding of the place of *Paradise Lost* in the history of allegory. Milton’s poem is not so indebted to Bacon and the linguistic

idealists who follow him that he cannot write an allegory: on the contrary, he writes an allegorical poem in part to expose the dubiousness of the ideology that they support, an ideology which, according to Milton's figuration, overwrites Christian history, and the material complexity of the natural world, in order to construct verbal idols of the dominating empirical mind.

In the first chapter of this dissertation, I explain how the proclamation of the Son introduces allegorical difference and historical time into heaven. I read the birth of Sin out of Satan's head as the expression of his desire to collapse the allegorical difference that God's proclamation of the Son has introduced to heaven, and thus to claim for himself the absolute power that God relinquishes in making way for this difference. Moreover, I show that the fall of the disobedient angels results from their assumption that in the figure of Sin they encounter the fusion of word and thing. I close the chapter by following up on Phillip Gallagher's account of how Sin and Death come to be both allegorical and real.<sup>16</sup> According to Gallagher, Sin and Death are real figures, but we access them only in the mediated form of the myth of the birth of Sin, which Satan has recounted to Hesiod as a misleading revision of the true story of Sin's birth. I suggest that this revised story reveals more than Satan wants it to—specifically, the impossibility of fusing word and thing in historical time.

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<sup>16</sup> Phillip Gallagher, "Real or Allegoric': The Ontology of Sin and Death in Paradise Lost," *English Literary Renaissance* 6 (1976): 317-35.

Chapter 2 turns to Eden, where we find a pre-verbal Eve ably responding to and interpreting the Edenic landscape, and beginning to understand her place in it, without the mediation of words. This unmediated hermeneutics is halted, however, when a mysterious voice speaks to her, convinces her to approach Adam, and thus initiates her indoctrination into a thinking based in words. This indoctrination, I show, constitutes a hermeneutic loss, for it convinces Eve to neglect allegorical difference—that is, the difference between the dialectical logic of words, which privileges categorical difference over similarity, and the truths she was beginning to access when she read the landscape without them—that is, the truth of similarity, and even potential identity, that God inscribes into the monistic landscape. In fact, Milton exposes this difference both in the dissimilarity between the interpositions and inter-involvements of the natural world and the logic of the language with which the poet tries to explain the Edenic landscape, and in the difference between Adam and Eve’s relatively equal standing in the world, and the strict hierarchy that words impose on that relationship.

Chapter 3 revisits this tension between identity and difference, and attributes it to the generative process in which God engages when He creates the world. Following up on John Rumrich and Michael Lieb’s accounts of creation in *Paradise Lost*, I highlight the poem’s references to creation as a procreative process, in which God plays the role of the father to the world that maternal matter brings forth. Thus, I explain how the material mother, whom God has left to realize the energies He has ascribed to her, becomes the material and ontological foundation of difference, and thus of allegorical language, human ontology, historical time, and free will.

I close this chapter by returning to the figures of Sin and Death, who are figured in the poem as the monstrous remnants of the generative, creative act, the blood spilled in the process of creating something like but different from God. This figuration, I argue, exposes their paradoxical roles in history, and the paradox at the heart of their figurative representation. When Sin and Death appear to be entirely antithetical to God, divorced from the ontology of difference that makes room for free will, Sin and Death appear to meet Samuel Johnson's expectations for what personifications should do: they are static figures, whose names would seem to give Johnson and other readers an opportunity to confirm their ideas about what Sin and Death are. Paradoxically, however, they only acquire meaning when they violate this expectation, when they willfully and actively invade the world of difference from which they have been discarded, and thus truly oppose God's will. That is, as allegorical personifications, and as God's opponents, their meaning lies in difference, in their attenuated relationship to the origin of truth, not in illusions of absolute identity absolutely divided from God.

Finally, Chapter 4 places Milton's allegorical ethics in the historical, literary, and philosophical contexts I have already outlined, and suggests that Milton's iconoclastic drive, and his enthusiasm for hermeneutic activity, bolster his resistance to the universal language schema. Returning to Eden, and to Eve's indoctrination into verbally-mediated thinking, I demonstrate that Eve falls because she not only ceases to recognize the difference between word and thing, or between the logic of the language she uses and the indecipherable logic of the sublime, but more pointedly because she privileges the former over the latter, because she worships the verbal sign

over the indecipherable truth it allegorically represents. Eve, following the serpent as he echoes John Wilkins and his peers, comes to believe that language defines truth, that truth lies in the comparative logic invoked by the name of “the Tree /Of Knowledge, knowledge both of good and evil “(9.751-51), and not in her own experience of the world. Thus, according to Milton’s account, Eve sins because she rejects allegorical difference and the hermeneutic activity it encourages, because she thinks that the words presented to her by Adam, by the serpent, and even by the tree, capture what is.

For Milton, this is the hermeneutic inactivity that universal language schemas, which purport to capture truth in a word, threaten to impose upon the English people. And it is a hermeneutic inactivity that is tantamount to a rejection of God’s gift of right reason, an ability to choose that is always exercised at the bounds of linguistic and logical certainty, when human beings are forced to choose, to navigate the difference between human knowledge and divine truth. This is what compels Milton to destabilize his allegorical figures, to write personifications whose actions extend beyond the bounds of metaphor: because for Milton, representation, including the allegorical representation of abstract ideas, must always be placed in its historical and ontological context—different from the sublime truth, the origin of all meaning, to which it can only refer.

## Chapter 1: The Begetting of the Son and the Birth of Allegory

Allegory is based in difference or otherness: “an allegory means something other than what it says and says something other than what it means” (Teskey, *Allegory and Violence*, 6). In my introduction, I argued that this allegorical otherness is stipulated in *Paradise Lost* by Raphael’s pondering about how he might possibly explain the wars in heaven to Adam:

High matter thou injoin’st me, O prime of men,  
Sad task and hard, for how shall I relate  
To human sense th’ invisible exploits  
Of warring Spirits.

(5.563-66)<sup>17</sup>

And I suggested that by fashioning himself as a prophetic poet who, brought by Urania “Into the Heav’n of Heav’ns” (7.13), returns to earth to “sing with mortal voice” (7.24) about immortal, heavenly things, Milton posits his language to stand in an allegorical relationship to the truth it tells. In brief, I argued that Milton’s poetry not only reflects its difference from sublime truth, but openly displays it.

The difference between sublime truth and “mortal voice” in *Paradise Lost* for many of Milton’s readers would have recalled the fall of humankind, which supposedly instigated the fall into arbitrary language as it unmoored human thinking

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<sup>17</sup> See also Book 7.112-14, when Raphael responds to Adam’s request that he explain the act of creation by asking, “to recount Almighty works / What words or tongue of Seraph can suffice, / Or heart of man suffice to comprehend?” (7.112-14).



and speaking from sublime truth. However, in this chapter I will argue that in *Paradise Lost*, the linguistic difference which divides speaking from absolute truth is attributed first and foremost to God's proclamation of the Son in heaven. That is, the poem suggests that the first linguistic difference, the first gap between language and truth, can be found in God's speech to the angels when He proclaims His Sonto be king—a speech which represents God's decision at once to relinquish His power over language and to release heaven into a state of historicity.

Read in this light, the story of pre-creation history helps us to understand the fatal flaw in Satan's thinking in rhetorical terms and, thus, to understand the Satanic intervention which, according to Phillip Gallagher, brings the allegory of the birth of Sin to earth. For Satan births Sin because he believes that he can reclaim the control over language that God has relinquished, can close the gap between word and thing, between past and future, and thus between his will and the realization of that will in heaven. Importantly for our interest in allegory, Satan's desire for this reclamation produces a personification that begins as an apparently perfect embodiment of Satan's thinking. As Milton figures her, then, Sin, the first personification, appears at first to realize Satan's goal, for, even from the angels' perspective, she seems to embody her name. Yet, Sin does not withstand the difference or the historicity that God has introduced to the heavenly landscape. Sin thus becomes a figure of the false promises of personification—promises that Satan delivers to earth by re-telling his own story in the allegorical, idolatrous form of the birth of Athena out of Zeus's head, and that Milton demolishes by exposing the historical difference that becomes a necessary aspect of signification after the proclamation of the Son.

The instability of allegorical language makes it, at least at first glance, difficult to draw definitive conclusions about what much of the poem means to say. This is especially true of Raphael's speech which, as he argues, necessarily accommodates heavenly truths to comprehension and speech. For example, as I have already pointed out, Raphael is not sure "how [he] should relate" such a history to "human sense," so he explains that he will have to accommodate heavenly history so that Adam can understand it:

...what surmounts the reach  
Of sense I shall delineate so  
By lik'ning spiritual to corporeal forms  
As may express them best.

(5.571-74)

Raphael must speak heavenly history—even heavenly ontology—in a language that is bound up with Adam's epistemological and ontological limitations, his familiarity with "corporeal forms" and his alienation from heavenly, "spiritual...forms."

I offer this brief analysis of Raphael's accommodation because, in theory, it poses a conundrum for any attempt to glean out of it any decisive, heavenly truth. Where in Raphael's speech—an accommodation of heavenly truths to an Edenic language that we, as readers, encounter in the terms set out by the poet's accommodating language—might we find the truth of heaven's history? How do we mine heavenly truth from a narrative that is two allegories removed from the meaning it does or does not speak? This question is perhaps impossible to answer, and at times it might appear to hinder or redirect my analysis. Yet, because *Paradise Lost* presents

itself as an inspired accommodation of heavenly truth, the allegorical layering that seems to complicate any attempt at decisive interpretation does not discount my attempt to seek meaning in the text. Rather, as my analysis will show, the poem's layering of modern allegory over Edenic allegory, and the semantic differences that are embedded into this allegorical layering, testify to the linguistic history that Raphael narrates in his account of the proclamation of the son and the disobedience that follows. For (as I will argue in this chapter) Raphael's account of pre-Edenic history and the presence of an ur-truth behind the allegorical veil places the layering of accommodations within a Providential history that is initiated by God, and that invites us to see God's proclamation of the son as the primary cause of the semantic difference that makes allegory *the* necessary mode of truthful speaking.<sup>18</sup>

In the first lines of *Paradise Lost*, the poet compares himself to Moses, the "Shepherd" (1.7) on "Sinai" (1.9) who "first taught the chosen Seed / In the Beginning how the Heav'ns and Earth / Rose out of *Chaos*" (1.10). The poet thus sets out his task of "justify[ing] the ways of God to men" (1.25) according to the Exodus story, in which Moses encounters an accommodated version of God, who has protected Moses's vision by cloaking himself in the flame of a burning bush. Appointed by God to lead the chosen out of Egypt, Moses asks God how he ought to name Him to the people: "And Moses said unto God, Behold, when I come unto the

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<sup>18</sup> My use of the term "mode" (as opposed to "genre") in this context follows Angus Fletcher's in *Allegory, the Theory of a Symbolic Mode* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1964). See introduction, especially note 4.

children of Israel, and shall say unto them, The God of your fathers hath sent me unto you; and they shall say to me, What is his name? what shall I say unto them?"

(Exodus 3:13).<sup>19</sup> God's response reveals the difference between the eternal being and the will that He subjects to the linear temporality of cause and effect: "And God said unto Moses, I AM THAT I AM: and he said, Thus shalt thou say unto the children of Israel, I AM hath sent me unto you" (Exodus 3:14). God expresses to Moses, *the visionary*, His ontological essence, but tells Moses, *the shepherd*, the leader of the Israelites, to describe Him as the "I AM [who has] sent" Moses to them, as the one who caused Moses to lead them out of Egypt.

Thus, God accommodates Himself to the linear temporality of human understanding, perhaps because He knows that the people will not comprehend the "I AM THAT I AM," an assertion of divine identity that reduces speech to a tautology, that goes against the grain of the linear temporality that is inscribed into speaking. God's "I AM THAT I AM" strains "mortal voice," for the repetition of God's authoritative assertion of being, "I AM," on either side of the "that" folds narrative progression onto itself. This suggests that the very act of speaking, of explication by means of the linear temporal structure of not only the cause-effect narrative, but also of grammar (for example, subject-verb-object), conflicts with a sublime ontology that contains all historical time within itself.

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<sup>19</sup> This and all subsequent references to the Bible are from The King James Version, <http://www.biblegateway.com>.

The poet's description of God's speech in Book 5 of *Paradise Lost* picks up on the distinction between sublime ontology and the speech to which God accommodates Himself. "So spake th' Eternal Father and fulfilled / All justice" (5.246-47). At first glance, God's speech to Raphael displays the difference between the mortal voice of the poet and the peculiar kind of speech in which God engages. God's speech, unlike human speech, realizes what it speaks. However, when the poet says that God's speaking fulfills—carries out, brings to consummation, and satisfies—the Justice that He wills, he also describes how God accommodates Himself to the very process of speaking.<sup>20</sup> For the fact that the absolute *ens* enfolds into Himself all events and all historical time means that even the absolutely effective speaking in which God here engages conflicts with His eternal being. Why would the omnipotent need a verbal mediator in order to realize his will? And why would this will be realized in time, as an effect that follows from an act—especially an act of speaking?

In fact, the special qualities that Raphael attributes to God's speaking also refer to the qualities of God that make this speaking inappropriate to Him. For example, the absolute effectiveness of God's speech is attributed to the absolute effectiveness of His will—an omnipotence which, as I have already pointed out, makes the verbal intermediary unnecessary. Moreover, Raphael's use of the ambiguous conjunction, "and," alludes to the temporal difference between God's

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<sup>20</sup> See Oxford English Dictionary, "fulfill," 5, 2nd edition 1989: "To carry out or bring to consummation (a prophecy, promise, etc.); to satisfy (a desire, prayer)."

eternally and absolutely effective will and His speaking—i.e., the simultaneity (as in, the dog went outside and is loud) and the linear temporality (as in, the dog went into the bushes and got sprayed by a skunk) to which “and” can refer. Given God’s omnipotence, “fulfilling” all justice can be simultaneous with His speech, or it can follow (and be an effect of) it. The ambiguous conjunction thus suggests the varying degrees to which God might have accommodated His will to the process of signification.

According to the narrative the poet tells, God’s speech effects His will within a linear temporal framework. For by telling Raphael to go to Eden and warn Adam not to “swerve...too secure” (1.236-37), God provokes Raphael to take the actions that will fulfill justice—that will ensure that Adam knows the terms of his stay in Paradise. Thus, Raphael’s description of God’s speech alludes to the difference between God the *ens* and the God who engages in the narrative that makes up heavenly and human history that is contained within His infinite being: between God the omnipresent and eternal, and the speaking, historical synecdoche into which He contracts Himself.

But how do we get to this God who speaks? At what point does God break from his own absolute ontology? We find the moment of this break in the very first historical event that the poem depicts, when God proclaims His Son to be king. God’s speech initiates a momentous shift in heavenly being, one which Raphael describes later in Book 5 of the poem, when he recounts heavenly history to Adam.

Raphael describes heaven’s hierarchy in terms of a neat structure of concentric circles:

As yet this world was not and chaos wild  
 Reigned where these heav'ns now roll, where Earth now rests  
 Upon her center poised, when on a day  
 (For time, though in eternity, applied  
 To motion measures all things durable  
 By present, past and future) on such day  
 As Heav'n's Great Year brings forth th' empyreal host  
 Of angels, by imperial summons called,  
 Innum'erable before th' Almighty's throne,  
 Forthwith from all the ends of Heav'n appeared  
 Under their hierarchs in orders bright,  
 Ten thousand thousand ensigns high advanced,  
 Standards and gonfalons 'twist van and rear  
 Stream in the air and for distinction serve  
 Of hierarchies, of orders and degrees  
 Or in their fluttering tissues bear imblazed  
 Holy memorials, acts of zeal and love  
 Record eminent. Thus when in orbs  
 Of circuit inexpressible they stood,  
 Orb within orb, the Father Infinite,  
 By whom in bliss embosomed sat the Son,  
 Amidst as from a flaming mount whose top  
 Brightness had made invisible, thus spake.

(5.577-600)

According to Raphael's account, the angels, who are imperially summoned, appear "from all the ends of Heav'n" "before th' Almighty's throne," and gather in a series of concentric circles and surround a perfect center: the "Orb within Orb, the Father Infinite," the sublime creator who is at once perfectly enveloped by the concentric circles and who radiates infinitely outward from that center. This imagination of the

order of the angels, and the defining center around which they circulate, depicts an absolutely symmetrical and absolutely ordered heaven, whose inhabitants form a perfect circle that is defined by its radiating center point. Importantly, this perfect form also figures perfect temporal circularity: the heavenly spheres of angels who orbit the “orb within orb” repeatedly return to a state, a position, they previously held, and which they will repeatedly inhabit in the future.

Nonetheless, the angels are free to experience the pleasures of variety, of “change delectable” (5.629). As Raphael explains to Adam and Eve, the angels engage in “Mystical dance” both “Eccentric” and “intervolv’d”:

That day, as other solemn days, they spent  
In song and dance about the sacred Hill,  
Mystical dance, which yonder starry Sphere  
Of Planets and of fixt in all her Wheels  
Resembles nearest, mazes intricate,  
Eccentric, intervolv’d, yet regular  
Then most, when most irregular they seem:  
And in thir motions harmony Divine  
So smooths her charming tones, that God’s own ear  
Listens delighted.

(5.618-27)

The customary movement of the angels’ “eccentric” dance would seem to contrast with the perfection and the order of the concentric circles into which they have been summoned, and to display a choreographic variety that breaks from the repetitive movement imagined by the perfectly symmetrical concentric circles. Yet, imagining that their eccentric movement “smooths [harmony’s] charming tones,” the poet



claims that eccentric angelic dance, and the individuality it expresses, in no way strains the spatial and aural congruity of the heavenly spheres: rather, dance is an instrument of heavenly harmony, incorporated into the aural expression of heaven's perfectly spherical form.

Indeed, the angels' choreographic activity, even after the proclamation of the son, follows the cyclical pattern of the exchange of night for day. Once they have practiced their customary "eccentric dance"—that dance with which they spend "That day, as other solemn days"—the angels, as "Ev'ning now approached" (627), gather "in Circles" (631) for a copious dinner, which is followed by a sleep "Fann'd with cool Winds" (655). Not only the form, but also the activity, of eccentric dance is incorporated into heaven's cyclical temporality. As the summoned angels stand "in orbs / of circuit inexpressible" (594-95), they return repeatedly to the same position: as individual angelic activity is contained within the repetitive exchange of night for day, it becomes part of that habitual, cyclical pattern which is defined and formed by the central, radiating "orb within orb."

This pattern of variety and individuality assimilated into cyclical time is mirrored in the poet's description of heavenly semantics, whose conscription into the form of the cycle helps to define heaven's unique form of historicity and signification. For example, the "standards and gonfalons" that the angels fly from their respective positions simultaneity reify each angels' respective place and display their own aptness to the hierarchical system into which they are inscribed: that is, the "standards and gonfalons" occupy the hierarchical position which they also signify, thereby fitting seamlessly into the perfect form of the circle and exhibiting a semantic

order that conforms to the perfect social order of the heavens. Moreover, the poet's description of the "glittering tissues" (591) which memorialize individual "acts of Zeal and Love" (592) suggests that even the history that is monumentalized by these tissues is absorbed into the a-historical form of circular movement. Like the eccentric dance, they become part of the smooth, pleasing, and a-historical harmony of the perfect spheres.

Thus, Raphael paints a picture of a perfect heaven in which God's command incorporates historical time—with all of its eccentricities and significant events—into a perfect, cyclical whole. But a momentous action shifts the perfect, cyclical form that overwrites variety and historical events: God proclaims the Son to be king in what is, not coincidentally, the first historical speech described by the poem. A hint of the historical/temporal implications of the proclamation in heaven can be found in the way Raphael refers to the day on which the proclamation is given:

As yet this World was not, and *Chaos* wild  
Reign'd where these Heav'ns now roll, where Earth now rests  
Upon her Centre pois'd, when on a day  
(For time, though in Eternity, appli'd  
To motion, measures all things durable  
By present, past, and future) on such a day  
As Heav'n's great Year brings forth, th' Empyreal Host  
Of Angels by Imperial summons call'd...

(5.577-84)

Even in the context of the infinite temporality of heaven, time can be measured according to the motion (presumably the circular motion of the heavens) which occurs within eternal time, thereby splitting time up into the "past, present, and

future” of the event Raphael aims to describe. Thus, when Raphael begins his story with “a day,” he defines the present (and past, and future) of his narrative according to the position in the heavenly cycle that creates day as opposed to night. Initially, this is as temporally specific as Raphael gets. He establishes only that his story begins on “a day,” an indistinct unit of time that is determined by (and thus corresponds perfectly to) the cyclical motion of the heavens. And yet, as he continues, Raphael specifies the year in which the proclamation occurred. His reference indicates that while angelic dance and past actions are absorbed into the heavenly circle whose perfect form is determined by God the radiating centerpiece, the proclamation expands both temporally and metonymically outward toward the “Great Year” in which it occurred, thereby transferring meaning to heretofore indistinct units of time. This nomenclature, the “Great Year,” thus signals a radical departure from heaven’s perfectly a-temporal state: heaven suddenly becomes a place where momentous events lend periods of time, even years, a historical significance that is not integrated into the perfect, eternal form of the heavenly circle.

In fact, the expansion of Raphael’s reference from day to “Great Year” gives us a number of ways to think about the effect of the proclamation on heavenly time. For example, the verbal shift that occurs within the development of Raphael’s narrative echoes, with a significant difference, Eve’s description of her experience of time suspended. Eve describes the suspension of time as she experiences it by a repeated description of the cycle of day into night, thus prefiguring Raphael’s repeated reference to the day:

With thee conversing I forget all time,  
All seasons and thir change, all please alike.  
Sweet is the breath of morn, her rising sweet,  
With charm of earliest birds; pleasant the Sun  
When first on this delightful Land he spreads  
His orient Beams, on herb, tree, fruit, and flow'r,  
Glist'ring with dew; fragrant the fertile earth  
After soft showers; and sweet the coming on  
Of grateful Ev'ning mild, then silent Night  
With this her solemn Bird and this fair Moon,  
And these the Gems of Heav'n, her starry train:  
But neither breath of Morn when she ascends  
With charm of earliest Birds, nor rising Sun  
On this delightful land, nor herb, fruit, flow'r,  
Glist'ring with dew, nor fragrance after showers,  
Nor grateful Ev'ning mild, nor silent Night  
With this her solemn Bird, nor walk by Moon,  
Or glittering Star-light without thee is sweet.

(4.639-56)

Eve's speech verbally mirrors the pattern of historically insignificant variety found in Raphael's description of angelic dance. She asserts that all times of the day seem the same to her, are "sweet" and "pleasing alike," because her experience of them is determined by her conversation with Adam.<sup>21</sup> Thus, changes in her diction—from

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<sup>21</sup> Presumably in order to clarify that Eve does not refer to the seasonal change that occurs over the period of a year, Merritt Hughes notes that Eve's "seasons and thir change" are about "times, period in the day." I believe Milton expects his readers to produce for themselves the same kind of clarification and, in so doing, to take note of

“Sweet is the breath of morn, her rising sweet, / With charm of earliest birds,” to “But neither breath of Morn when she ascends / With charm of earliest Birds”—like the various forms of angelic dance, are incorporated into a repetitive pattern of speaking, and of the cycle of day and night that Eve’s speaking describes. Verbal variety has no bearing on the passage of the time, nor does it assign particular significance to one day over another. Eve’s shifting words, like the dancing of the angels, are assimilated into the a-historicity whose corporeal form is circular movement, and whose evidence is the eternally repeating exchange of night for day.

Indeed, the fact that for Eve the change of “seasons” is suspended by her conversations with Adam suggests that we ought to imagine even this individual experience of a-historicity in the same, cyclical terms by which Raphael describes its heavenly form. For the English verb, to converse, comes from the Latin *conversārī*, *conversāre*, and *convertère*, whose meanings include, respectively, “to turn oneself about,” “to turn to and fro,” and “to turn about.”<sup>22</sup> Thus, as much as Eve means to attribute the suspension of time to speech and intercourse, her narrative also alludes to the cyclical motion which subjects her verbal variety to a state of historical insignificance: it is because of conversation, of the repetitive cycle of day and night,

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the absence of seasons in Adam and Eve’s prelapsarian world. For attending to this absence reinforces the suspension of time that Eve wants to describe. Time, in Eden, is not marked by seasonal change, but rather by the repeated cycle of day and night.

<sup>22</sup> Oxford English Dictionary, “converse,” v. 2nd ed. 1989.

that one day seems like any other—or at least, does not seem to produce any significant change.

After the fall, however, the repeated revolution of day and night, and the eternally enduring spring with which Adam and Eve have been gifted, succumb to seasonal change. Milton offers two cosmological explanations for how this change was effected:

Some say he bid his Angels turn askance  
The Poles of Earth twice ten degrees and more  
From the Sun's Axle; they with labor push'd  
Oblique the Centric Globe: Some say the Sun  
Was bid turn Reins from th' Equinoctial Road  
Like distant breadth to Taurus with the Sev'n  
Atlantic Sisters, and the Spartan Twins  
Up to the Tropic Crab; thence down amain  
By Leo and the Virgin and the Scales,  
As deep as Capricorn, to bring in change  
Of Seasons to each Clime;

(10.669-78)

The momentous event of the fall provokes a change in the historical status of creation itself, for it subjects the ever-repeating cycle of day and night to the unprecedented and overarching variety that occurs over the period of a year.<sup>23</sup> Importantly, Milton

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<sup>23</sup> In chapter 3 I will argue that even before the fall, the overgrowth of Edenic fauna exceeds the repetitive cycle and grants linear temporality to even prelapsarian earth. However, this temporality is distinct from the fallen temporality in which seasonal change occurs.

imagines this temporal shift in cosmological terms: the earth's rotation is no longer perfectly perpendicular to the path of its orbit of the sun, either because the sun has changed its path, or because the angels have tilted the earth.

This is where Raphael's reference to "Heaven's Great Year" is particularly striking. For, according to Hughes and Teskey "Great Year" refers to the year when all of the heavens return to their original positions, a year that would, according to Plato's account, repeat every 36,000 earth years.<sup>24</sup> But how are we to imagine this original state? Significantly, the notion of the Great Year is a product of a gradual shift in the earth's axis of rotation: that is, 36,000 years (according to Plato's calculation) is the measure of the time it takes for the axis of the rotation of the North Pole to complete a full precession. What Plato saw as a product of this precession was that the stars in the sky appeared to shift position over time—and that they would, every 36,000 years, return to an apparently original place in the sky.

Milton, in assigning the proclamation of the son to "Heaven's Great Year," could be referring to the heavenly shift that Plato perceived, and that he took to be a result of the movement of the heavens around the earth. However, in 1543, Copernicus discovered (or, as Martin Ekman tells us, rediscovered) that the perceived heavenly shift was actually an effect of the rotation of the earth.<sup>25</sup> Thus, we can take

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<sup>24</sup> See John Milton, *Paradise Lost*, ed. Gordon Teskey (New York: Norton, 2005) and Merritt Hughes, *John Milton: Complete Poems and Major Prose*.

<sup>25</sup> Ekman argues that the Greek astronomer Hiparchos, who was apparently the first to discover precession, attributed it to the movement of the earth, but his work was

Milton's use of the possessive "Heaven's" in his reference to suggest that this "Great Year" is a product of heaven's own rotational wobble, so to speak. In fact, read in this light, and read prospectively rather than retrospectively, we find "Heaven's Great Year" to be a cosmological metaphor for the beginning of a new form of heavenly movement and heavenly temporality. As the angels push the earth out of sync with the celestial equinox and thus instigate earth's precession and the seasonal changes therein effected, so "Heav'n's Great Year" implies that heavenly movement has somehow come unhinged from its perfect (and un-wobbly) spherical form, and that a new kind of heavenly temporality has begun.

Indeed, God's own proclamatory words refer to one particular cosmological shift which would distinguish pre- from post-proclamation heaven:

"Here all ye angels, progeny of light,  
Thrones, Dominations, Princedoms, Virtues, Powers,  
Hear My decree, which unrevoked shall stand!  
This day I have begot whom I declare  
My only Son and on this holy hill  
*Him* have anointed whom ye now behold  
At My right hand. Your head I *Him* appoint  
And by Myself have sworn to *Him* shall bow

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lost, and Klaudios Ptolemaios, the mathematician and astronomer who quoted him, revised the discovery to assert that precession was the result of the movement of the stars. See Martin Ekman, "A Concise History of the Theories of Tides, Precession-Nutation and Polar Motion (From Antiquity to 1950)," *Surveys in Geophysics* 14 (1993): pp. 585-617, esp. pp. 596-9.



All knees in Heav'n and shall confess *Him* Lord.  
Under His great vicegerent reign abide  
United as one individual soul  
For ever happy. *Him* who disobeys  
Me disobeys, breaks union, and that day,  
Cast out from God and blessed vision, falls  
Into utter darkness, deep engulfed, his place  
Ordained without redemption, without end.”

(my italics, 5.600-15)

With God's proclamation, the concentric circles of angels give way to a new form, for the side-by-side positioning of the father and Son forces the angels to reorient and shift their concentric arrangements, to arrange themselves not around a “Father Infinite” whose omnipotence radiates from a sublimely centered center, an “Orb within orb,” but rather around a kingship that is positioned at the right-hand side of the creator father. That is, the angels must circle around two foci. With this shift, eccentricity comes to imagine not only the individual dances of the angels, but also the new, elliptical shape of heaven itself.<sup>26</sup> Whereas the fall tilted the earth's axis, and thus precipitated the seasonal changes that make up earth's year, so the proclamation stretched heaven into an elliptical shape by forcing the angels to follow a path that no longer outlined a perfectly symmetrical sphere, thus precipitating a

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<sup>26</sup> See Oxford English Dictionary, “eccentric,” adj., 5, 1989 edition: “Of orbital motion: Not referable to a fixed centre of revolution; not circular. Of a curve, an elliptic, parabolic, or hyperbolic orbit: Deviating (in greater or less degree) from a circular form.”

change in the way that the angels experience time. Angelic orbit after the proclamation no longer incorporates historical events into a pattern of perfect repetition over time: instead, the angels orbit the son and father in a pattern whose eccentricity implies the choreographic variety of their “eccentric” dance.

Indeed, the proclamation effects an analogous change in angelic thinking: like seventeenth-century astronomers who encountered Kepler’s discovery that the planets moved in an elliptical, eccentric shape, the angels have to make room for a radical new idea.<sup>27</sup> In fact, as I will demonstrate, this need to make room is mirrored in the verbal structure of the proclamation itself, for in speaking the proclamation, God places his signifiers at strained, and historical, odds with His will.

Of course, it may be objected that if the poet is writing God’s speech in “mortal voice,” then this act of accommodation itself might be the source of any difference, any strain, we find in God’s speech. Perhaps the poet’s accommodating voice is what differs from the omnipotent will, and the heavenly proclamation, he seeks to describe. While this is a reasonable challenge, the text offers a few indications that the semantic strain is attributable to God’s speaking, rather than to the poet’s accommodation. For example, Raphael, careful to set out God’s speech as a quotation, and echoing Biblical rhetoric, encloses this quotation with the introductory “thus spake” (5.599) and the concluding “So spake the Omnipotent” (5.616). Thus, although the poet delivers this story in English, and the angel speaks in the earthly

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<sup>27</sup> See Johannes Kepler, *New Astronomy*, trans. William H. Donahue (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1992), esp. chapt. 44.

voice comprehensible to Adam and Eve, we can read Raphael's quotation as an apt accommodation of God's speech.

If the strain that God's speech places on semantic order is not due to the difference between a "mortal voice" and a sublime speaking, then it derives from the sudden change that God has introduced into heaven's social order. More specifically, by ostentatiously forcing "Him" into a syntactical position that obfuscates meaning and places grammatical elements in a confusing, uncustomary order, God forces a linguistic shift akin to the formal shift from perfect circle to ellipses. In each of the three sentences in which "Him" appears in the proclamation, "Him" is the object of a transitive verb, whose case would be most easily defined and understood in the context of a subject-object-verb syntax. However, verbally echoing the hierarchical status into which He has suddenly placed His Son, God puts "Him" in a position of emphatic priority. This curiously-placed pronoun, in turn, determines the grammatical and semantic roles of the other words in the sentence. Take "Your head I Him appoint / And by Myself have sworn to Him shall bow / All knees in Heav'n and shall confess Him Lord." The meanings of the first independent clauses of this compound sentence are resolved only at the appearance of the object/verb combination marked by "Him," whose position in this peculiar syntax emphasizes the semantic priority of the son. That is, the "Your head I," and "by Myself have sworn," are defined, retroactively, only at the appearance of the object/verb combination whose place is marked by "Him."

As the proclamation did to the pattern of angelic movement, so God's speaking has initiated a shift in heavenly semantics. Indeed, by the end of God's

sentence, language, like the angels, seems to have accommodated the semantic priority of Him: “All knees in Heav’n,” the subject that had appeared at end of the sentence that precedes it, becomes the understood subject of a more conventional subject-verb-object syntax: “and shall confess him Lord.” The sentence thus closes with a grammatical and syntactic resolution, a final statement that cements and clarifies God’s command.

And yet, the resolution is fleeting, for syntactical confusion reappears in God’s warning: “Him who disobeys / Me disobeys.” God places the objective “Him” into the conventional position of the subject, which, if it were placed here, would presumably be the disobedient angel subject, as in “[He] who disobeys.” In fact, despite “Him” being an objective pronoun, its semantic content and grammatical role are not entirely clear until the second appearance of the transitive “disobeys,” which retroactively makes “Me” *its* object and thus reveals the fact that the “Him who disobeys” contains no subject pronoun at all—neither a “he” nor “she” nor even an ungrammatical “Him.” Thus, as God shifts syntax, he also goads Satan, flaunting the radical change that, especially from Satan’s perspective, is effected by the proclamation. For by verbally placing “Him” in the conventional position of the grammatical subject of “disobeys”—and so not in the conventional position of the object of the definitive clause—God syntactically and grammatically removes the highest angel, Lucifer, from his place of syntactical and grammatical priority, and places the son where, according to convention and Satanic perspective, Lucifer rightfully belongs. Thus, God at once to prophecies Lucifer’s disobedience and makes him verbally disappear.

Indeed, it is in this syntactical strain that Raphael's description of the imperial summons, of angelic dance, and especially of the "standards and gonfalons," become particularly apt, for we can read the physical placement of the "glittering tissues" in the respective hierarchical positions that they signify as a spatial analogy to the verbal syntax I have thus far examined, and thus as a foil to the strain that God places on His syntax in proclaiming the Son to be king. That is, whereas God speaks in a new syntax, placing "Him" in a syntactical position as foreign to the semantic order as the Son's ascendancy is to the social order, the emblems of angelic stature are placed exactly where one might expect them to be—mirroring the respective standing of each of the angels in the heavenly hierarchy and, as I have already argued, incorporated into the timeless form of the circle. The spatial analogy suggests that the heavenly syntax that precedes the proclamation does not bear the strain of historical change, but rather verifies the perfect a-historicity, and the order, of pre-proclamation heaven. Moreover, it suggests that the new ascendancy of the Son forces a shift in the heavenly syntax. That is, the positions of the signifiers must, like the order of the angels, make adjustments to accommodate the ascension of the Son, adjustments which will appear, at first, to overturn the conventional order.

This is how *Paradise Lost* historicizes language and contextualizes language's allegorical state—by backdating the birth of linguistic difference to God's proclamation of the Son. For in forcing language to adjust to the new meaning it is supposed to convey, God not only changes linguistic form. He also subjects His omnipotent will to a historical change which is revealed in the strain of linguistic difference. That is, God's proclamation opens up a semantic fault line, a difference

between God's will that the Son ascend and the customary language that He uses to express that will—i.e., the semantic system that is accustomed to the order of things. This fault line reveals the difference between the order God once put in place and the order He initiates now. Thus, in His speaking, God conspicuously subjects the expression of His will to historical vicissitudes and forces which do not cohere with His infinite, omnipotent, absolute being. God's contraction of His eternal self into historical time, and the linguistic difference it effects, display the concomitance of linguistic difference and historicity. God's speech makes heaven a historical place, where variety and change are not seamlessly assimilated into, but rather seem to shift, the forms which are part of heaven's a-historical perfection. The linguistic difference which is inscribed into allegory, the difference between speaking and truth, then, is born out of the difference between God's speech and His will, and His decision to subject Himself and His heavenly reign to historical change.

I am not sure whether God's proclamation provoked Satan's disobedience, but *Paradise Lost* does suggest that Satan's violation of the heavenly order was occasioned by God's speech. In fact, Raphael immediately follows up his quotation of God's proclamation with a curious description of Satan's evil thoughts: "So spake the Omnipotent and with His words / All seemed well pleased: all seemed but were not all (5.616-7)." There is a verbal innocence to Raphael's description of heaven's first duplicity, as if Raphael is remiss to signify "lying" to Adam, and instead describes lying in terms of the partial negation of a truth. But there is also at work here a sophisticated crossing of two different juxtapositions: seeming vs. being and all vs. some. This crossing captures the fact that two kinds of difference are made possible

by God's decision to subject His will, and heaven itself, to the vicissitudes of linguistic difference and historicity. The first is the difference between representation and truth, between Satan's seeming "well pleas'd" and the fact that he is not. The second is the departure of the one, the singular, from the harmonious society of the angels themselves, who have adjusted the very shape of heaven in order to accommodate the Son. Satan is incorporated into the body of heaven, and into the unanimous agreement, only by counterfeit. Thus, read in light of the linguistic history I just described, Satan's dissent, his lying, and indeed his desire to challenge the new rule to which he has been subjected, emerge as the hyperbolic realizations of the difference that God inscribes into the proclamation, and of the historicity He thereby initiates.<sup>28</sup> Once Satan observes the semantic system being strained, and the angels adjusting to the ascension of the Son, he seizes the opportunity to effect a similar shift in heavenly being—to make the angels adjust again, only this time to his ascendancy.

For the remainder of this chapter, I will examine the birth of Sin out of Satan's head, which is recounted in Book 2 of the poem, in light of God's proclamation of the Son and the historicity and linguistic difference that proclamation initiates. I will argue that the proclamation of the Son, which appears in Book 5, explains in narrative

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<sup>28</sup> The question arises: does my reading indicate that Satan is the first self-authoring subject, the first to choose an identity in contradistinction to the one he was given at his creation? How does God's strained speaking open up the possibility for choice and self-authorship, which, according to Milton, is the foundation of right reason and free will?

retrospect how this birth came to pass and outlines the ethical implications of Satan's apparent production of an embodiment of his thoughts. Finally, following Phillip Gallagher's argument that the pagan myth of the birth of Athena represents Satan's misrepresentation of his own history (and specifically his own failure), I will investigate how, according to Milton, historicity (into which is inscribed linguistic difference) destabilizes personification as a rhetorical figure of embodiment, of an abstract truth captured and confirmed in a perfectly named figure.

Before readers learn of Sin's birth and know her name (and thus the nature of Satan's ill-pleased state), Satan falls into hell and, eventually, finds a horrible and unknown female figure guarding its gates:

The one seem'd Woman to the waist, and fair,  
But ended foul in many a scaly fold  
Voluminous and vast, a Serpent arm'd  
With mortal sting: about her middle round  
A cry of Hell Hounds never ceasing bark'd  
With wide Cerberean mouths full loud, and rung  
A hideous Peal: yet, when they list, would creep,  
If aught disturb'd thir noise, into her womb,  
And kennel there, yet there still bark'd and howl'd  
Within unseen.

(2.650-60)



This initial description of this ‘seem’d woman’ burdens her with the long-established iconographic tradition of, as George Butler calls it, “serpentine women.”<sup>29</sup> Her ugliness thus presumably mirrors the atrocity of Satan’s rebellion, and is a precursor to the hideous figures who will appear later in both Christian and pagan texts.<sup>30</sup>

But up until the point at which Sin recounts the angels’ naming of her, Sin is presented as an example of the allegorical mode—more specifically, of the

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<sup>29</sup> George F. Butler, "Spenser, Milton, and the Renaissance Campe: Monsters and Myths in *The Faerie Queene* and *Paradise Lost*," *Milton Studies* 40 (2001), 27. See also Butler’s “Milton’s Pandora: Eve, Sin and the Mythographic Tradition,” *Milton Studies* 44 (2005): 153-78.

<sup>30</sup> Indeed, critics have responded to Sin’s body by gleaning allegorical meaning out of Milton’s allusions to, among others, Scylla, Spenser’s Dragon, Spenser’s Error, Athena, and Minerva. For instance, John Mulryan cites Athena, Minerva, Scylla, and Error as iconographic sources; Catherine Gimelli Martin considers the influence of James 1.13-15; and John Steadman considers both Genesis 3 and St. Basil as source texts. See John Mulryan, “Satan’s Headache: The Perils and Pains of Giving Birth to a Bad Idea,” *Milton Quarterly* 39, no.1 (March 2005): 16-22.; Catherine Gimelli Martin, “The Sources of Milton’s Sin Reconsidered,” *Milton Quarterly* 35, no. 1 (March 2001) : 1-8; John Steadman, “‘Sin’ and the Serpent of Genesis 3 *Paradise Lost*, II, 650-53,” *Modern Philology* 54, no. 4 (May 1957): 217-20; and John Steadman, “Milton and St. Basil: The Genesis of Sin and Death,” *Modern Languages Notes* 73, no. 2 (February 1958): 83-83.

personifications that pepper allegorical texts—*without being named*. Thus, until the scene of her naming, she is not reified as a personification, an embodiment of the thing called sin. In fact, *Paradise Lost* withholds her name even at its most helpful narrative junctures. For example, the name of Sin is conspicuously absent from the Argument of Book 2:

He [Satan] passes on his Journey to Hell Gates, finds them shut, and who sat there to guard them, by whom at length they are op'n'd, and discover to him the great Gulf between Hell and Heaven.

(The Argument, Book 2)

The Argument tells us that we will encounter someone in Book 2, and the poet begins to describe that someone in line 650 of the same book. But the poem waits until line 760 to give us her name. Thus, Sin's naming, when it occurs, registers as a verbal reification of her iconographic and allegorical significance.

All on a sudden miserable pain  
Surprised thee: dim thine eyes and dizzy swum  
In darkness while thy head flames thick and fast  
Threw forth till on the left side op'ning wide,  
Likest to thee in shape and count'nance bright  
(Then shining Heavn'ly fair) a goddess armed  
Out of thy head I sprung! Amazement seized  
All th' host of Heav'n. Back they recoiled afraid  
At first and called me "Sin" and for a sign  
Portentous held me.

(2.752-61)

As Maureen Quilligan has noted, “[t]he speech in which Sin describes her birth for her forgetful father is remarkable for its persistent punning on the words sign-sign-sinister” (181). The third term, “sinister,” she describes as “a buried pun”: “Sin states that she was born from the ‘left,’ that is, the ‘sinister’ side of Satan’s head” (181). According to Quilligan, the sudden burst of polysemy into the heavenly landscape signals a fall into arbitrary, polysemous language, and thus into the demonic allegorical mode (181-82).<sup>31</sup> Following up on Quilligan’s observation of the polysemy inscribed into this passage, I want to argue that the birth of Sin represents not a fall into arbitrary language, but rather a bold and willful attempt to collapse polysemy into one, to establish a fusion of word and thing that does not stand up to the historicity of post-proclamation heaven, or to the linguistic difference that God initiated with the proclamation of the Son.

We can discern the nature (and the apparent success) of Satan’s attempt to collapse polysemy, to fuse word and thing, in the angels’ intuitive naming of her. For the pun on “Sin” and “sign” that Quilligan observes is placed within a chiasmus, or what George Puttenham, in 1569, called the “cross coupler.” According to Puttenham, the cross coupler “takes me two contrary words, and tieth them as it were in a pair of couples, and so makes them agree like good fellows, as I saw once in

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<sup>31</sup> See introduction. See also *Milton’s Spenser*, in which Quilligan places the infection of *Paradise Lost* later, after Sin “has arrived on earth” (*Milton’s Spenser: The Politics of Reading* [Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1983], p. 87).

France a wolf coupled with a mastiffe, and a fox with a hound.”<sup>32</sup> While Puttenham’s mating metaphor is dubious, we can still infer from it the kind of semantic intermingling that occurs within the ABBA structure of the chiasmic crossing of terms. When the angels (A) *call* this woman (B) *sin*, and as a (B) *sign* portentous (A) *hold* her, they cross Sin with sign and calling with holding.<sup>33</sup> Placing the act of naming within a chiasmus, Milton thus figures the angels’ natural and intuitive naming of her. According to the angels’ intuitive holding and calling, Sin not only names this woman: Sin is what she is and what she is named. Importantly, the angels’ naming at once confirms Sin’s status as an embodiment of Satan’s sinful thoughts and constitutes Sin’s birth as an apparently successful move to recapture the fusion of signifier and signified that God relinquished with the proclamation of the Son.

And yet, the angels’ naming of Sin also betrays the difference that is necessarily built into heaven’s now-historical temporality, and that is implicit to every signification. For the angels find their intuitive naming of Sin, and the identity of the word and the thing which their motivated naming captures, eroded by the fact that as a “sign,” Sin ominously “portends” historical events they do not know, a history of things to come which they, even in their natural deeming and naming of Sin, cannot intellectually and verbally capture. The fusion figured by the cross-coupler, then,

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<sup>32</sup> Goerge Puttenham, *The Art of English Poesy*, ed. Frank Whigham and Wayne E.

Rebhorn (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2007), p. 291.

<sup>33</sup> Puttenham’s “cross-coupler” is discussed at length in Joel Fineman, *Shakespeare’s Perjured Eye* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1986).

does not stand up to the difference that God has inscribed into language and history. Indeed, if Sin did capture the history to which she referred, that history would collapse into one—into the I am that I am of the woman named Sin.

Sin's sudden, surprising, and violent birth out of Satan's head thus exposes the radical nature of his oppositional thoughts in rhetorical terms. For in generating an entirely new being, a neologism, and an apparently perfect embodiment of his disobedient thoughts, Satan poses as an omnipotent creator, an author of entirely new beings and words. While God has contracted Himself into history, thereby relinquishing His absolute identity and the absolute identity of His will, His speech, and its effect, and imbuing signification with difference, Satan seems to spawn a new fusion of the three—a perfect manifestation of his willful disobedience who is also what she is named. Thus, the birth of Sin figures Satan's disobedient and prideful thoughts in terms of rhetoric and heavenly semantics. Satan seeks to restore heaven to its prior linguistic, a-historical state, but with a significant change: this time, he will climb the hierarchical ladder by producing, as if through godly omnipotence, a fusion of will, speech, and effect.

A specific kind of verbal iconoclasm emerges out of the way *Paradise Lost* narratively sets up the naming of Sin as a fusion of image and verbal meaning, and then watches that meaning disintegrate with time. We can understand this iconoclasm by comparison to the iconoclastic strategy of Milton's response to *Eikon Basilike*. The frontispiece of *Eikon Basilike* sets out an agenda which is elaborated and supported by iconic language – language that spells out in words the way that Charles

fits the iconic image that the frontispiece presents.<sup>34</sup> The idolizing of the king that the text thereby encourages inspires Milton to comment sarcastically:

In one thing I must commend his op'nness who gave the title to this Book, Εικόν Βασιλική, that is to say, The Kings Image; and by the Shrine he dresses out for him, certainly would have the people come and worship him. (343)

Milton commends the book's title for constructing a verbal shrine, one which reifies the frontispiece's idolatrous visual figuration of Charles I as the image—i.e., the exemplar and embodiment—of kingliness, and thus inspires the people to idolatrous worship of him.

Perceiving the force of this verbal reification, Milton responds by dismantling it. For example, noting that “the blockish vulgar...through custom, simplicity, or want of better teaching, have not more seriously considered kings than in the gaudy name of majesty,” Milton not only points out the undue influence that such a “gaudy” name has on evaluations of Charles I, but also imagines the name as a kind of accessory, as part of an elaborate costume that naïve readers take to signify the man

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<sup>34</sup> See Marshall Grossman, “The Dissemination of the King,” in *The Theatrical City*, ed. David Bevington, Richard Strier and David Smith (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), pp. 261-81, in which he points out the various iconoclastic moves that Milton makes in his text, including “disrupting the unity first of image and text and then of text and source” (265) and “breaking the link between image and inscription” (267).

himself.<sup>35</sup> By revealing this rhetoric strategy, Milton sets the name “majesty” apart from the man it verbally dresses up: “majesty” is nothing more than a name that has been deceptively and inappropriately appended to him.

Strikingly, Milton’s strategy of explicitly dividing the referent of the abstract name from the referent of the name of majesty, prefigures the verbal iconoclasm that he achieves in *Paradise Lost*. To explain: the first entry for “majesty” in the Oxford English Dictionary reads “Greatness, dignity, power, etc.” Entry 1a pertains to “the greatness and glory of God.” Entry 1b gets a bit more complicated: “the dignity or greatness of a monarch; sovereign power; sovereignty. Also: the person or personality of a monarch” (“majesty” OED). The editors of the OED do not distinguish between the use of majesty as a noun referring to the attributes of a king – “dignity or greatness” – and a noun referring to the king himself – “the person.” Milton’s linguistic intervention, however, insists on a distinction between these two uses. He maintains that Charles being named majesty does not mean that Charles carries or embodies the attributes associated with kingliness. (In fact, Milton’s point is that *no one* named king lives up to these idealized attributes.) The referent of the proper noun, Charles, does not match up with the concept signified by the abstract noun, majesty.<sup>36</sup>

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<sup>35</sup> John Milton, “Eikonoklastes,” in *Complete Prose Works of John Milton*, v. 3, ed.

Merritt Hughes (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1962), p. 338.

<sup>36</sup> My analysis of *Eikonoklastes* is complicated by Milton’s erudite attack on Salmasius in *A Defence of the People of England*, in which he mocks Salmasius’s

In the angels' naming of Sin, and the customary reading of her that follows, *Paradise Lost* stages the need for a similar linguistic intervention. As I have already described, when Sin is first born, the angels take her to be the embodiment of sin. Hence, they give her a proper name that they believe captures what they naturally deem her to be. But when Sin seduces the angels, she introduces the need for linguistic intervention: "but familiar grown / I pleas'd, and with attractive graces won / The most averse, thee chiefly" (71-63). These lines can be read as a fairly simple allegory: familiar grown, sin can begin to appear attractive. But the poem does not tell us that the angels find the *act* of sin attractive. Rather, the poem says that "the most averse" angels are seduced by the woman named Sin. Hence, the poem implies that

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conflation, in Latin, of "persona" for "person." Milton asks, "what is 'in the person of the king'? When was Latin ever spoken like that? ... Unless perhaps you are telling us about some pretender like the false-Philip who assumed the guise of king and carried out some murder or other among the English: In this you may have spoken more truly than you thought, for a tyrant, like a king upon the stage, is but the ghost or mark of a king, and not a true king" (310). That Milton distinguishes persona from person of a king suggests that he might believe in such a thing as "a true king." Of course, Milton was seizing on an opportunity to attack Salmasius's lack of learning, and in doing so might have pushed this notion of "true king" further than he actually believed it. See "A Defence of the People of England," in *Complete Prose Works of John Milton*, vol. 4, ed. Don M. Wolfe, gen ed. Merritt Hughes (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1966), pp. 283-300.



those angels who are seduced by this woman named Sin are led to conclude that the act of sin—that is, the disobedience to God to which the common noun, sin, refers—corresponds to the “attractive graces” of the woman named Sin. Because they read the woman named sin as an embodiment—an abstract notion perfectly projected into the material world, and perfectly fused with the name the angels have appended to her—they take the act of sinning to be as attractive as the woman who shares its name.

Where the king dons a gaudy name in order to make his person more attractive, the attractiveness of the woman named Sin obscures the ugliness of the abstract referent, the act of sinning.

Thus, in the naming of Sin, and in the emergence of a customary reading of her, *Paradise Lost* tells us a story of metonymic transference precipitated by linguistic naiveté. The angels’ evaluation of the act of sinning changes because their evaluation of the woman named Sin shifts over time, but the transference from Sin to sinning is a product of their customary, a-historical assumptions: the angels, accustomed to a heavenly and perfect correspondence between signifier and signified, do not appreciate that such a correspondence is not sustained after God’s proclamation of the Son. Not recognizing the presence of linguistic difference, or the possibility of polysemy in the language of their heavenly world, the angels conflate the referent of the proper name “Sin,” with the referent of the abstract noun “sin.” Milton, by pointing out their mistake, unfuses the word from the thing, and challenges the very notion of embodiment, of an abstract idea perfectly realized by a named (or titled) being.

Why would Milton use the same strategy to destabilize Charles majestic figuration and Sin's status as an apparent embodiment of the act (or thought) of sinning? Because the fusion of word and thing they seem to achieve supports their idolatry—their status as graven images that overwrite the difference inscribed into signification, and that thereby claim to embody potencies that they only represent. As the rest of this chapter will show, Milton also aims this rhetorical strategy against the allegorical genre which, as the poem presents it, follows directly from Sin's birth.

Heaven does not make the accommodations for Sin that it once made for the ascendancy of the Son. On the contrary, once Sin is born into heaven, and once the angels are seduced by her, God purges them all, tossing them into hell. God's act, which rids heaven of the pollution of disobedience, releases Sin, and the rhetorical mode she represents, into created history. Thus begins the history that Milton tells about how the allegorical mode comes to infect creation. In short, the allegorical mode as it appears on earth represents Satan's repeated attempt to create embodiments of his will, to claim omnipotence by overwriting a dynamic world of history and linguistic difference with an idolatrous and apparently perfect projection of his will onto the world.

In *Authors to Themselves*, Marshall Grossman explains *Paradise Lost's* “assumption that the apocalypse will provide history with a synecdochic narrative closure” to the metonymic difference inscribed into human history.<sup>37</sup> He argues that

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<sup>37</sup> Marshall Grossman, “*Authors to Themselves*”: *Milton and the Revelation of History* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1987), p. 28. See esp. pg. 26 on

“the principal theme of Books I and II of *Paradise Lost* is the exclusion of the fallen angels from this dialectic transformation of difference into identity” (28). That is, the fallen angels are quarantined from the history that the poem imagines to be the foundation of human beings’ ability to become “authors to themselves” by “actively participat[ing] in the motion of history toward [the] narrative closure” (28) of revelation. Thus, in hell, past and present become conflated in the landscape Satan experiences, a landscape which is a product of his own thinking:

This equation of space and time is ascribed to a subjectivity peculiar to the fallen when Satan, awaking to the double torment of present pain and the memory of lost pleasure, ‘throws his baleful eyes / That witness’d huge affliction and dismay’ (I.56-7). What the reader sees through Satan’s eyes is an external world that mirrors in physical terms Satan’s internal distress. (29)

Satan’s world becomes utterly narcissistic, a “pseudoworld projected by internal desire” (29). Grossman here describes an a-historical subjectivity which projects, in each passing moment, all of Satan’s “internal distress” onto his external world. Thus, in hell Satan gets just what he tried for in heaven, a world that corresponds with exactly what he is thinking, and is absolutely effected by his will.

One result of this absolute projection is the erasure of historical truth:

To bow and sue for grace  
With suppliant knee, and deify his power

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the “transformation from metonymy to synecdoche” in the first six lines of the poem.

Who from the terror of this Arm so late  
Doubted his Empire, that were low indeed,  
That were an ignominy and shame beneath  
This downfall; 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 War  
Irreconcilable to our grand Foe.

(1.111-22)

Satan willfully misinterprets the history he has only recently experienced, conveniently forgetting that the Son, with one sweep, demolished the devil forces, and dubiously alleging that the Son's power might be "deif[ied]" by "suppliant knee," rather than being inherently Godly already.

The erasure of history becomes a prevalent theme in the poem's depiction of the fall into hell, and, more importantly for us, of the rhetorical infection of creation that follows. Much of this is enacted through the erasure of the fallen angels' names:

...Godlike shapes and forms  
Excelling human, Princely Dignities,  
And Powers that erst in Heaven sat on Thrones;  
Though of thir Names in heav'nly Records now  
Be no memorial, blotted out and ras'd  
By thir Rebellion, from the Books of Life.

(1.358-63)

Echoing Psalms and Revelations, the poet tells us that the devils' original names have been "blotted out" from the book that records heavenly history. The biblical allusion

suggests that such blotting prepares the way toward the New Jerusalem, its realization as a whole, perfect place:

Let them be blotted out of the book of the living, and not be written with the righteous. (Psalm 69:28)

And there shall in no wise enter into it any thing that defileth, neither whatsoever worketh abomination, or maketh a lie: but they which are written in the Lamb's book of life. (Revelation 21:27)

God has purged the devils' names from the heavenly history book, for their sin will not be assimilated into the perfect, new world to come. By erasing names, God has let heaven forget its history, thereby preparing history itself for its inevitable narrative closure.

In the interim, however, the blotting out of the devils' names from the heavenly book is matched, on earth, by a proliferation of arbitrary names that write over heavenly history, thereby almost erasing it from the earthly purview and, in so doing, becoming the verbal foundations of pagan idolatry:

Nor had they yet among the Sons of Eve  
Got them new Names, till wand'ring o'er the Earth,  
Through God's high sufferance for the trial of man,  
By falsities and lies 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 Religions 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.

(1.364-75)

As part of their demonic strategy of obscuring God's glory and posturing as deities, the devils take on new names. These names function (like the gaudy name of king) as verbal costumes. For example, the devil who called himself "*Chemos*," and was "th' obscene dread of *Moab's* Sons" (1.406), later took the name of "*Peor*, [an]other Name, when he entic'd / *Israel* in *Sittim* in thir march from *Nile* / To do him wanton rites, which cost them woe" (1.412-4). Not only does the erasure of the devils' heavenly names blot out the glorious history from which they have fallen: the freedom with which they take on new names obscures, for example, the fact that the same demon was worshipped and idolized by the sons of Moab and the Israelites. The devils' new names, like the name of the king, thus verbally support their idolatrous performances specifically by erasing the historical evidence of their posturing, of their inability to realize the godliness they try to project. New names prompt followers to worship before the shrine, and to ignore the sublime power from which these idols fell.

The pattern by which a new name obscures a past history is essential to the story that *Paradise Lost* tells about the allegorical mode. For example, Phillip Gallagher argues that by alluding to the myth of the birth of Athena in his depiction of the birth of Sin, Milton gives this myth a back-story, and thus explains how the

myth departs from historical truth (Gallagher, 318).<sup>38</sup> Gallagher points out that because the story of Sin's birth is not found in the Old Testament but rather in Hesiod, Milton is telling a story whose distorted version was delivered to Hesiod by Satan himself, who revised his autobiography in order to self-glorify:

Hesiod is telling a *true* story; but under the influence of Satan (his Muse) he has gotten the details confused. In *Paradise Lost*, Satan refuses to worship the newly exalted Son of God, thereby arrogating divine prerogatives to himself ('swallowing' wisdom) and conceiving Sin. These facts he transforms into Hesiod's account of the seizure of Metis (divine counsel) and the conception and birth of Athena (wisdom). The Devil's motives are not difficult to figure: wishing to enhance his own image among the Gentiles, he transforms the account of his own rebellion into a veritable hierogamy. He becomes God (Zeus), Sin becomes wisdom (Athena), and a blasphemous but plausible myth emerges.

(331)

By giving Sin (and presumably himself) a new name, Satan erases the truth of the original, cephalic birth upon which this allegory is based. This, for Gallagher, explains why the poem presents the story of Sin (and Death), which he takes to be an historical truth, as if it were an allegory: by this presentation, Milton alludes to a Satanic, allegorical revision of a historical truth.

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<sup>38</sup> See also page 329, where Gallagher notes that Milton's "mature opinion of Greek myth resembles that of Justin Martyr and numerous other Christian apologists from late antiquity to the Renaissance who believed heathen mythology to have originated in demonic distortions of Scripture."

As Gallagher tells us, Hesiod would have taken the story of Athena's birth to "[confirm] the principle of patriarchy: the act enables him [Zeus] to give birth to Athena, the goddess of wisdom and war, out of his head; that is, wisdom and military might are established decisively as male prerogatives" (329). Moreover, swallowing Metis "allows the god to release cosmic energy while at the same time harnessing it so as to prevent the offspring of his own creativity from rebounding upon himself" (329). In short, Zeus's appropriation of the process of birth, and the military and intellectual prowess born out of that appropriation, confirm Zeus's godly centrality and potency: he is the force by which power is harnessed and released, and thus the origin and the central figure of new life, of intellect, and of military power.

Following up on Gallagher's reading of the Athena myth and its Satanic attribution, I think we can excavate Milton's *specific* intervention into the allegorical mode in its Satanic form. For as much as Satan tries to erase historical truth by providing history with his "(prevaricated) autobiography" (Gallagher 332), that autobiography, when read against the grain of the history that *Paradise Lost* recounts, reveals narcissism and anti-historicity to be at its heart:

Zeus, being king, first married the goddess of practical reason,  
Metis, the wisest, most knowledgeable of immortals or mortals.  
But, just as she was about to give birth to gray-eyed Athena,  
Zeus, at that moment misleading her wits by a cunning deception  
And with his flattering arguments, swallowed her into his stomach,  
At the advice of the earth goddess, Gaia, and star-studded heaven.  
For they instructed him thusly, in order that none of the other Gods  
whose race is eternal should get royal power but Zeus.  
All too intelligent children were destined to come out of Metis;



First was the gray-eyed maiden Athena, called tritogeneia,  
Who, in intelligent counsel and forcefulness, equals her father.  
Afterward, Metis was going to bear him a son of a reckless  
Character, larger than life, future king of the gods and of men, too;  
But Zeus, before she could do so, swallowed her into his belly,  
So that the goddess might teach him the meaning of good and of  
evil.<sup>39</sup>

Hesiod tells us that Zeus consumes the mother of his children in order to prevent the history that has been prophesied, one that promises to bring forth a female competitor to his prominent status and, finally, a new “king of gods and...men.” And yet, after she has been assimilated into Zeus’s body, Athena is born: “All by himself, from his head, Zeus fathered gray-eyed Athena, / Terrible rouser to battle and leader of armies, that tireless / Lady whose pleasure is ever in war cries and warfare and fighting” (ll. 878-80).<sup>40</sup> While the birth of the son appears to have been averted, and while the

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<sup>39</sup> Hesiod, *Theogony*, in *Works of Hesiod and the Homeric Hymns*, trans. Daryl Hine (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2005), ll. 841-55. lines. 889-900.

<sup>40</sup> Hugh G. Evelyn White’s translation of the *Theogony*, which appeared originally in the Loeb Classical Library edition, differs significantly from Hine’s, for it indicates that Athena was born of Metis within Zeus’s body:

But he seized her with his hands and put her in his belly, for fear that  
she might bring forth something stronger than his thunderbolt:  
therefore did Zeus, who sits on high and dwells in aether, swallow  
her down suddenly. But she straightway conceived Pallas Athene:  
and the gather of men and gods gave her birth by way of his head on

poem tells us that Zeus fathered Athena all “on his own”—i.e., as if of his own volition—Athena’s birth nevertheless realizes the prophecy that Zeus had tried to prevent. She is, as had been prophesied, “All too intelligent.” Thus, when read in light of the heavenly story in which Milton alludes to it, the myth of Athena turns out not to be a story about omnipotence confirmed, but rather about priority giving way to a fated historical change, to the forces of generation which, even by assimilating them within himself, Zeus can neither control nor suspend. Though Zeus has apparently

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the banks of the river Triton. And she remains hidden beneath the inward parts of Zeus, even Metis, Athena’s mother, worker of righteousness, who was wiser than gods and mortal men. There the goddess (Athena) received that whereby she excelled in strength all the deathless ones who dwell in Olympus, she who made the host-scaring weapon of Athena. And with it (Zeus) gave her birth, arrayed in arms of war.

(line 929)

White’s translation of this passage, however, appears to be an anomaly, and the editors of the Loeb Classical Library, in 2006, published Glenn W. Most’s translation, which more closely matches Hines’s. See Hesiod, *Theogony*, in *Hesiod, Homeric Hymns, Epic Cycle, Homeric Hymns*, trans. Hugh G. Evelyn White, Loeb Classical Library Volume 57 (London: William Heinemann, 1914); and Hesiod, *Theogony*, in *Hesiod, Theogony, Works and Days, and Testimonia*, ed. and trans. Glenn W. Most, Loeb Classical Library Volume 57 (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2006). See also Hesiod, *Theogony and Works and Days*, trans. M. L. West (New York: Oxford University Press, 2008).

prevented the birth of the Son, fate and gestation, even the gestation he apparently controls, have overpowered his decision to consume and assimilate into himself the mother of his fated children.

Thus, the myth of Athena becomes an allegory of the futility of the allegorical mode. Indeed, it exemplifies in both historical and generative terms the vanity of what Gordon Teskey terms the violence of allegory. Teskey argues that “allegory categorizes bodies as the material basis of an order of signs” (16) and that the idealism backing allegory “submits the world around it to truths it is convinced it already knows” (17).<sup>41</sup> This submission of the world to idealism, he argues, “is transferred to the alien context of gender [i.e., of mother], where it can appear to be solved under the image of sexual congress” (15-16). Teskey finds this transference in Plato’s *Timaeus*, which imagines the mother to be a “featureless... ‘receptacle’ through which the father propagates his seed in the world of things.” Plato’s account exemplifies a “confusion” about generation that “is psychologically resonant and politically useful,” for it subdues the mother to a passive material medium through which the father demonstrates “what, in Platonic terms, we already know” (17). In brief, allegory does violence to those elements of the material world that do not correspond to the projected desire, the idealism, of the paternal allegorist, in part by asserting that this material world is absolutely “subject” (17) to the force of paternal form.

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<sup>41</sup> See introduction.

Zeus's consumption of his sexual partner, Metis, follows Teskey's paradigm, for Zeus, in making Metis part of himself, appropriates her maternal production so that it will confirm his idea of his own godly status.<sup>42</sup> I want to suggest, moreover, that when we read the myth of Athena's birth in light of the Sin story which alludes to it, we find bound up with Zeus's appropriation of Metis's body a violent attempt to suspend and overwrite history. Specifically, we find a contrast between the priority that Zeus wants to maintain, and the generation that, over historical time, begins to erode this priority. Athena—who gestated in Metis's body even after Metis was ingested by Zeus—is born, thereby realizing a portion of the fate that Zeus attempts to avoid: she becomes “equal to her father in strength and in wise understanding.” The myth of her birth thus turns out to be an allegory—that is, a speaking that is other to its referent—about the futility of the allegorical mode—that is, about the vanity of an attempt (especially of Satan's attempt) to submit the world, and history, to a preconceived “truth” that is exceeded by generation and historicity. Though they pose as gods, Zeus and Satan do not have the power to contain history, or generation, within themselves.

The story of the birth of Athena, instead of revising Satan's history, simply retells it in allegorical form. Satan's attempt to claim the absolute power which God had already relinquished to the vicissitudes of history becomes Zeus's attempt to suspend the history that will produce children who vie with his position of priority. Moreover, the myth of Athena displays the failure of the allegorical mode within the

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<sup>42</sup> See chapter 3 for how procreation forwards history.

historicity of Christian time. That is, Satan's authoring of an earthly allegorical mode—which posits Zeus and Athena to be embodiments of godly power and intelligence—contrasts vastly with the historical, Christian truth out of which it is produced. Milton reveals that the myth of Athena repeats the birth of Sin out of Satan's head not only because it is a cephalic birth, but also because the idolatrous notion it advances—i.e., the notion that Zeus embodies godly power—represents Satan's repeated attempt to deny and overwrite the historicity that initiates (or is initiated by) linguistic difference—that is, the historicity that makes embodiment, the fusion of word and thing, impossible. As he did with the birth of Sin, Satan in the pagan myth attempts to construct verbal and visual idols, and to demonstrate his own priority over language and history, but, as with the birth of Sin, Satan's allegorical mode, his violent projection of his idea of himself into the world, erodes under the force of historicity, and of the specific, heavenly history that his allegory attempts to overwrite.

I began this chapter by noting how Milton's self-fashioning as a prophetic poet displays the difference between his earthly voice and the heavenly history he tells—that is, the difference between his language and his truth. And I explained how, according to the narrative *Paradise Lost* tells, this linguistic difference came into being at God's proclamation of the Son, which at once revealed a semantic fault line between God's will and His speech and subjected heaven's perfect form to historical change. This, I believe, tells us the Christian history which is foundational to Milton's allegorical ethics. Milton takes language to speak a story that is other to the truth it tells in part because he takes human beings to live between the moment that God

relinquished His omnipotent power (and thus initiated both signification and history) and His reclamation of that power at the revelation (where history and signification will collapse into the absolute identity of the all in all). In other words, Milton takes allegory to be the only linguistic condition appropriate to Christian history.

But Milton's ethics of allegory also has a corrective, hermeneutic edge. For wrapped up with Milton's assertion that allegory is the only apt linguistic condition for humans living in a historical world is his critique of the allegorical mode, especially as it originates with the first personification, Sin, and, following her birth, raises expectations of embodiment, of difference collapsed. These expectations, Milton suggests, are a product of Satan's hubris, his denial of history, and his attempt to claim that omnipotence which God has temporarily relinquished. Milton counters this Satanic mode by demonstrating how Christian readers can glean truth, as he says in *Areopagitica*, even out of bad texts: Christians can find truth in the history that exceeds the allegorical presentation, that erodes the notion of embodiment that the allegorical mode (as Satan produces it) puts forth. The ethical response to allegory, then, is not only to admit and display the difference between your language and the truth to which it refers, but also to force verbal idols to contend with the historical truth, and with the Christian historicity, which they try to deny and suspend. For this forced contention will reveal the fact that only when God decides to close human history, to assimilate being and time into the *ens*, will signification and the linguistic difference therein inscribed be collapsed into a unified being, into an embodiment of the "I AM."

## **Chapter 2: Allegory and Allegorization: Writing and Reading the Sublime in *Paradise Lost***

I argued in the first chapter of this dissertation that when God proclaims His Son to be king, He contracts Himself into history and submits Himself to a semantic system that cannot capture His sublime, omnipotent, and omnipresent being. I also demonstrated that by His proclamation, God introduces semantic strain and historicity into heaven's once-perfect semantic order and a-historical milieu. Satan's disobedient thinking, his mutinous plots, thus emerge as eruptions of antithetical difference out of semantic strain and historicity. And the birth of Sin, the projection of an entirely new signifier out of Satan's head and into the heavenly semantic landscape, thus becomes a verbal figure of Satan's disobedient thoughts, and his desire to reclaim powers that God has already relinquished.

This projection exhibits two paradoxical qualities. The first: the birth and naming of Sin imply that Sin fuses will, word, and thing, that she erases the linguistic difference that God has installed into heavenly signification. The second: because Sin appears to be captured by her name, to fuse word and thing, and to negate the difference that God has inscribed into heaven, her birth and naming threaten to unmoor signification from its sublime origin. That is, with the birth of Sin, the signifiers that once mediated a de facto, sublime truth become themselves the basis of truth claims, the node around which "truth" circulates. For example, as I demonstrated in Chapter 1, Sin is the signifying figure upon whom evaluations of the horror or the attractiveness of sin itself depend: when the woman named Sin "with

attractive graces” (2.762) wins over the angels, she effects a change in their evaluation of sinful rebellion against God. With the birth of Sin, then, meaning becomes contingent. For naïve readers especially, Satan’s language becomes determinant: words mean what they mean depending on the context in which Satan speaks them, depending on the Satanic will that projects those words onto the world.

The most ostentatious example of this contingency is in hell, in Satan’s abominable abuse of rhetoric:

We may with more successful hope resolve  
To wage by force or guile eternal War  
Irreconcilable to our Grand Foe,  
Who now triumphs, and in th’ excess of joy  
Sole reigning holds the Tyranny of Heav’n.

(1.120-24)

When the angels are purged out of heaven and thrown into the “infinite Abyss” of hell (2.405), they detach from the sublime order, and their words follow suit. Thus, even though God’s speaking, by introducing difference into the semiotic system, makes Satan’s rebellious act possible, Satan accuses God of exerting absolute control over the angels in a “Tyranny of Heaven.” In addition, though in Christian theology, hope and despair are spiritually antithetical, Satan places them in rebellious alliance. Because we are “Irreconcilable” to God—that is, because of our despair—Satan says, we ought to hope for war. Though Satan does not initially refer to despair by name, as he continues speaking (perhaps because of the fallen angels’ rhetorical complacency) he eventually names despair and hope as primary and complementary motivators of violent rebellion: “What reinforcement we may gain from Hope, / If not what



resolution from despair” (1.190-91).<sup>43</sup> In hell, words mean what Satan wills them to mean. Their significance derives from their position within Satan’s rhetorical constructions.

In this chapter, I will argue that Milton imagines Edenic and earthly language to occupy a space somewhere between heavenly order and hellish disorder, to be imbued with the kind of semantic difference that the fallen angels overlook, and yet also guided by its connection, albeit attenuated, to sublime truth. Thus, Milton imagines both prelapsarian and postlapsarian language as medievalists, early modernists, and even twentieth-century critics imagine allegory: as a veil that both accommodates *and* potentially covers over or alters the sublime.<sup>44</sup> Focusing on Book

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<sup>43</sup> It is just such a signifying and hermeneutic complacency that leads Milton to complain, in *Eikonoklastes*, that the English people “through custom, simplicity, or want of better teaching, have not more seriously considered kings than in the gaudy name of majesty” (337).

<sup>44</sup> For example, George Puttenham is characteristically non-committal regarding his evaluation of allegory:

And ye shall know that we may dissemble, I mean speak otherwise than we think, in earnest as well as in sport; under covert and dark terms, and in learned and apparent speeches; in short sentences, and by long ambage and circumstance of words; and finally, as well when we lie as when we tell the truth. To be short, every speech wrested from his own natural signification to another not altogether so natural is a kind of dissimulation, because the words bear contrary countenance to the intent. But properly, and in his principal virtue,

4 of *Paradise Lost*, I will explore the tension between language's careful mediation of sublime truth and its imposition of a particular, linguistic logic onto that truth. I will investigate the way Book 4 repeats a hermeneutic pattern of describing the monistic, sublime, material landscape written by God—that is, of writing a (relatively) transparent verbal allegory of God's material allegory—and of subsequently interrupting that allegory with an interpretation that breaks up the landscape into taxonomies that reflect the structural logic of language. Thus, I will consider how words imbue the Edenic world of *Paradise Lost* with a meaning which it might not, without language, necessarily contain, and how Milton exposes the tension between this verbally-inflected meaning and the meaning of God's created world. I will close this chapter by examining in detail how such a tension affects the way Eve reads

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*allegoria* is when we do speak in sense translative and wrested from the own signification, nevertheless applied to another not altogether contrary, but having much conveniency with it, as before said of the *metaphor*. As, for example, if we should call the commonwealth a ship, the prince a pilot, the counselors mariners, the storm wars, and calm and haven peace, this is spoken all in allegory. (271)

For a modern claim that allegory obfuscates as much as it reveals, see Angus

Fletcher, *Allegory: The Theory of a Symbolic Mode*, esp. p. 23. For an elucidating analysis of the figure of the allegorical veil, see Annabel Patterson's parsing of Simone Martin's frontispiece to Petrarch's manuscript of Virgil, in *Pastoral and Ideology* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1987), chap. 1, "Medievalism."

herself in the world: specifically, how the mysterious voice that interrupts Eve's reading of her mirror image convinces Eve to relinquish her identification with the idyllic landscape in favor of an experience of the world as adjudicated by Adam's words.

Seventeenth-century theologians imagined God to write into the material of the natural world an allegory of himself, a Book of Nature. John Calvin, for example, insisted that God wrote himself into the material text of the world so that even the illiterate might see and know him:

Moreouer because the furthest ende of blessed life standeth in the knowledge of God: that the way to felicity should be stopped to none, therefore God hath not onely planted in the mindes of men that seed of religion which we haue spoken of, but also hath so disclosed himselfe in the whole workmanship of ye world, and daily so manifestly presenteth himselfe, that men cannot open their eyes but they must needs beholde him. His substance in dede is incomprehensible, so that his diuine maiestie farre surmounteth all mens senses: but he hath in al his workes grauen certain marks of his glory, and those so plaine and notably discernable, that the excuse of ignorance is taken away from men, be they neuer so grosse and dull witted.<sup>45</sup>

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<sup>45</sup> John Calvin, *The Institution of Christian Religion*, trans. Thomas Norton (London: Reinolde Wolfe and Richarde Harrison, 1561), Book 1, Chap. 5: That the knowledge of God doeth shiningly appeare in the making of the world and in the continual gouernement thereof. Early English Books Online, [http://gateway.proquest.com/openurl?ctx\\_ver=Z39.88-2003&res\\_id=xri:eebo&rft\\_id=xri:eebo:citation:99842856](http://gateway.proquest.com/openurl?ctx_ver=Z39.88-2003&res_id=xri:eebo&rft_id=xri:eebo:citation:99842856).

Milton, following this tradition, presents nature as a material text “written” for Adam and Eve’s delight and edification, an allegory of his love. Thus, after Raphael explains to Adam nature’s material connection to God—that creation is all made of “one first matter” (V.472)—and that the gift of right reason makes the contemplation of nature possible, Adam gratefully replies:<sup>46</sup>

O favorable Spirit, propitious guest,  
Well hast thou taught the way that might direct  
Our knowledge, and the scale of Nature set  
From centre to circumference, whereon  
In contemplation of created things  
By steps we may ascend to God.

(5.508-13)

Aided by the gift of right reason, which protects them from the ungrounded vortex of fallen signification, Adam and Eve are given a material text that is imbued with “first matter” and God’s love. Their “contemplation” of the natural order, the material allegory God has given them, will deliver them to the heavens.<sup>47</sup>

Notably, when Adam reads this world, he names it:

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<sup>46</sup> Raphael is explaining how he, an incorporeal angel, benefits from corporeal food, by digesting it into something insubstantial and spiritual.

<sup>47</sup> My analysis of Adam’s speech will elucidate why Adam recognizes nature as a sublime text only after Raphael explains it to him: that is, why Adam requires a verbal hermeneutic lesson.

As thus he spake, each Bird and Beast beheld  
With blandishment, each Bird stoop'd on his wing.  
I nam'd them, as they pass'd, and understood  
Thir Nature, with such knowledge God endu'd  
My sudden apprehension.

(8.349-53)

When Adam sees the animals, he names them and understands them. What grants him this ability is right reason, a sublime gift that, as Calvin describes it, is “a certaine vnderstanding of his diuine maiestie.”<sup>48</sup> But Milton does not loosely define reason. Rather, Milton defines reason as that gift which gives us interpretive options. As he asserts famously in *Areopagitica*, “reason is but choosing.”<sup>49</sup> Or, as Lee Jacobus points out, reason can be found in “the active joining or disjoining what is perceived”:<sup>50</sup>

...But know that in the Soul  
Are many lesser Faculties that serve  
Reason as chief; among these Fancy next  
Her office holds; of all external things,  
Which the five watchful Senses represent,

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<sup>48</sup> Calvin, *The Institutions*, Book 1, chap. 3: That the knowledge of God is naturally planted in the myndes of men.

<sup>49</sup> John Milton, “Areopagitica,” in *Complete Prose Works of John Milton*, Vol II., ed. Ernest Sirluck, general editor Don M. Wolfe (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1959), p. 527.

<sup>50</sup> Lee A. Jacobus, *Sudden Apprehension: Aspects of Knowledge in Paradise Lost* (Paris: Mouton, 1976), p. 46.

She forms Imaginations, Aery shapes,  
Which Reason joining or disjoining, frames  
All that we affirm or what deny, and call  
Our knowledge or opinion.

(5.100-108)

I find Jacobus's analysis of this passage helpful, but disagree with his insistence that Adam's naming of the animals represents an "intuitive" response distinct from this act of joining or disjoining (46). For, as John Leonard's reading tells us, God "endow[s] Adam and Eve with the reason to form an accurate language for themselves."<sup>51</sup> In fact, given the "word-order" of this passage, in which apprehension follows naming, Leonard concludes that "the name is a means whereby Adam apprehends the nature; it is not an inevitable consequence of the nature. 'Sudden apprehension' suggests something other than the passive receiving of an idea: it implies an act of 'grasping with the intellect; the forming of an idea' (OED 'apprehension' 7)" (12).

Thus, Adam's naming of the animals constitutes an interpretation of nature which then mediates his understanding. The nature and implications of this verbal interpretation for the exercise of right reason I can lay out in perhaps a trite example. Adam names each animal in a particular way, attaching certain appellations to certain animals.<sup>52</sup> "Tiger" (as opposed to, for example "cockroach") is made to refer to the

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<sup>51</sup> John Leonard, *Naming in Paradise*, p. 13.

<sup>52</sup> See also page 6 of *Naming in Paradise*, where Leonard insists that in the

seventeenth century, "arbitrary"—as in "arbitrary language"—qualified not

animal we now call tiger. This choice to name the animal “tiger” writes over and discounts a variety of hermeneutic possibilities: for example, the possibility of emphasizing the cockroachiness of a tiger. That is, by placing a particular four-legged furry animal under the nomenclature, tiger, Adam’s naming of the animals distinguishes and separates this furry animal from a six-legged insect and, by extension, emphasizes the difference between the animal and the bug, even as both are created out of “first matter all.” Thus, language, which is a verbal accommodation of God’s material text, is also an allegorization—an interpretation of that text, a choice to read matter in a particular way.<sup>53</sup> This chapter will demonstrate that as an

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random events or actions, but rather those that were “dependent on the discretion of an arbiter.” Also informing my reading is Victoria Kahn’s argument that language requires choice: “signs..are not simply a consequence of the fall but the precondition of any genuine ethical choice” (150). I agree with her entirely on this point, but also want to suggest that making choices first results in (or begets) the signs that then become opportunities for more ethical choices. See Victoria Kahn, “Allegory, the Sublime, and the Rhetoric of Things Indifferent in *Paradise Lost*,” in *Creative Imitation: New Essays on Renaissance Literature in Honor of Thomas M. Greene*, ed. David Quint, Margaret Ferguson, et al. (Binghamton, NY: Medieval & Renaissance Texts & Studies, 1992), pp. 127-52

<sup>53</sup> I use this term, allegorization, to signal the continuous line that we can draw between God, who writes an allegory of Himself in the material text of the world, and Adam, who interprets that world and, in so doing, produces a new text that is

allegorization of a prelapsarian world created out of God's material, such a categorizing language distances Adam and Eve from the sublime.

The trouble with language is that it takes on a semantic and interpretive force of its own. Once it is spoken and released into the world, language forms its own logic and accumulates meanings that are at odds with their original. Milton teasingly lays out this accumulation of meanings in postlapsarian retrospect:

Southward through Eden went a River large,  
Nor chang'd his course, but through the shaggy hill  
Pass'd underneath ingulft, for God had thrown  
That Mountain as his Garden mould high rais'd  
Upon the rapid current, which through veins  
Of porous Earth with kindly thirst up-drawn,  
Rose a fresh Fountain, and with many a rill  
Water'd the Garden; thence united fell  
Down the steep glade, and met the nether Flood,  
Which from his darksome passage now appears,  
And now divided into four main Streams,  
Runs diverse, wand'ring many a famous Realm  
And Country whereof here needs no account,  
But rather to tell how, if Art could tell,  
How from that Sapphire Fount the crisped Brooks,  
Rolling on Orient Pearl and sands of Gold,  
With mazy error under pendant shades  
Ran Nectar, visiting each plant, and fed

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allegorical different from God's and that, as I will show, gets allegorized (i.e., interpreted) by subsequent readers.



Flow'rs worthy of Paradise which not nice Art  
In Beds and curious Knot, but Nature boon  
Pour'd forth prouise on Hill and Dale and Plain,  
Both where the morning Sun first warmly smote  
The open field, and where the unpierc't shade  
Imbrown'd the noontide Bow'rs.

(4.222-45)

In the beginning of this passage, the poet describes a “River large” that passes through the topography of Paradise and, rising out of the earth as “a fresh Fountain,” waters the Edenic “Garden” until it is, again, “united” into the form of a moving stream. As this stream joins the “nether Flood,” it is broken up into wandering streams which irrigate the kingdom into which postlapsarian history has divided the earth. The original, Edenic body of water is no longer whole, and no longer in service of Eden or its Garden. This depiction of an Edenic wholeness broken up as it passes through a “nether Flood” figures in topographical terms the disconnect from the absolute sublime that is suffered after the fall. The topographical break leads the poet to reflect on his anxieties about his own poetic project in terms that refer to his historical, rhetorical, and conceptual distance from Eden, and from its perfect topography. By what “art” can the poet describe Edenic flowers that are fed by “the crisped Brooks,” if such mortal, “nice Art” willfully malforms the natural landscape into “Beds and curious Knots?” How to speak of Eden’s singular water if it has been broken up into unrecognizable streams, and if the language in which you speak is tied up with that historical and ontological break?

This passage, so deeply concerned with the disconnect between postlapsarian and prelapsarian language, also includes one of the most famous puns in *Paradise Lost*, in which the poet refers to the wandering of the “crisped Brooks” with that loaded term, “error.” This pun has become the crux of a number of different investigations of *Paradise Lost*’s language, including its approach to allegory. For example, in *The Language of Allegory*, Maureen Quilligan asserts that “error” in Paradise means only wandering, *not* erring, and that “By suppressing the multiple meaning of words, Milton makes his language participate in a pristine purity and precision much like that desired by scientists of the Royal Society.”<sup>54</sup> Given her insistence that allegory is based in polysemy, this reading supports her argument that *Paradise Lost* “is only the most obvious testimony to the increasing unviability of allegory as a genre in the seventeenth century” (179). Yet, she is forced to conclude with a concession, introduced by a conditional clause: “if he did not choose to write allegory, he wrote a poem which, with a theological neatness, most economically explains the necessity of allegory’s existence” (182).<sup>55</sup>

I am troubled by Quilligan’s notion of “suppression” and her cautious concession that Milton was writing *about* allegory, rather than writing *an* allegory. If

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<sup>54</sup> Maureen Quilligan, *The Language of Allegory*, p. 180.

<sup>55</sup> Quilligan cites Christopher Ricks’s equally ambiguous assertion that “Error here is not exactly a pun, since it means only ‘wandering’—but ‘only’ is a different thing from an absolutely simple use of the word, since the evil meaning is consciously and ominously excluded.” See Christopher Ricks, *Milton’s Grand Style*, p. 110.

Milton somehow “suppressed” the polysemy of the word “error,” then readers would not notice its polysemy. On the contrary, Milton exposes the fact that he is writing in an allegorical language that cannot capture the innocence, the unfallenness, of a natural language not infected with polysemy. In fact, Milton’s use of this word, “error,” recalls its appearance in earlier books of *Paradise Lost*. In his depiction of Sin in Book II, he alludes overtly to Spenser’s Error in the *Faerie Queene*. In Book I, the poet insists that the Greeks gave an erroneous account of the history of Mulciber, who was not thunderstruck by Jove, but who “Fell long before” when he was tossed out of heaven: “thus they relate, / Erring; for he with this rebellious rout / Fell long before” (1.746-48). When Milton uses “err” to refer to a stream that wanders through the Edenic landscape, he does not “suppress” its polysemy, but rather confronts his readers with its accumulation of referents and connotations, an accumulating process which he displays by his own multiple uses of the word. For a stream to err is a metaphor for the contours of its movement through the natural landscape, but when Milton burdens this metaphor with the meaning that the word “err” has accumulated, he separates his readers from a more immediate, or a more transparently mediated, experience of Paradise, and exposes the allegorical nature, the *allos*, of his language.

Milton’s erring stream contrasts the material text of the book of nature with the verbal medium through which he presents it: erring takes on multiple meanings only for the fallen, and only through the medium of a language burdened by the disasters of postlapsarian history. The juxtaposition of the innocent material and the allegorical language becomes even clearer if we compare the stream to that anomalous presence in Paradise, the guileful serpent:

...close the Serpent sly  
Insinuating, wove with Gordian twine  
His braided train, and of his fatal guile  
Gave proof unheeded;

(4.347-50)

In this word, “insinuating,” we find something akin to the “verbal ambidextrousness” (26) that Quilligan sees in the polysemy that is so prevalent in allegory: the serpent’s “insinuating” *form* gives “proof” of its essentially nefarious character, and predicts the role of it, and of its insinuating language, in the fall of humankind. God has written the serpent’s nefariousness into its material form.<sup>56</sup> In contrast, no such concordance of form and historical role is to be found in Milton’s reference to the erring stream: the stream that wanders through the landscape never actually makes a mistake. This distinction reveals not that allegory is impossible in the seventeenth

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<sup>56</sup> Milton is responding to Genesis 3:1, which asserts, “Now the serpent was more subtil than any beast of the field which the LORD God had made;” and to Genesis 3:14, in which God inveighs, “Because you have done this, Cursed are you above all the livestock and all the wild animals! You will crawl on your belly and you will eat dust all the days of your life.” In the King James Bible, and in *Paradise Lost*, the role of the serpent in the fall is oddly predetermined by its form, and the serpent is strangely burdened with culpability. See biblegateway.com, King James Version.

century; rather, is insists that language as a mediator of sublime truth, or of truths from which we have been separated by postlapsarian history, is burdened with that history. Milton's language, then, is allegorical, both because it takes on multiple meanings (as Quilligan takes allegorical language to do) and because it points to an other, unrepresentable truth.

In fact, it is the difference between Milton's language and the sublime truth he aims to tell that effects the Miltonic sublime. Edmund Burke was infamously impressed with the Miltonic sublime, which, he avowed, was an effect of "judicious obscurity": "No person seems [better] to have understood the secret of heightening, or of setting terrible things, if I may use the expression in their strongest light by the force of a judicious obscurity, than Milton."<sup>57</sup> Burke continues by distinguishing architecturally exact description from evocative poetry:

It is one thing to make an idea clear, and another to make it *affecting* to the imagination. If I make a drawing of a palace or a temple, or a landscape, I present a very clear idea of those objects; but then (allowing for the effect of imitation which is something) my picture can at most affect only as the palace, temple, or landscape would have affected in the reality. On the other hand, the most lively and spirited verbal description I can give, raises a very obscure and imperfect *idea*

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<sup>57</sup> Edmund Burke, *A Philosophical Enquiry into the Origin of Our Ideas of the*

*Sublime and Beautiful* (London, 1757; Cambridge, Chadwyck-Healey, 1999),

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Obscurity.

of such objects; but then it is in my power to raise a stronger *emotion* by the description than I could do by the best painting.<sup>58</sup>

Following Burke's line of thinking, we can align the distinction he makes between logical description and poetic affect with the distinction between the logic of language—the categorizing, the taxonomizing force of names and words—and Milton's evocation of something beyond that logic, something that neither Burke nor I can accurately name precisely because it surpasses words. With this in mind, we can consider in more formal detail one of the ways that Milton achieves the affect of the sublime. For example, Satan's experience of Zephon, who chastises him for entering Paradise:

...abasht the Devil stood,  
And felt how awful goodness is, and saw  
Virtue in her shape how lovely, saw, and pin'd  
His loss; but chiefly to find here observ'd  
His luster visibly impair'd;

(4.845-9)

The "goodness" which infuses, and has always infused, the heavenly world Satan once inhabited, now strikes him with reverence and fear. The poem explains that part of this fearful reverence is wrapped up with Satan's sudden self-exposure: the beauty

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<sup>58</sup> Sect IV: Of the difference between clearness and obscurity with regard to the passions.

of goodness and virtue exposes to Satan his own aesthetic degradation. In addition, “awful goodness” demonstrates the aesthetic response that is characteristic of Satan’s fallen state: the awful feeling that emerges when the fallen comes in contact with a sublime goodness that overwhelms his hermeneutic capabilities.

Satan’s experience of the sublime effect results, then, from his distance from the theological sublime. Moreover, “awful goodness” exposes both the limitations and the potential power of fallen language, for by “awful goodness” Milton grammatically forces two signifiers of seemingly discordant qualities to refer to the same quality of sublimity. Thus, he suggests that the origin of the sublime effect surpasses the verbal logic that would, in most cases, separate the fearful from the beautiful and the good.

Of course, for such discordance to evoke a feeling, an imagination, of a sublime that surpasses the sum of its discordant verbal parts requires on the part of the reader a level of poetic indulgence. That is, the Miltonic sublime as Burke and I describe it requires that the reader ignore the logic of the language, the either/or that is marked by the discordant fusion of terms. To experience the sublime effect, then, the reader must rely not on what his terms mean individually, or how they compare with one another, but rather allow them to evoke something beyond the scope of language, to imagine, against the logic of language, “The dark unbottom’d infinite Abyss / And...the palpable obscure” (2.405-6). To read these terms comparatively, to consider their taxonomic relationship, is to read too literally. It is to limit our reading

to the logic of the verbal medium itself. It is, as Milton argues in *Doctrine and Discipline of Divorce*, to indulge in an “obstinate *literality*” that obscures the divine.<sup>59</sup>

In short, Milton shows that the sublime is beyond his words. So too, is the Edenic landscape:

...Thus was this place,  
A happy rural seat of various view:  
Groves whose rich Trees wept odorous Gums and Balm,  
Others whose fruit burnisht with Golden Rind  
Hung amiable, *Hesperian* Fables true,  
If true, here only, and of delicious taste:  
Betwixt them Lawns, or level Downs, and Flocks  
Brazing the gender herb, were interpos'd,  
Or palmy hillock, or the flow'rs lap  
Of some irriguous Valley spread her store,  
Flow'rs of all hue, and without Thorn the Rose:  
Another side, umbrageous Grotts and Caves  
Of cool recess, o'er which the mantling Vine  
Lays forth her purple Grape, and gently creeps  
Luxuriant; meanwhile murmuring waters fall

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<sup>59</sup> John Milton, “Doctrine and Discipline of Divorce,” in *Complete Prose Works of John Milton*, Vol. II, Chap. XIV, p. 279. For an analysis that connects Milton’s political tracts and his poetry, see Marshall Grossman, “The Dissemination of the King,” in which he considers “the ambiguities, contradictions, and agrammaticalities of evil conceived of as negations” in *Paradise Lost*, and their iconoclastic force in political discourse and narrative (278-81).



Down the slope hills, disperst, or in a Lake,  
That to the fringed Bank with Myrtle crown'd,  
Her crystal mirror holds, unite thir streams.  
The Birds thir choir apply; airs, vernal airs,  
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 Spring.

(4.246-69)

Fluidity and interposition dominate this topography, making verbal distinctions both unnecessary and impossible. Thus, this ambitious description of Paradise, spoken apparently from Adam's "happy rural seat of various view," is overwhelmed by a lack of specificity and distinction. Insistently ambiguous adjectives undercut topographic specificity: "*the* flow're lap" belongs only to "*some* irriguous Valley," while the "Grots and Caves" are placed not in any specific direction, but only on "*Another* side" of the "Groves [of] rich Trees." Further, the poet is unable to determine which category of landscape he witnesses as he surveys Paradise: "Lawns, or level Downs," "Or palmy hillock, or the flow're lap / Of some irriguous Valley." Paradise eludes mapping, its slopes and valleys elude categorical distinction, so that the poet is forced to concede, to offer categorizing options that are each singularly inadequate to the task of accommodating the material of Paradise.

The indecipherable overlapping and crossing of topographic categories reflects the interposing and indecipherable pattern of the Edenic landscape. In fact, as the "mantling vines..gently creeps / Luxuriant" over the "Grots and Caves," they

recall the conglomeration of vines that together make up the impassible (though, given Satan's leap, not insurmountable) shrubbery that guards Paradise:

So thick entwined,  
As one continu'd brake, the undergrowth  
Of shrubs and tangling bushes had perplext  
All path of Man or Beast that pass'd that way:

(4.174-7)

Like this wall of "tangling bushes," Eden exists as an absolute cooperation of the things of nature, a collaboration that perplexes and overwhelms the possibility of distinguishing each element, of each plant standing apart on its own.

In addition to this pervasive material cooperation, there is in Eden both an absolute temporal stasis—a universal always-happening—and an aural cooperation that knits singular sounds into an idyllic textual whole. The songs of birds and the trembling leaves are attuned, while Pan, the Graces, and the Hours practice a simultaneous choreographic knitting, a celebratory always-dance that weaves time and motion together and announces a spring that, as eternal, is always there. Meanwhile, the poet has knit pagan mythology, and pagan figures of universality (Pan), weaving (Graces), and time and fecund spring (Hours) into his Christian vision of an idyllic landscape. By this weaving of pagan figures into his Christian landscape, the poet allegorizes the absolute present of Paradise. If the poet in some moments suggests that his language is too burdened with history to capture the sublime, he also

implies that the absolute sublime knits postlapsarian history, even pagan myth, into its absolute temporal, material, and aural fabric.

But as the poet begins to incorporate pagan myth into his presentation of Paradise, he ends up also confronting the history that cannot be incorporated into the sublime, prelapsarian past. The poet interrupts his description with a series of disclaimers:

...Not that fair field  
Of Enna, where *Proserpin* gath'ring flow'rs  
Herself a fairer Flow'r by gloomy *Dis*  
Was gather'd, which cost *Ceres* all that pain  
To seek her through the world; nor that sweet Grove  
Of *Daphne* by *Orontes*, and th' inspir'd  
Castalian Spring might with this Paradise  
Of *Eden* strive;

(4.267-74)

By establishing Eden's difference from other idyllic landscape and, by extension, its difference from the pagan traditions it previously incorporated, these disclaimers undercut the irrevocable indistinction—the difference-erasing absoluteness—that infuses the poet's description of the Edenic landscape. What is interesting here, though, is that the poet offers no material evidence for this distinction. He asserts, rather, the evaluative authority of his words: “Not” and “nor,” and the conditional “might with this Paradise / Of *Eden* strive” indicate a comparative evaluation that is carried by language, not by matter or aural texture, and that limits and directs our

reading of the Edenic landscape. Not coincidentally, the joining of meaning and words that occurs in this disclaimer also posits a hierarchical, comparative distinction that overrides the topos of similarity and incorporation that made up the initial depiction of Eden and that placed the Garden sublimely beyond the reach of the taxonomizing force of language. The poet's allegorical accommodation of the prelapsarian landscape becomes a postlapsarian allegorization, an interpretation that overwrites and subdues God's original, material text.

Though in his description of the landscape, the poet sets verbal allegory apart from allegorization, in his description of the first parents, he seems more ably to combine the two:

Two of far nobler shape erect and tall,  
Godlike erect with native honor clad  
In naked majesty, seemed lords of all.  
And worthy seemed for in their looks divine  
The image of their glorious Maker shone:  
Truth, wisdom, sanctitude severe and pure,  
Severe, but in true filial freedom placed,  
Whence true authority in men.

(4.288-95)

The combination of physical description—"of far nobler shape erect and tall"—and interpretative evaluation—"seemed lords of all"—suggests that the poet in this instance sews up the seam between allegory and allegorization. Combining description with interpretation, he balances the topos of similarity with the topos of

distinction: the insistence that Adam and Eve are both “Godlike erect” with the implication that they are, thereby, different from the rest of the animals. Yet, despite this apparent balance, the poet is quick to clarify what might have been so far a misleading implication:

...Though both  
Not equal as their sex not equal seemed:  
For contemplation he and valor formed,  
For softness she and sweet attractive grace:  
He for God only, she for God in him.

(4.295-9)

Concerned that the reader might have taken Adam and Eve’s similarities to be signs of their equal states, the poet sets out to establish a hierarchy between them. Notably, the poet offers no clear material description of Adam and Eve in support of this hierarchy. Rather, he offers a subjective response—“not equal seemed”—which he presents as the material basis for his conclusion that they are “Not equal.” Further, the poet relies on suppositions (apt or not) about Adam and Eve’s respective final causes to cement his claim that Adam and Eve are unequal, and to qualify the implications of their described formal likeness.<sup>60</sup>

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<sup>60</sup> The passage I cite here is presented as a description of what Satan sees when he spies on Adam and Eve, so the particular subject, the agent to whom this evaluation can be attributed, is not clear. However, it is clear that this response is subjective, that it effects a hermeneutic shift, and that it is spoken in a fallen

When the poet interrupts his own description of Adam and Eve, he repeats the shift that he made in his description of the landscape: from a descriptive allegory of an idyllic state of interposition and difference-erasing cooperation, to an evaluative allegorization that places the elements of creation into distinct, hierarchized positions and categories. The repetition of this hermeneutic shift is important because of the repercussions it has for Eve. Upon awakening, Eve reads the landscape according to the terms displayed by the poet's descriptive allegory: she sees in Eden an overwhelming similarity, an incorporating material into which she might fit. But the verbal allegorizations asserted by the mysterious voice and by Adam interrupt that reading, and induct Eve into a verbally mediated experience of Paradise. This verbally mediated experience sets her apart from the landscape, sets Adam and Eve apart from one another in hierarchical relations, and sees meaning in a structural logic that is at odds with the sublime cooperation of the idyllic landscape.

Upon her initial awakening into Paradise, Eve ponders her origin and being: "much wond'ring where / And what I was, whence thither brought, and how" (4.451-52). Eve's "whence thither brought" demonstrates her intuitive sense that a force beyond her "brought" her here by mysterious means, while "what" indicates Eve's unique sense of selfhood. Displaying Eve's unique sense of self, this "what" contrasts directly with the terms of Adam's initial self-questioning:

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language—that is, a language that follows either Satan's fall from heaven or humans' fall out of Paradise.

But who I was, or where, or from what cause,  
Knew not; to speak I tri'd, and forthwith spake,  
My Tongue obey'd and readily could name  
What'er I saw.

(8.270-73)

Adam conceives of himself as a subject who aptly names the objects—the “Whate’r”—he sees around him, and he thinks of himself as the potential referent of a uniquely identifying proper noun, an answer to the interrogative pronoun, “who.” In contrast, Eve refers to herself by the pronoun “what,” indicating that she conceives of herself not as the unique referent of a proper name, but rather as the referent of a common noun.

If we back up to the awakening experience that precedes Eve’s question, we see how such a self-conception emerged:

That day I oft remember, when from sleep  
I first awak’t, and found myself repos’d  
Under a shade on flow’rs, much wond’ring where  
And what I was, whence thither brought, and how.

(4.449-52)

Eve begins life burdened with a self-splitting self-consciousness. Her discovery of her reposing “self” places her in a subject/object dialectic in which an awakened “I” (subject) finds a physical reposing “self” (object). But, combined by the grammatical ambiguity of the third line in this passage—“much wond’ring where / And what I was”—the “I” and “self” quickly unite into a whole, a thinking and a physical “I” that is the united subject of the verb phrase “[was] wond’ring.” That is, we might read the

grammatical subject who does this wondering to be either the “I” who awakes to find her “self repos’d,” or the reposed “self” discovered by that “I.” But to respond to this ambiguity with such an either/or proposition incongruously splits the thinking and the physical Eve, which are, in the experience of wonderment, united. This unison is indicated by the way Eve describes the actions that succeed her wondering:

Not distant far from thence a murmuring sound  
Of waters issu’d from a Cave and spread  
Into a liquid Plain, then stood unmov’d  
Pure as th’ expanse of Heav’n; I thither went  
With unexperienc’t thought, and laid me down  
On the green bank, to look into the clear  
Smooth Lake, that to me seem’d another Sky.

(4.453-59)

Instead of observing her reposed body, Eve now refers to the movement of that body as the movement of “I”: the subject Eve, who once awakened to find its reposed body, is now incorporated into that body. Thus, the subject/object dialectic with which Eve begins resolves into an Eve incorporated into the material body she initially finds, a corporeal Eve who, as a result, does not conceive of herself as set apart from the world into which she awakes. Eve is an integrated “what”—an embodied, placed thing—rather than a conscious self, a singular subject, abstractly pondering “who” she is, or authoritatively naming the whatever’s around her.

This self-incorporating self-conception explains the even-handed way Eve turns from considerations of herself to explorations of the landscape. Eve is not compelled to continue asking questions about her origins. Instead, she responds to the sound of the moving water and the expanse of the liquid plain, and she turns (abruptly



from our perspective) from questions of origins—“whence thither”—to an active exploration of the landscape—“I thither went.” The repetition of “thither” in different contexts—the first referring to an abstract question about origin, the second to an active, physical exploration of the world—marks the easy transfer of Eve’s attention, from wonderment to engagement, from the abstract to the physical, from origin to location. Eve’s first moments, then, do not display the kind of self-involvement of which she is often accused, but rather an apt sense that she has been placed, and a feeling that she ought to explore the matter with which she has been united, into which she has been incorporated.

It is in this context that Eve views her image in the lake:

As I bent down to look, just opposite,  
A Shape within the wat’ry gleam appear’d  
Bending to look on me, I started back,  
It started back, but pleas’d I soon return’d,  
Pleas’d it return’d as soon with answering looks  
Of sympathy and love;

(4.460-65)

James Earl has read Eve as stuck in a primary narcissism that she must overcome in order to achieve adulthood, and that she can overcome only by having a baby.<sup>61</sup> Since its publication in 1985, critics have challenged Earl’s account, directly and indirectly, on textual, psychoanalytic, and phenomenological terms.<sup>62</sup>

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<sup>61</sup> James W. Earl, “Eve’s Narcissism,” *Milton Quarterly* 19 (1985): 13-16.

<sup>62</sup> For example, Marshall Grossman offers an alternative explanation for Eve’s putative projection of herself onto the world around her. Because Adam and God do

For my part, I believe that Earl's account not only does not attend to the self-conception that emerges out of Eve's first moments. It also neglects the specific textual analysis that Milton's allusion invites, and the specific, Edenic context in which this vision of the mirror image occurs. For if we consider the Narcissus myth as presented in Arthur Golding's 1567 translation of the *Metamorphoses*, we find clear distinctions between Narcissus's experience of his image and Eve's response to hers. Narcissus encounters his image in the water and falls in passionate love, and tries repeatedly to embrace his image:

O Lord how often did he kisse that false deceitfull thing?  
How often did he thrust his armes midway into the spring?  
To haue embraste the necke he saw and could not catch himselfe?  
He knowes not what it was he sawe. And yet the foolish elfe

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not have mothers, they see themselves in "an other whom they recognize as different from themselves." Eve (and Jesus Christ for that matter) do have mothers, so they "know themselves as combining parts of two" (154). See Marshall Grossman, "Servile/Sterile/Style: Milton and the Question of Woman," in *Milton and the Idea of Woman*, ed. Julia Walker (Urbana, IL: University of Illinois Press, 1988): 148-68. In "Resisting Representation: All About Milton's 'Eve,'" Karen L. Edwards argues that it is Adam whom we might accuse of narcissism. She also helpfully reviews the critical debate about Eve's putative narcissism. See Karen L. Edwards, "Resisting Representation: All About Milton's 'Eve,'" *Exemplaria: A Journal of Theory in Medieval and Renaissance Studies* 9, no. 1 (1997): 231-53.

Doth burne in ardent loue thereof.<sup>63</sup>

At first, Narcissus is not aware that he has fallen in love with himself and, in retribution for the pain he has caused his forsaken lovers, suffers the pangs of unmet

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<sup>63</sup> Ovid, The. xv. bookes of P. Ouidius Naso, entytuled Metamorphosis, translated oute of Latin into English meeter, by Arthur Golding Gentleman, a worke very pleasaunt and delectable, trans. Arthur Golding (London: Willyam Seres, 1567). Early English Books Online, [http://gateway.proquest.com/openurl?ctx\\_ver=Z39.88-2003&res\\_id=xri:eebo&rft\\_id=xri:eebo:citation:99845834](http://gateway.proquest.com/openurl?ctx_ver=Z39.88-2003&res_id=xri:eebo&rft_id=xri:eebo:citation:99845834). Golding obviously takes poetic license in his translation from latin to English verse. Here he replaces the trope of the erring eyes for a metaphor of ardent, burning love. The corresponding Latin text reads:

inrita fallaci quotiens dedit oscula fonti!  
In mediis quotiens uisum captantia collum  
Brachia mersit aquis nec se deprendit in illis!  
Quid uideat nescit, sed quod uidet uritur illo  
Atque oculos idem quie decipit incitat error.

(3.426-30)

Though the metaphor of burning love does not appear in this passage in the original Latin, Golding does take it directly from Ovid's text, as can be seen in the passages that follow.

This and all subsequent Latin quotations are from the R. J. Tarrant edition, *Metamorphoses* (New York: Oxford University press, 2004).

desire. After complaining at length of his torments, Narcissus discovers, “It is my selfe I well perceyue, it is mine Image sure, / That in this sort deluding me, this furie doth procure.”<sup>64</sup> Though part of Narcissus’s torment lies in his unrequited love and desire, a great part is caused by the impossibility of self-love within the context of the subject/object dialectic. Narcissus, so long an object of desire, remains both that object and also the subject who suffers from desire: “I am enamored of my selfe, I doe both set on fire, / And am the same that swelteth too, through impotent desire.” When he takes on the roles of both the desiring subject and the desired object, he self-consumes with a burning desire that, like a fire eternally supplied by its own fuel, constantly re-ignites. Thus, uncharacteristic of romantic lovers, Narcissus does not ask to be united with his beloved. Rather, he wishes (so he says) he could separate his desiring self from his desired self: “O would to God I for a while might from my bodie part. / This wish is straunge to heare a Louer wrapped all in smart, / To wish away the thing the which he loueth as his heart.” But Narcissus is by now enraptured and trapped by his own self-love, so he returns to the water, and melts into the image in which he sees himself: “Euen so by piecemale being spent and wasted through desire, / Did he consume and melt away with *Cupids* secret fire.”<sup>65</sup> This image of Narcissus, who painfully fuses the desiring I and the desired object, and who dies and melts from the heat of that fusion, is fundamentally distinct from Eve, who sees in her

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<sup>64</sup> “iste ego sum! sensi, nec me mea fallit imago. / uror amore mei, flammam moueoque feroque” (3.463-64).

<sup>65</sup> “...sic attenuatus amore / liquitur et tecto paulatim carpitur igni.” (3.489-90)

mirror image the mutual pleasure of “sympathy and love.” The *Metamorphoses* takes Narcissus’s attraction to his image in the lake to be motivated by passionate desire, but Eve’s attraction might be better described as a kind of exploratory intrigue, an interest in the possibility of symbiosis.

Eve’s sense of this possibility develops out of her unique hermeneutic of the landscape, her proclivity for seeing sameness and unity in accidental similarities. Eve explains that when she looked “into the clear / Smooth Lake,” it “to me seem’d another Sky.” Of course, there is no other sky, for the sky is a singular thing not to be repeated on earth, just as Eve is a singular thing not to be repeated in the water. The difference between Eve’s and the reader’s responses to the lake opens up the possibility that Eve—so unaware of difference—might conceive of sameness in radical terms. For if Eve takes creation to include the possibility of two, mutually identifiable skies, it is also possible, indeed probable, that Eve sees in this other sky a potential sameness: according to Eve, these two skies not only mutually identify, but also are, in fact, iterations of the same sky, different only in place but in essence the same. Such a reading would not only realize Eve’s proclivity for reading similarity and ignoring difference. It also follows Eve’s first experience of her self. Eve initially finds a reposed body which she identifies as her “self,” a material body whose selfhood and experience of the landscape corresponds with the intellectual and ontological perspective of the “I.” This correspondence leads the “I” and the reposed body to the fusion that I have already described, to a mutual identification that collapses difference into the same beingness. This experience makes it possible for

Eve to see the lake as the sky's "self," a material being whose seeming sky suggests that the lake and the sky might turn out to be the same thing.

These complementary readings of the united I/self and sky/lake helpfully inform our reading of Eve's response to her image in the lake. When Eve recounts that the shape bends and returns to look at her, that it answers (rather than mirrors) her looks of sympathy and love, she does not outline the relationship between an agent and its mirror. She describes a symbiosis, a correspondence of movement and feeling that, for her, suggests the possibility of mutual identification and, further, unity. Thus, Eve's "vain desire" is that "sympathy and love" might join the perceiving "I" with the perceived image, and that, by this joining, she might discover herself written (again) into the landscape she explores.

Criticism has demonstrated an unrelenting dismissal of Eve's unique response to the landscape and to her image in the water, and further, a surprising inattention to the aptness of what she sees. For what Eve sees in the lake is a similarity that overwhelms difference, and that corroborates Raphael's assertion that creation is made up of all the same, sublime stuff:

O Adam, one Almighty is, from whom  
All things proceed, and up to him return,  
If not depriv'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.

(5.469-74)

In Milton's monistic landscape, Eve is, after all, not essentially (or materially) different from the image she sees reflected in the lake. Thus, we might want to take seriously the implications of the sameness she perceives here. When Eve views the image of herself in the lake, which she takes to be another sky, what she sees is an image of herself in heaven. Eve reads that her earthly self and her future, heavenly self might potentially be united by "sympathy and love" and thereby identifies (and identifies with) her future heavenly existence. This apt identification occurs, notably, without the intervention of language.

Milton's inclusion of the Narcissus myth in Eve's awakening suggests, at first, that we ought to see something potentially narcissistic in Eve's response to her image, something threateningly prideful of which seventeenth-century (and contemporary) thinkers might accuse her. But while Milton offers such a possibility to his readers, he also exposes the irrelevancy of the Narcissus myth to Eve's hermeneutic, and to the Edenic world in which she lives. Thus, his allusion to the Narcissus myth displays the threat that textual history poses for his project. The Narcissus myth is revealed to be a pagan text whose appearance in Milton's Christian text potentially writes over the aptness of Eve's reading with the tormented subject/object dialectic that characterizes Narcissus's response to the image in the fountain and, for that matter, post-lapsarian experience as *Paradise Lost* imagines it. The Narcissus myth, then, inhabits the dubious position of the word "error": its presence in Milton's poem demonstrates the trouble of writing Paradise through the medium of postlapsarian allusions and words.

But if Eve's reading of the landscape is apt, what do we do with the voice that supposedly corrects it? Critics have conjectured that this is the voice of God, or of

Eve's intuition, or that this voice constitutes the beginning of Eve's symbolic stage. Rather than trying to corroborate any of these positions, I will argue that this voice both blends into the idyllic landscape of Paradise and stands apart from it. I will show that its unique verbal authority, rather than the source of its speaking, initiates a shift in Eve's thinking and reading.

We can consider the position of this voice in Paradise by looking at the place of voice in the idyllic landscape of Milton's poem, *Lycidas*, which, as a pastoral poem depicting an idyllic landscape, shares with Paradise the topos of indistinction and indecipherability. Part of this topos in *Lycidas* is developed through an indecipherability of voice. The poem contradicts itself regarding the identity of its speaker(s) and the authorial origin of its song. This is especially true in the 1645 reprinted edition, which includes the following introduction:

In this Monody the author bewails a learned Friend, unfortunately drown'd in his Passage from *Chester* on the *Irish* Seas, 1637. And by occasion foretells the ruin of our corrupted Clergy then in their height.<sup>66</sup>

The poem begins with an invocation to the muses, and describes the pastoral childhood that the assumed "author" has shared with his friend. Yet, in an abrupt turn in the last stanza of the poem, a new voice offers a narrative interjection: "Thus sang

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<sup>66</sup>"*Lycidas*," in Merritt Hughes, *John Milton: Complete Poems and Major Prose*, pp. 116-25.



the uncouth Swain to th' Oaks and rills, / While the still morn went out with Sandals gray" (185-6). This interjection suddenly defines the great majority of the poem as the song of a poetic character, a swain, who sings of his friend. Thus, it retroactively distinguishes between the singer of the pastoral song and the author who pens the poem. But this distinction does not stand, for the introductory lines attribute the song, and the bewailing tone of the poem, specifically to "the Author," and this author (and perhaps Milton), according to the introduction, takes the drowned man to be a "Friend." A reader concerned with specifying voice and point of view would have to try to sort out these coincidences of tone and perspective and to reconcile the introduction—which leads her initially to take the entire poem as the Author's mournful song—with the closing lines of the poem—which take the mournful song to be the shepherd's. In addition, such a reader would have to make the introduction's claim that this poem is a "Monody,"—"A lyric ode sung by a single voice"<sup>67</sup>—somehow coincide with the two voices that emerge out of the poet's last-stanza interjection.

But such a reading, such a sorting out, I think, would miss the poem's privileging of sound over origin, its emphasizing of the texture of the landscape over the individuals who participate in it. The poem's prevailing interest in aural texture is touched on, in different terms than mine, by Lauren Shohet, who argues that there are

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<sup>67</sup> Oxford English Dictionary, "monody," 1a, draft revision 2008.

“two distinct models of subjectivity” offered by *Lycidas* (102).<sup>68</sup> One, which she calls the transcendent model, is concerned with the “autonomously human voice” (102) that critics continue to see emerging out of the last third of the poem, when St. Peter begins to speak. The other “is entangled with objects—with inanimate, nonhuman ‘things’—to such an extent that objects actually seem to cosponsor poetic utterance” (102). This she calls “collective subjectivity”: the collective model “take[s] pastoral to show poetic subjectivity in constant negotiation with objects” (103). Shohet’s analysis of the mournful echoes that sound in *Lycidas* makes this point especially clear:

But O the heavy change, now thou art gone,  
Now thou art gone, and never must return!  
Thee Shepherd, thee the Woods, and desert Caves,  
With wild Thyme and the gadding Vine o’ergrown,  
And all their echoes mourn.

(37-41)

Contradicting Paul Alpers, Shohet asserts that the poem gives the agency of mourning to the woods and caves, not to the singing shepherd himself (110).<sup>69</sup>

Shohet’s intervention is helpful in some ways because it offers an alternative reading of the subject in *Lycidas*, but I believe she has unhelpfully disregarded the multiple ambiguities of reference (and multiple grammatical shifts and logical dissonances) built into this passage, especially the ambiguation, and the departure

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<sup>68</sup> Lauren Shohet, “Objects and Subjects in *Lycidas*,” *Texas Studies in Literature and Language*, 47.2 (summer 2005): 101-18.

<sup>69</sup> Paul Alpers, “*Lycidas* and Modern Criticism,” *ELH* 49 (1982): 468-96.

from origin, achieved by this noun, “echoes.”<sup>70</sup> The poem does not clearly set out what is being echoed here, the mournful call of the shepherd/poet, or the natural sounds emanating from the landscape. What it does assert is that a resonating tone of mournfulness fills the natural landscape: caves do not mourn, echoes do. Thus, the echo does not present subjectivity as a product of self/landscape negotiation: rather, it weaves an affecting sound into its idyllic aural fabric, dismissing subjectivity in favor of textual and aural tone. The mourning echo rises out of the choir of natural mourners—the shepherd, woods, caves, thyme, and vine—and becomes like the ever-echoing song of a choir in a Gothic church—seemingly without origin, filling the air with an aural texture and tone that sacrifices individuality in favor of aural breadth. Poetry is not cosponsored by nature, as Shohet argues; idyllic poetry is defined by its incorporation into the idyllic landscape it describes.

This indistinguishable, pathetic sound is an essential part of the idyllic landscape of *Lycidas*. Thus, it is no surprise that a sound with similarly vague origins speaks to Eve:

...there I had fixt  
Mine eyes till now, and pin'd with vain desire,  
Had not a voice thus warn'd me, What thou seest,  
What there thou seest fair Creature is thyself,  
With thee it came and goes: but follow me,  
And I will bring thee where no shadow stays

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<sup>70</sup> Clearly, Shohet's reading is in conversation with my reading of Eve, but as my reading of the voice will show, Shohet does not see the subject/object dialect dissolving into the idyllic landscape.

Thy coming, and thy soft imbraces, hee  
Whose image thou art, him thou shalt enjoy  
Inseparably thine, to him shalt bear  
Multitudes like thyself, And thence be call'd  
Mother of human Race.

(4.465-75)

The poem's ambiguity about the source of this "a voice" coincides with the way Eve has experienced the Edenic landscape so far, as a place where similarity, createdness, and materiality overcome distinctions, and incorporate the thinking "I" into a sensory and corporeal beingness. Yet, this voice is not like the water's "murmuring sound" which we heard earlier in Eve's description of the landscape, nor is it the kind of vaguely mournful echo that fills the air of *Lycidas*. Rather, this is a singularly verbal sound, a voice that injects verbal meaning into a landscape that for Eve, thus far, has been unmediated by words. What makes this voice fit into the idyllic landscape is its ambiguous origin. What makes it stand out, what gives it a role in prelapsarian history, is that it mediates and signifies.

Eve's "vain desire" threatens an interminable stasis that could have "fixt" her before her image in the lake. What stops her is the voice, an intermediary that ascribes to her an experience she never mentions, and in fact that her account of her image disputes.<sup>71</sup> According to the voice, Eve's shadow "staies [her] coming." We can glean from this claim that when Eve bends over the water to see her reflection,

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<sup>71</sup> We can read verbal mediation in Paradise as I read God's speaking in Chapter 1, as instigating historicity by pulling Eve out of the otherwise static and interminable identity with her image. See also chapter 3.

when her head comes between her image and the sun, she eclipses that reflection, so that a shadow replaces her image and seems to block Eve's access to her other self. Eve, of course, never mentions this intermediating chaperone, and her claim that the image responds with answering looks when she approaches would seem to dispute it. Thus, by positing that Eve is unsatisfied with her image because of the intervening, blocking shadow, the voice imagines its own role: the voice intervenes in and mediates Eve's experience of the world. The voice poses as a verbal allegory of what Eve has experienced—a retelling of her experience in verbal terms—but it asserts a new allegorization of that experience, a new interpretation of her experience that is based on evidence she does not herself mention, not even in the context of retrospectively narrating the event.<sup>72</sup>

Further, the voice strikes its allegorical pose by taking advantage of verbal ambiguity: by using terms that seem to restate what Eve has already intuited, but that expose her to the contingency and difference of which she is unaware. "What thou seest, / What there thou seest fair Creature is thyself." Critics have oddly concluded that the voice here informs Eve that she sees only her reflection in the lake.<sup>73</sup> But this

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<sup>72</sup> It also contrasts with the Latin version of the story, in which the Narcissus

complains "exigua prohibemur aqua" (III.450). Water, not a shadow, keeps Narcissus from his image.

<sup>73</sup> Perhaps this conclusion can be described as a case of over-reading the allusion. In Golding's translation of the *Metamorphoses*, the voice of the poet specifically outlines the contingent relationship between Narcissus and his mirror image:

is not at all what the voice says, and because Eve conceives of the mirror image as another iteration of herself, because she does not conceptualize the contingency of the mirror image, it is more likely the case that the voice verifies Eve's reading of her image. The voice affirms that this image is, indeed, (an)other Eve, just as the lake is (an)other sky. Thus, the voice does not prepare or teach Eve to read the contingent relationship suggested by its reference to Adam as "hee / Whose image thou art." By this assertion, the voice places Eve structurally into the contingent position of the image in the lake: Eve, as an image of Adam, is contingent upon her originating image.<sup>74</sup> But because the voice has been remiss in its interruption of her reading of her image in the lake, because it has not clarified that the mirror image is contingent on her, Eve does not infer from the voice's reference to her as an image that she is contingent on Adam, the like being she is about to encounter.

The difference between the voice's accommodating pose and its assertive interpretation is exposed in Eve's comical response to, and rejection of, Adam. Though the voice promises Eve a self which will be "inseparably" hers, what she encounters in Adam is a shocking difference which, to her, seems to discount such an inseparability:

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The thing thou louest straight is gone. It is none other matter  
That thou doest see, than of thy selfe the shadow in the water.  
The thing is nothing of it selfe: with thee it doth abide,  
With thee it would departe if thou withdrew thy selfe aside.

<sup>74</sup> As Karen Edwards puts it, "Eve's reflection is to Eve as Eve is to Adam" (249).

Till I espi'd thee, fair indeed and tall,  
Under a Platan, yet methought less fair,  
Less winning soft, less amiably mild,  
Than that smooth wat'ry image; back I turn'd.  
(4.477-80)

Eve initially finds herself invited by the soft, horizontal plains of her reposed body and of the still lake. But with Adam, Eve not only encounters someone who is strikingly different from herself. She also encounters someone whose vertical structure and hardness do not lead her to imagine a possible unification, an inviting incorporation, as she found in the soft fluidity of her image in the water. Thus, it is no surprise that she finds the erect Adam to be less inviting. Nor is it surprising that the ambiguous voice has not prepared her for this encounter with difference.

When Adam calls to Eve, and intervenes in her intuitive rejection of him, he sets out terms and allegorizations that establish Eve's singularity:

...Return fair Eve,  
Whom fli'st thou? Whom thou fli'st, of him thou art,  
His flesh, his bone; to give thee being I lent  
Out of my side to thee, nearest my heart  
Substantial Life, to have thee by my side  
Henceforth an individual solace dear;  
Part of my Soul I seek thee, and thee claim  
My other half: with that thy gentle hand  
Seiz'd mine, I yielded, and from that time see  
How beauty is excell'd by manly grace  
And wisdom, which alone is truly fair.  
(4.481-91)

Adam refers to Eve by her proper name, thereby establishing her identity as a singular, unique “who” set apart from the “what’s” of the Edenic landscape. In a vertiginous whirlwind of personal pronouns, Adam proceeds by explaining Eve’s contingency. His explanation is obviously based in the matter of her creation. She is indeed made of material that in its first created form was part of his body. But Adam’s claims extend beyond this material cause. Adam reports not that the rib was taken from him in his sleep, but that he “lent” his rib in order that she be created. Thus, in addition to being Eve’s material and final cause, Adam claims to contribute willfully to the specific process of her making. He prompts Eve to read her being as a sign of the past—as a sign of Adam’s agency in forming her—and of the present and future—as the basis of their heretofore hierarchical interactions. He asserts the authority of his words over the authority of material history and creation.

Eve apparently takes this reading lesson to heart. Once taking Adam to be less than her “wat’ry image,” she now claims that “beauty is excelled by manly grace / And wisdom alone is truly fair.” She now interprets the world, not as imbued with similarity that invites incorporation, but as a world of hierarchical structure:

O thou for whom  
And from whom I was form’d flesh of thy flesh,  
And without whom am to no end, my Guide  
And Head, what thou hast said is just and right.  
For wee to him indeed all praises owe,  
And daily thanks, I chiefly who enjoy  
So far the happier Lot, enjoying thee  
Preminent by so much odds, while thou  
Like consort to thyself canst nowhere find.



(4.440-48)

Eve's tendency to experience the landscape as a fluid, reposed body into which her "I" might be incorporated is replaced by the distancing, self-isolating experience of reading this landscape through Adam's verbal mediation. As words mediate her reading of the world, and as they convince her to take on the subservient role in which they place her, so Eve's experience of the sublime ends up being mediated by Adam—the "Guide," the "Head," the right namer of things.

The effect of this mediation on Eve is profound, and almost instantaneous. It returns her to the subject/object dialectic she lost with her initial incorporation into her reposed body: "with that thy gentle hand / Seiz'd mine." Now experiencing her "I" as an observer of her body, Eve returns to the out-of-body experience into which she first awoke. Redefined in this way, separated in this way from her corporeal self, Eve now lets Adam interject into her experience of her corporeal self, and allows him to define, verbally, their relationship: "I yielded, and from that time see / How beauty is excell'd by manly grace / And wisdom, which alone is truly fair." Instead of focusing on similarity, and on the potential for mutual identity, Eve now sees difference in the world, and experiences the material world as different from her thinking and perceiving "I." In these moments, she also seems to forget that she, too, is "Godlike erect," and that she is meant to be Adam's other, his companion, his help mate, that she was created specifically so that he would not be without "Like consort."

I have tried to expose in this chapter the way that verbal mediations, even within the prelapsarian context of Paradise, emphasize difference and, by this

emphasis, write over what Milton presents an ineffable sublime, an idyllic lack of distinction, and a landscape whose monistic matter and absolute cooperation erase the boundaries between thing and thing, between individual and world. The differentiating force of language reveals itself when the poet, seeking to write an allegory of this landscape, gives into the taxonomic logic of words, when description gives way to evaluation and allegory gives way to allegorization. The effect of this allegorizing force also reveals itself in Eve's new hermeneutic of herself in the world. Once Eve's experience is mediated by words, she relinquishes her potential identity with the "what's" around her, her self-effacing cooperation and incorporation into the landscape, for a singular identification. Eve becomes "Eve," a "who," an "I" separate from her body, distinct from Adam, and set into the hierarchical structure that Adam verbally asserts. She becomes, so she claims, what Adam says.

## Chapter 3: Maternal Matter and the Ontological Basis of Allegorical Ethics

In Book 4 of *Paradise Lost*, Eve recounts to Adam the story of her awakening into the world. She explains that as she looked into a lake that “seem’d another Sky” (4.459), she saw a “Shape” that responded to her with “answering looks / Of sympathy and love” (4.461, 4.464-5). She turns from this shape only after a voice interjects: “What thou seest / What there thou seest fair Creature *is thyself*” (4.467-8, my italics). In chapter 2 of this dissertation, I argued that because Eve takes likeness to be a sign of mutual identity, she does not recognize that the shape she sees in the water is her mirror image, and that as her mirror image, it is different from and dependent on her. Eve, uninformed by any experience of difference—or, in her words, “With unexperienc’t thought” (4.457)—takes literally the voice’s verbal equating of “what thou seest” with “thyself.”

I also asserted in chapter 2 that by its misleading validation of Eve’s belief in absolute identity, the voice convinces Eve to approach Adam, and hence leads her (potentially) to accept the alleged material and spiritual basis of the subservient role he offers her. Here I want to consider the importance of the voice’s apparent verbal laxity for the poem’s understanding of history and free will, especially in light of the contrast between the voice’s reference to Eve’s mirror image and its more accurate description of Eve’s progeny:

...but follow me,  
And I will bring thee where no shadow stays

Thy coming, and thy soft embraces, hee  
Whose image thou art, him thou shalt enjoy  
Inseparably thine, to him shalt bear  
Multitudes *like thyself*, and thence be call'd  
Mother of human Race.

(my italics, 4.470-75)

When the voice refers to Eve's mirror image, it omits the comparative "like" that would have clarified the relationship between Eve and her reflection. But the voice includes "like" when describing Eve's future progeny—who will be "like," and hence not exactly the same as, Eve. This verbal shift from implied identity to implied difference offers us a microscopic verbal demonstration of the historical paradigm that informs the entire poem. In *Paradise Lost*, the difference inherent in comparative likeness distinguishes the linear history recounted in the poem from the a-historical stagnation threatened by Eve's belief that she can identify absolutely with her mirror image. In fact, Eve's speculation on what might have happened if she had continued to gaze on her image confirms the distinction between a-historical identity and historical difference: "...there had I fixt / Mine eyes till now, and pin'd with vain desire, / Had not a voice thus warn'd me..." (4.465-7). By breaking free from the fixation threatened by an illusion of absolute identity, and by participating in the linear history that is figured in terms of difference, Eve not only takes on her specific, maternal role as mother of the human race. She also engages with the very possibility of history itself: once she turns away from the lake, Eve ensures that her future will be different from her present and past.

Why is this important for an investigation of allegory? My premise so far has been that allegory exists because there is a difference between the sublime ur-referent and the accommodating language that refers to it. That is, foundational to allegory is the impossibility of achieving absolute identification between the signifier and the sublime ur-referent. In this chapter, I will suggest that the difference between signifier and referent, and the difference between Eve and her future offspring, are born in part of the generative (or reproductive) process by which *Paradise Lost* imagines creation to occur—specifically, out of the difference between the spirit that infuses the matter of creation with “vital warmth” (7.238) and the matter that receives and responds to this infusion. That is, allegorical and historical difference on earth which, as I will argue, are fundamental to free will, are born of the generative process by which God creates.

Beginning with the poem’s depiction of creation as a reproductive process, I will propose a new, ontologically-informed reading of Milton’s allegorical ethics. I will argue that language is necessarily allegorical because it follows and reflects humankind’s inborn difference from God, a difference which humankind inherits from the maternal mater out of which creation is formed, matter that is itself (or herself) created when God individuates it (or her) from His omnipresent being. That is, humankind’s ontological state—of being like God but different from Him—begins with God’s decision to individuate matter from Himself, to send His spirit to converse with “her” as the mother of humankind, and thus to allow the form of the material

mother to mediate God's paternal imprint on the forms and being of his children.<sup>75</sup> Moreover, I will show that this mediated state is reflected and even sustained by allegorical language, which expresses and negotiates the dialectical difference between God and the maternal material which he commands into fruition, i.e., the difference between the father and the child born out of the womb of the mother.<sup>76</sup>

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<sup>75</sup> In setting God's spirit and the material substratum against one another in cooperative and dialectical conversation, I do not think Milton was invoking a Platonic distinction between matter and spirit, between Godliness and materiality. Rather, in *Paradise Lost*, God's retirement from the material substratum constitutes a creative move that makes chaos, the maternal source of human being, into an individual, a formless form that exists outside of God's control. That is, God releases the material substratum into its (or her) own, individuated beingness, and thus grants it (or her) formal properties not determined by providential order and rule. He makes her into the mother of humankind.

<sup>76</sup> In using this term, "dialectical," to refer to the difference implicit to the creative process, I borrow from Michael Lieb, who takes dialectic to be the basis of Milton's conception of historical progression toward truth. Citing *Areopagitica*, he argues that Milton takes knowledge to be "forever arising dynamically out of the contention of opposing views" (4). Thus, "disputation will be the constructive means of uniting opposition in a superior perspective" (4-5). In fact, as I will do in this chapter, Lieb connects this dialectic to the generative process imagined in the poem. Though I will follow Lieb in attending to the "dialectics of creation," I

In fact, Milton not only explains allegorical difference in terms of the creative process, but also imagines unallegorical language—i.e., that verbal idol which purports to collapse difference, to fuse word and thing—in terms of its isolation from the creative dialectic. Milton figures this language most prominently in the character named Sin, who descends into a state of anti-allegory, not coincidentally, when she descends into a state of a-historicity, absoluteness, and what I will call anti-maternality.

God’s creation of the earth begins with his initial withdrawal from the reign of chaos, which God describes when He sends His Son and “overshadowing Spirit” out to command chaos into “appointed bounds”:

My overshadowing Spirit and might with thee  
I send along, ride forth, and bid the Deep  
Within appointed bounds by Heav’n and earth,  
Boundless the Deep, because I am who fill  
Infinitude, nor vacuous the space.  
Though I uncircumscrib’d myself retire,  
And put not forth my goodness, which is free  
To act or not, Necessity and Change  
Approach not mee, and what I will is Fate.

(7.165-72)

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will argue against the framework of creation and uncreation he proposes, and attend more closely to the oppositional and cooperative relationship between the spirit and matter that emerges out of the generative creative process. See Michael Lieb, *The Dialectics of Creation: Patterns of Birth & Regeneration in Paradise Lost* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1970).

Criticism over the past four decades has established that when God “retire[s]” (7.170) from a portion of the infinitude He fills, He leaves behind a chaotic part of Himself that is not subject to His goodness or His ordering and creating power. Critics have alleged that the chaotic matter that God leaves behind exists in a state of pure potentiality, activated only when God sends His Son and Spirit to inspire matter into created form. Thus, in 1970 Michael Lieb notes that chaos is “nothing more than part of [God] from which he has withdrawn his influence...imbued with the potentiality for glorious production” (17); in 1987 John Rumrich asserts that the matter of chaos becomes the “substratum proper” of creation and exists in an “in-between state” of being neither individuated nor identifiable with God (63); and in 2006 Gordon Teskey refers to chaos as the “neutral” (106), “alienated substance of God” (99), ready to respond obediently to God’s decision to create (102).<sup>77</sup> These analyses helpfully posit God as the original and universal origin of all Being. However, the characterization of the material substratum that they offer stands at odds with the poem’s description of chaos and the matter unrul’d by God: the “dark / Illimitable Ocean” (2.892) “where eldest *Night* / And *Chaos*, Ancestors of Nature, hold Eternal Anarchy, amidst the noise / Of endless wars, and by confusion stand” (2.894-6). This is not a region of

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<sup>77</sup> Michael Lieb, *Dialectics of Creation*; John Rumrich, *Matter of Glory: A New Preface to Paradise Lost* (Pittsburgh, PA: University of Pittsburgh Press, 1987); and Gordon Teskey, *Delirious Milton: The Fate of the Poet in Modernity* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2006).



perfectly passive, neutral stuff awaiting God's activation: the stuff of chaos has an energy of its own.

In fact, the neutrality and passivity critics have ascribed to the matter of creation conform to the material substratum of *Christian Doctrine* rather than that of *Paradise Lost*. For example, Rumrich cites the following passage of *Christian Doctrine* to bolster his assertion that the matter of chaos is necessarily passive:

It is clear, then that the world was made out of some sort of matter. For since "action" and "passivity" are relative terms, and since no agent can act externally unless there is something and something material, which can be acted upon, it is apparent that God could not have created this world out of nothing....It was necessary that something should have existed previously, so that it could be acted upon. (CP 6, 307)<sup>78</sup>

Referring to this passage, Rumrich asserts Milton's allegiance to the Aristotelian concept of passive prime matter and argues that the "Aristotelian interaction between active and passive principles appears on every level of Milton's universe" (55). He mentions the energy and discord of the prime matter of *Paradise Lost* only in an aside, when he describes chaos as "passive, if stormy" (55). Gordon Teskey similarly accounts for his description of the material substratum by reference to theological, rather than poetic, and philosophical considerations: "God has alienated his substance

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<sup>78</sup> As cited in Rumrich, p. 55. See John Milton, *Christian Doctrine*, trans. John Carey, in *Complete Prose Works of John Milton*, vol 6., ed. Maurice Kelley, gen. ed. Don Wolfe (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1973), p. 307.

from himself so that it is matter; and it has here at last become as neutral as any proponent of creation *ex nihilo* could wish. Matter is now ruled only by necessity and chance, ‘outrageous as the sea,’ until the Father sends forth his ‘goodness,’ the Son, to subdue it by Creation” (106). Teskey argues here that Milton synthesized the traditional theology of creation *ex nihilo* (and its implication that God is not subject to necessity or change) with the Lucretian assertion that creation *ex nihilo* was impossible for God (and its implication that God must have changed part of Himself in order to create). But I am left wondering: if this is purely neutral stuff, defined only by the absence of God’s goodness, whence the outrageousness, the forces of necessity and change which dominate chaos? And why does this purely potential stuff need to be subdued?

Though it is tempting to treat these questions as tangential to the poem’s imagination of the creative process, I want to bring them to the foreground of my analysis. For I believe that the energy manifested in the pre-creation material substratum re-appears after creation as the structural and ontological basis of humankind’s difference from God, and that we find it both in the “adverse” (7.239) residue discarded during the creative process, and in the overabundant growth that emerges uncontrollably out of mother earth. To overlook these signals of matter’s individuated state, and the proprietary power that lies in *potentia materiae*, is to miss the dialectical negotiation implicit to the creative process, and the ontological basis of

humankind's difference from God.<sup>79</sup> In short, it is to overlook the poem's presentation of creation as a reproductive or generative process, in which two

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<sup>79</sup>The term *potentia materiae* appears in *Christian Doctrine*, in which Milton asserts that "Nearly everyone agrees that all form—and the human soul is a kind of form—is produced by the power of matter [ex potentia materiae]" (322). Arguing that *DDC* is not necessarily penned by Milton, William B. Hunter alleges that *potentia materiae*, an Aristotelian concept, refers not to material *power*, but rather to its *potential*, and that in the Aristotelian system, matter "[i]n itself is completely powerless, inert." Thus, when Raphael suggests that matter "aspire[s]" (5.484) to its created form, he ascribes to matter a providential energy absent from *DDC*. While I agree with Hunter that the matter of *Paradise Lost* is distinct from that of Milton's prose tracts, my reading of the generative process of creation, and of Raphael's language, will show that the *potentia materiae* of *Paradise Lost* is not necessarily passive or aspiring, but is at times resistant to the forms of creation. See William B. Hunter, *Visitation Unimplor'd: Milton and the Authorship of De Doctrina Christiana* (Pittsburgh: Duquesne University Press, 1998), p. 132-3. See also Marshall Grossman's observation of the resistance of matter to God's will: in order for God to have his will reflected back at him, "it is necessary to impute to matter a certain recalcitrance, a counter-will comprising a resistance to fate. This resistance, which is consistently figured as feminine, is, for Milton's texts, the hard kernel of Christian liberty" (Marshall Grossman, "The genders of God and the redemption of the flesh in *Paradise Lost*," in *Milton and*

individuated beings cooperate to form a new being—specifically, in which the material ur-mother of creation contributes to the various, and imperfect, form(s) of her children.

God creates, as Teskey alleges, by subduing chaos: he sends his son to submit the “dark, wasteful, wild” (7.213) abyss of chaotic matter to providential peace and order: “Silence, ye troubl'd waves, and thou Deep, peace, / Said then th' Omnific Word, your discord end” (7.216-17). In achieving God's plan, the son draws a distinct line between order and disorder, and thus clearly distinguishes between matter that will be translated into created form and matter that will be left external to creation:

Then stay'd the fervid Wheels, and in his hand  
He took the golden Compasses, prepar'd  
In God's Eternal store, to circumscribe  
This Universe, and all created things:  
One foot he centred, and the other turn'd  
Round through the vast profundity obscure,  
And said, Thus far extend, thus far thy bounds,  
This be thy just Circumference, O World.  
Thus God the Heav'n created, thus the Earth,  
Matter uniform'd and void:

(7.224-33)

As tools used to draw precise measurements and perfect circles, the golden compasses display the ordering power of the divine in geometric terms. As an astronomer subjects his vision of the heavens to the representational organizations of

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*Gender*, ed. Catherine Gimelli Martin [Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 2004], p. 202). See also pp. 95-114.

a map, so the son inserts boundaries and divisions into the amorphic ambience of pre-creation chaos. In doing so, he relegates the energetic discord of chaos to exteriority, and calms and neutralizes that matter culled from chaos's reign. Once part of the war of chaos, the matter out of which the earth will be formed is now, simply "unform'd and void." A blank slate, this neutralized matter is ready to bear the creative imprint of the spirit.

This preparation suggests that matter is now ready to receive and take on the forms that the son will command, that creation is not the dialectical process I want to suggest. However, what follows reveals that the son has not prepared the matter selected for creation to accept passively its own formation into created beingness:

...Darkness profound  
Cover'd th' Abyss: but on the wat'ry calm  
His brooding wings the Spirit of God outspread,  
And vital virtue infus'd, and vital warmth  
Throughout the fluid Mass, but downward purg'd  
The black tartareous cold Infernal dregs  
Adverse to life: then founded, then conglob'd  
Like things to like, the rest to several place  
Disparted, and between spun out the Air,  
And Earth self-balanc't on her Centre hung.

(7.233-42)

The spirit here does not command passive, neutral matter into new form so much as it responds to the formal properties that matter displays after its infusion with "vital warmth," casting creation out of those portions of the substratum that are "like" enough to be amenable to conglobing. Furthermore, the spirit purges that stuff of

creation that reveals itself to be “adverse to life,” that resists the spirit’s creative imprint. Even the portion of the material substratum that has been chosen and prepared for creation exhibits its own formal properties—displayed either in its amenity, or its adversity, to being formed into something new.

Not coincidentally, these formal properties emerge in the context of a generative creative process. The spirit, spreading his “brooding wings” infuses matter with “vital warmth.” In short, the material substratum, is, like a human mother, impregnated by the warm ejaculate of the father.<sup>80</sup> By further examining this representation of creation, and the adversity that it exposes, we can see how Milton backdates the reproductive (i.e., human) model of creation and procreation into creation itself, and how the material substratum becomes the model of the human mother, whose own formal properties actively engage with the generative process and effect and mark the final form and being of the child.

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<sup>80</sup>Thomas Laqueur observes that for Hippocrates and the early moderns who followed him, part of what established and verified the hierarchy of gender was temperature: women’s ejaculate during sex was cold, while man’s was hot. Furthermore, orgasm and conception were effected by the heat of friction during intercourse. Thus, we can take “vital warmth” to refer to early modern perceptions of what happens when people make new people. See Laqueur, *Making Sex: Body and Gender from the Greeks to Freud* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1990), esp. p. 100-1.

In fact, returning to the “adverse” dregs of creation, we see that human motherhood is relevant to a new reading of the material substratum. This is a relevance Gordon Teskey has already outlined. For though Teskey attempts to distinguish creation from human reproduction, in so doing he connects the presence of residual matter with the “madness” of the maternal parent who engages in a generative production of offspring. Teskey takes “translative or, better, reproductive making, in which both the substance and the life are captured from something previously made” (111) to be represented by Eve’s formation out of Adam’s rib, and marked specifically by the blood that is spilled in the process of this making. This spilled blood effects “an inadvertent disclosure of Milton’s relationship with the body, the corpus, of heroic poems made in the past” (114) and reveals “the violent energy of assimilation that has gone into the making of Milton’s epic” (118). That is, despite his claim to be directly inspired by the heavenly muse, Milton actually constructs *Paradise Lost* out of pieces—indeed, whole lines—of already made, already formed classical poetry (and has apparently discarded the rest).

The spirit’s discarding of the “black tartareous cold Infernal dregs” suggests that human beings are made of something already made as well, and that we can read creation as Teskey reads *Paradise Lost*. As *Paradise Lost* is revealed to be mediated by (and thus bearing some resemblance to) the poems that precede it, so human beings are marked by the madeness of the material substratum which, like the classical poetry out of which Milton makes a new poem, has its own formal properties. Creation, then, emerges as the original model of the “reproductive” or “translative” making Teskey describes. Indeed, we can imagine the “black tartareous

cold Infernal dregs” to materialize the remnants of the generative process in which God engages, to represent the ur-placenta of creation, the cold maternal matter unassimilated into human form and discarded at birth. This ur-placenta reveals the difference between Teskey’s description of how Milton authored his poem and God’s creation of the world: while Milton might have violently assimilated classical poetry into the form of his own poem and tried to erase the poetic residues he left behind, God restrains His will in order to play the father of creation, and openly reveals the difference between the creation of the earth as He instigates it, and the material matter out of which creation is formed.<sup>81</sup> That is, He leaves the material substratum to fulfill her maternal role in the begetting of humankind. Importantly, this process, like the human reproductive process, produces children who are like, but different from, each of their parents, who are made in God’s image, and yet not exact iterations of Him.

In fact, this reproductive basis for understanding creation and human ontology also recontextualizes in macrocosmic terms the Christian ideal of love and the ideal love and union expressed by Adam and Eve in the garden.<sup>82</sup> As individuals who were

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<sup>81</sup> I am not convinced that Milton attempted the violent assimilation that Teskey describes. Milton borrows from texts with which many of his readers would have been readily familiar, thus exposing the fact that his poem is made, in great part, out of the poetic pieces he has gathered up. However, I do find Teskey’s paradigm for deciphering madness helpful.

<sup>82</sup> Michael Lieb also posits love, intercourse, and sexual union to be key to the recovery of heavenly wholeness, which he takes to be the promise of “re-



at one time encompassed and united in Adam's singular being and body, Adam and Eve are modeled after God and the material substratum: as Eve is extrapolated from Adam's body and becomes through conversation the mother of his children, so the material substratum is individuated from the divine and becomes the mother of humankind. Thus, Adam and Eve's conversations approximate the conversation out of which they are born, and the absolute union that will be achieved at the end of days—when God's paternal and maternal providences re-unite into the absolute one.<sup>83</sup>

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creation.” He describes this intercourse in more hierarchical terms than I: “sexual union in the unfallen world is not mere dalliance but has the higher and more creative purpose of the submission of disorder or wantonness to the temperance of a higher or superior order” (72). See also pg. 85, in which Lieb describes the “pattern” of *Paradise Lost* as “one in which union proceeds through destruction to reunion.”

<sup>83</sup> We can see this unity as God's proprietary recovery of what Rumrich calls his “secret possession of a distinctly feminine and incorrigibly unruly source of power—an inexhaustible womb” (7-8). Chaos and matter can be taken to be the feminine aspect of a hermaphroditic or omni-gendered God, who divides himself into genders when He retires from that aspect. In fact, Marshall Grossman takes chaos to relate to God as Eve does to Adam. As Eve, made out of Adam's rib, “appears before [Adam] not as the thing [phallus] itself, which he has surrendered to and for her, but rather as the embodiment of its lack” (97), so chaos, that realm

Perhaps this explains the ironic twinge of Adam's assertion that God, an absolute and perfect being, does not need a companion: "...No need that thou / Shouldst propagate, already infinite; / And through all numbers absolute, though One" (8.419-21). The irony of Adam's rather bold analysis is that God has indeed propagated, created someone like Himself and, despite Adam's speculation, has sought "social communication" (8.429). Though God has not created His equal or His helpmate, and does not need a helpmate in order to realize His perfection, per se, He has made out of a part of Himself an individual with whom His spirit converses, and who will one day return to Him in love. At once eternal and omnipresent, God has installed love into the historical process which He instigates, and will realize the end of that process when that love is absolutely returned.

Of course, this absolute return of love is only an anticipated, ineffable ideal. Adam and Eve are different beings of different genders, whose sexual union only approximates the love and unity that they will find at the end of days. Until then, Adam and Eve are suspended in a state of difference which distinguishes them from the final, eternal selves to which they and God look forward. This suspended state,

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of darkness ruled by a queen, relates to her creator, the "*ens*" (96) who withdrew Himself from her and left "nothing" behind. Thus, Grossman attests, we can take Milton's repeated feminizing of the nothing that God leaves behind to have ontological backing, for in Milton's cosmography, "sexual difference" is reduced to "a function of the presence or absence of the phallic thing" (96). ("The genders of God").

and the anticipation of union and identity, is reflected in language, in the difference between signifier and referent, in the difference between the human “I” and the self. As I have already suggested, it is also the basis of Adam and Eve’s historical existence, and their freedom to act and choose.

And this historicity, this suspended state, is of woman born. In fact, as I will now demonstrate, the mediator between the human and the sublime, the mother whose difference from God establishes and sustains human difference, is posited in *Paradise Lost* to be the source of linear time, for the overabundant growth that she births breaks with the a-historicity of the sublime. In short, the material substratum, “the womb of Nature and perhaps her grave” (2.911), gives birth in the first stages of creation to a new maternal mother, the earth, the new “womb” of new Edenic forms (7.454). This earth carries forward into history the maternal role of her mother, and her children—the plants, animals, and human beings of Eden—in turn challenge the atemporal and ahistorical design of Edenic life. That is, the fecundity of the mother earth, “the overwhelming abundance of unfallen Nature,” requires “Adam and Eve constantly to temper its productivity” (Lieb 19), thereby challenging the Edenic status quo.

We can examine the over-productivity of the earth, and its implications for creation and historicity, by looking at those moments in which it is first revealed. God designs and creates the Edenic landscape first by organizing and dividing, by telling the waters to separate from the earth—“Be gather’d now ye Waters under Heav’n / Into one place, and let dry Land appear” (7.284-5). However, the perfect structure of this division immediately gives way to generation and fecundity:

...Let th' Earth  
 Put forth the verdant Grass, Herb yielding Seed,  
 And Fruit Tree yielding Fruit after her kind;  
 Whose Seed is in herself upon the earth.  
 He scarce had said, when the bare Earth, till then  
 Desert and bare, unsightly, unadorn'd,  
 Brought forth the verdant Grass, whose verdure clad  
 Her Universal Face with pleasant green,  
 Then Herbs of every leaf, that sudden flow'r'd  
 Op'ning thir various colors, and made gay  
 Her bosom smelling sweet: and these scarce blown,  
 Forth flourish'd thick the clust'ring Vine, forth crept  
 The smelling Gourd, up stood the corny Reed  
 Embattl'd in her field: and th' humble Shrub,  
 And Bush with frizzl'd hair implicit...

(7.310-24)

The feminized earth in this account produces a “sudden” flowering which retroactively defines God’s commanding word as a catalyst of a growth that continues and increases on its own. God “let[s]” the earth “put forth” and commands her to display the implicit fertile properties of the natural world—the herb that yields seed and the tree that yields fruit. God has activated the earth’s implicit fecundity, what critics have called her pure potential, and has allowed (“let”) her to display her growth. Moreover, as this feminized landscape takes on the characteristics of a potential sexual partner and a fertile woman—adorned, beautiful, *unbarren*, and bringing forth new life—God responds, accordingly, like a father, who anticipates the generation of his offspring out of the mother’s womb. He awaits, sees, and then responds to the birth of his offspring: “God saw that it was good” (7.337). At the

beginning of this process, God wields and exercises his powers in commanding the earth to realize herself as mate and mother; by the end of this passage, He observes the fecundity of the mother he has made, and whose powers He has “let” her reveal.<sup>84</sup>

In fact, the spatial metaphor of “bringing forth” imagines growth as birth. As the earth brings forth grass, the vine flourishes forth, and the gourd creeps forth, they prefigure the more explicit description of birth which Milton applies to the animals of Eden:

...The Earth obey'd, and straight  
Op'ning her fertile Womb teem'd at a Birth  
Innumerable living Creatures, perfect forms,  
Limb'd and full grown:

(7.453-56)

Here the poem insists that the creatures born out of the earth are already formed and, indeed, full grown. Looking back at the growth of the flowers, we can see a similar pre-formation, in the blooming herbs that “sudden flow'rd / Op'ning thir various color.” Here color, the object of the opening, is not literally opened. Rather, color is, by the opening of the flower, displayed: the color of the herbs' flowers, then, is revealed, not formed, through their growth into the world. This display posits color to

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<sup>84</sup> Juliet Cummins also finds signals of the proprietary, feminine role of matter, and of the mother earth, in creation. However, she asserts that “the masculine agents in Milton's Creation...are dominant and formative,” and even present after the first generation occurs (96). See Juliet Lucy Cummins, “Milton's Gods and the Matter of Creation,” *Milton Studies* 40 (2002): 81-105.

be an inherent quality once occluded and, by mirroring the opening and revealing process of giving birth, points retroactively to the womb as the space in which the qualities of the created are pre-determined. In creation, gestation and formation are obscured from view, hidden in the earth's womb and revealed only in retrospect.

This pre-formation and predetermination in the womb is significant for our reading of Milton's representation of creation in part because of its consequences for the way seventeenth-century anatomists took reproduction to occur. As Thomas Laqueur testifies, many early modern thinkers departed from the Aristotelian model of creation and generation (that model which critics take Milton to follow). Instead of asserting that human form could be attributed only to the father, who printed that form onto the matter of mother, early modern anatomists thought it a distinct possibility that women, like men, contributed to the form of the child. Thus, Vesalius, among others, proposes that both the male and the female produce seed which combines to make human form (116), while William Harvey concludes that women have within them an egg or "primordium" which is "both a material and efficient cause of generation."<sup>85</sup> As much as we take into account the Aristotelian model of

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<sup>85</sup> As Laqueur attests, "Harvey's account borders on parthenogenesis," and his analysis lends itself in the seventeenth-century to accusations that he has potentially discounted men from the generative process at all (144). Sally Shuttleworth, among others, argues that Laqueur oversimplifies historical complexities in order to create a clean, easy-to-read narrative. Indeed, Jane Cadden, who published *Meanings of Sex Difference* in part as a refutation of Laqueur's apparent oversimplification of medical

creation when we read *Paradise Lost*, we ought also to consider these accounts of generation in our reading of the birth of plants, animals, and humans out of the earth. For when the poem locates the formation of the created in the womb of the earth and prior to their birth, it raises the possibility that the earth, like the human mother, made some contribution to created form. The form of the created is of the mother as much as it is of God's design.

The importance of the proprietary role of the mother earth in the creative process can hardly be overstated, for her fertility not only makes Eden an idyllic space. The earth's contribution to the creative process also effects a maternally- and

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history, argues that medieval and early modern notions of sex were more varied than Laqueur suggests, and not reduced to a binary opposition between Aristotelian and Galenic models (117-9). However, Cadden seems to be in agreement with Laqueur that the "scholastic authors" of the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries were faced with a number of questions about the generative process: "How do children come to resemble their fathers? their mothers? Has nature made two seeds to serve one purpose? Or one seed for no purpose? or similar structures for different purposes?" (119) and that William Harvey presented his theory as a "purportedly novel formulation" (118)—i.e. as a new way of answering the question. See Sally Shuttleworth, review of *Making Sex: Body and Gender from the Greeks to Freud*, *Journal of the History of Sexuality* 3, no. 4 (Apr. 1993): 633-5; and Joan Cadden, *Meanings of Sex Difference in the Middle Ages: Medicine, Science, and Culture* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1993).

materially-based break from the original unity of God's omnipresent being, and establishes a difference between earthly ontology and existence and the perfect cosmological framework that surrounds it.<sup>86</sup> We find this break, for example, in Adam and Eve's prayer, in which they enjoin the sun, the moon, and even the circling atoms to praise God:

Thou Sun, of this great World both Eye and Soul,  
Acknowledge him thy Greater, sound his praise  
In thy eternal course, both when thou climb'st,  
And when high Noon hast gain'd, and when thou fall'st.  
Moon, that now meet'st the orient Sun, now fli'st  
With the fixt Stars, fixt in thir Orb that flies,  
And yee five other wand'ring Fires that move  
In mystic Dance not without Song, resound  
His praise, who out of Darkness call'd up Light.  
Air, and ye Elements the eldest birth  
Of Nature's Womb, that in quaternion run  
Perpetual Circle, multiform, and mix  
And nourish all things, let your ceaseless change  
Vary to our great Maker still new praise.

(5.171-84)

Here the poem articulates the tension between the historical time which is forwarded by generative fecundity, and the a-historicity sustained by the circular, repetitive

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<sup>86</sup> As will become clear by the end of this chapter, I imagine generative creation to follow up on the difference and historicity inscribed into language and heavenly being at God's proclamation of the Son.



movements of the planets, the heavenly spheres, and the stars. The first nine lines of Adam and Eve's morning orison describe the "eternal" and "fixt" pattern of cosmological movement.<sup>87</sup> This "eternal course" provides Adam and Eve with a night and day which, from their perspective, results from the ascension and decline of the sun. Focusing on the elements born of "Nature's womb," the last six lines describe the microcosmic mirror of the cosmological pattern outlined by the earlier lines: the earth, air, fire, and water move in a "Perpetual Circle." The passage seems to display the perfect repetition, a-historicity, and correspondence which rules over prelapsarian Edenic life.

Yet, as the elements "nourish all things," they support a growth that challenges the circular, timeless formal structure the poet initially describes. For the nourishers of growth, the "eldest birth[s]" of "Nature's Womb," instigate and sustain changes over time that are at odds with the repetitive, circular motion they seem to mimic microcosmically. That is, nature's "eldest births" effect and encourage growth and floral accumulation which extends beyond the night-and-day boundaries set by cosmological circulations:

Adam, well may we labor still to dress  
This Garden, still to tend Plant, Herb and Flow'r,  
Our pleasant task enjoin'd, but till more hands  
Aid us, the work under our labor grows,  
Luxurious by restraint; what we by day  
Lop overgrown, or prune, or prop, or bind,

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<sup>87</sup> Note the echo in this description of Eve's own a-historical stagnation before her mirror image: "...there had I fixt / Mine eyes till now..." (4.465-66).

One night or two with wanton growth derides  
Tending to wild.

(9.205-12)

Here, Eve expresses her fear that the overabundance of nature will inevitably change the landscape, and make it impossible to sustain Eden as it is. Arguing that she and Adam ought to divide their labors, she asserts that the “wanton growth” of nature overwhelms nocturnal boundaries: over a period of one or more nights, the plants continue to grow, and thus reject the cosmological order of repetition and return that defines the repetitive exchange of night for day.

Thus, Eve explicitly posits overabundance and growth as the source and mark of linear temporality in Eden. Today is different from yesterday because the plants born of the earth sustain a trajectory of accumulation that surpasses the cyclical and repetitive temporality of the formal framework of earthly being. Obtaining changes over time which are at specific odds with the a-historicity of the perfect cosmological cycle, overgrowth provides Adam and Eve with the historical context in which they live. The earth mother, who suddenly brings forth these elements, and these vines and plants, also brings forth linear time.

The historicity that the mother earth births is essential to Milton’s conception of the experience of being human—distinct from God, set apart from the sublime, gifted with free will, and gifted with the experience of authoring and interpreting texts. In fact, according to God’s own self-justifying words, free will, writing, reading and historicity are intertwined:

So without least impulse or shadow of Fate,  
Or aught by me immutably foreseen,

They trespass, Authors to themselves in all  
Both what they judge and what they choose; for so  
I form'd them free, and free they must remain,  
Till they enthrall themselves...

(3.120-5)

Marshall Grossman has observed that just as Milton becomes and discovers himself to be an authorial Milton in the process of reading the poem he has authored, so Adam and Eve author themselves into historical roles and retrospectively read themselves as the authors of their own acts. Thus, authorship and free will emerge as the ability to experience the self over time, according to a series of choices and actions taken specifically within a historical context, one in which the present self is different from (and yet defined according to) the past self who made choices and wrote those choices into the text of history.<sup>88</sup> Notably, this successive and continual negotiation defines the human experience, and will close only at the end of linear time and difference, when the self is fulfilled and fully realized, when the self “already written into the degenerate heart” (Grossman, 8) becomes immediate and, indeed, is no longer written.

Important for my examination of allegory, God’s metaphor of authorship posits a model of signification that is wrapped up with history and difference; for the

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<sup>88</sup> My reading follows Grossman’s “contention that we may take this metaphoric association of authoring and acting within time very seriously” and thus “draw[s] out its implications until they form a modus operandi for the reading of *Paradise Lost*.” See Marshall Grossman, “*Authors to Themselves*,” p. 1.

retrospective, historically bounded, and mediated identification of the self according to past writings is based in the impossibility of absolutely knowing and identifying the self, and in the difference between the true self and the self written into history. This difference is the allegorical difference between the signifier and the referent, the “I” and the self to which it refers. It is only because the “I” that Eve authors by her actions does not absolutely identify who she is, does not fix or enthrall her in the a-historical grasp of absolute identity, that Eve can successively and progressively “judge” and “choose” who she is and who she will be. Textually speaking, because the representation that Eve authors only approximates her, because she can depart from this fleeting and inexact representation, Eve can make new choices that differ from the ones she made before, and can in turn become the historically-informed author of a newly-inscribed self. That is, difference, indeed allegorical difference, makes it possible for the sinful Eve to be eventually redeemed. She can continue her historical negotiation until the end, until the authored Eve and the true Eve fuse, until the difference between representation and truth collapse, until the writing on the degenerate heart simply is.<sup>89</sup>

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<sup>89</sup> Thus, though I have argued that Eve’s identification of her future self in heaven is apt, the threat of Eve’s identification with her mirror image lies in the possibility of bypassing history in favor of the unity and identification which will be achieved at the end of days, of Eve never exercising free will or becoming who she will decide to be.

Thus, we can conclude that by pointing to the ur-mother earth as the original source of historicity, the original break from the cyclical pattern of day and night, *Paradise Lost* also posits the ur-mother to be the material basis of allegory in the created world, of language based in difference and written into history. In fact, we find traces of creation's generative history in Book 5 of *Paradise Lost*, when the angel Raphael visits and lunches with Adam and Eve and explains to them why the angels eat. In this speech, Raphael implicitly delineates the likeness and difference which make allegory both necessary and possible:

O *Adam*, one Almighty is, from whom  
All things proceed, and up to him return,  
If not depriv'd from good, created all,  
Indu'd with various forms, various degrees  
Of substance, and in things that live, of life;  
But more refin'd, more spirituous, and pure,  
As nearer to him plac't or nearer tending  
Each in thir several active Spheres assign'd,  
Till body up to spirit work, in bounds  
Proportion'd to each kind. So from the root  
Springs lighter the green stalk, from thence the leaves  
More aery, last the bright consummate flow'r  
Spirits odorus breathes: flow'rs and thir fruit  
Man's nourishment, by gradual scale sublim'd  
To vital spirits aspire, to animal,  
To intellectual, give both life and sense,  
Fancy and understanding, whence the Soul  
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.

(5.469-90)

Raphael's explanation for why angels and humans can dine on the same food confirms the poet's earlier invocation of alchemy as an aspirational process. Digestion, it seems, achieves the same kind of purification, the same climbing up the chain of being, attempted by alchemists who "by fire / Of sooty coal...Can turn, or holds it possible to turn / Metals of drossiest Ore to perfect Gold / As from the Mine" (440-43). Thus, Raphael's speech validates his later pondering that the earth might "be but the shadow of Heav'n, and things therein / Each to other life, more than on earth is thought" (5.575-6). Raphael's optimistic speculation, as Stephen Fallon suggests, "minimizes the ontological distance between angel and men."<sup>90</sup>

Indeed, the ontological continuum Raphael describes here seems preemptively to moderate Raphael's anxiety about his rhetorical task of relating heavenly history to Adam:

High matter thou injoin'st me, O prime of men,  
Sad task and hard, for how shall I relate  
To human sense th' invisible exploits  
Of warring Spirits; how without remorse  
The ruin of so many glorious once

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<sup>90</sup> Stephen Fallon, *Milton Among the Philosophers* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1991), p. 143. See also John Leonard, ed. *Paradise Lost* (New York: Penguin Publishers, 2000), note on 5.574-76, p. 362, in which he asserts that Milton "stresses the likeness of the two worlds, not their differences."

And perfet while they stood; how last unfold  
The secrets of another World, perhaps  
Not lawful to reveal? Yet for thy good  
This is dispens't, and what surmounts the reach  
Of human sense, I shall delineate so,  
By lik'ning spiritual to corporal forms,  
As may express them best...

(5.563-73)

Though Raphael is worried about fulfilling the rhetorical task assigned to him by Adam's query, he finds a way to accommodate "high matter" to "human sense." Taking human and angelic intellect to be "Differing in degree, but of kind the same" (5.490), Raphael overcomes these quantitative variances by lowering his diction to "human sense," by rhetorically descending the great chain of being that connects humans with the sublime. Raphael has discovered an epistemological basis for claiming that his language bridges and accommodates the distance between the heavenly and the earthly.

However, I think we can read in Raphael's alchemical and digestive descriptions some signals that we ought to take his rhetorical anxieties more seriously—that, as Gordon Teskey alleges, "the events described entirely exceed anything on the level of human senses."<sup>91</sup> For Raphael's anxiety and his diction compromise his insistence on ontological continuity, and betray the ontological difference which requires him to accommodate, for example, "spiritual" into "corporal forms."

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<sup>91</sup> Gordon Teskey, ed. *Paradise Lost*, note to 5.571-73, p. 122.

This difference can be traced to the ontological difference which God initiates when He retires from the material substratum and gives it individual being, and when He makes humans into the children of the dialectical, reproductive processs in which God engages when His spirit converses with the material substratum. In fact, Raphael refers to this process when he explains that “things that live” inhabit “bounds / Proportioned to each kind” (5.478-9). According to the OED, “kind” refers to “birth,” and to those characteristics and states of being that can be attributed to one’s birthright.<sup>92</sup> As the OED notes, Milton’s use of “kind” in *Eikonoklastes* follows this definition, in which Milton alleges that Charles’s “bitter vehemence against his Judges and accusers” at the time of his execution imitates “not our Saviour, but his Grand-mother Mary Queen of Scots, as also in the most of his other scruples, exceptions and evasion: and from whom he seems to heav learnt, as it were by heart, *or els by kind*, that which is thought by his admirers to be the most vetuous, most manly, most Christian, and most Martyr-like of his words and speches heer, and of his answers and behaviour at his Tryall” (my italics, 597). Milton complains here that Charles I inherited his speech from his grandmother, either by nurture (by heart) or by nature (by kind). This emphasis on grand-maternal inheritance supports Milton’s repeated accusation that bad kings suffer from too much feminine influence. In

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<sup>92</sup> Oxford English Dictionary, “kind” n. I. abstract sense, Second Edition 1989.



addition to his unmanly submission to his Catholic wife, Charles I has too much of his Catholic grandmother in him.<sup>93</sup>

When Raphael asserts that the members of the continuum inhabit “bounds / Proportion’d to each kind,” we can hear an echo of Milton’s concern about paternal versus maternal influence and inheritance. Read in light of its generative referent, “kind” here hints at the parentage which appears to back the hierarchy of humans and angels. The angels, whose existence precedes the generative creation outlined in Book 7, are individuated beings, and thus are not entirely unified with God. Yet, their relationship with God is a close one, in part because it is not mediated by the maternal, material influence. That is, Raphael’s reference to “kind” suggests that the difference between humans and angels lies in God’s creative innovation, His reproductive creation of humankind and, more specifically, the degree to which He gives over to the influence of the maternal matter in the creative process. The

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<sup>93</sup> According to Marshall Grossman, Milton sets Charles’s protests and emulation of Mary Queen of Scots in contrast with the sacrificial Son’s refusal to cast judgment on his accusers. Inscribing “the relations of king and parliament...rhetorically...within the relations of man and creator” (159), *Eikonoklastes* takes Charles I’s emulation of his grandmother to constitute a failure to affirm the Parliamentary authority validated by its original creation of king, thereby subjecting himself to a “female control” which ought to be read only as a “signifier” of “providential [i.e., paternal] meaning” (160). See “Servile / Sterile / Style: Milton and the Question of Woman.”

respective positions of the humans and the angels on the hierarchical ladder are determined by the degree to which matter—i.e., the maternal influence—informs their ontology.

This possibility is supported by the fact that the gender difference inscribed into the generative process is, according to the poem, one of the things that most readily distinguishes humans from angels. While Adam and Eve are of different sex, the angels cross genders and bodies as easily as they move from the heaven to the earth: “...and obstacle find none / Of membrane, joynt, or limb, exclusive barrs” (8.624-5). It also explains how human beings at once have intellectual capacities only quantitatively distinct from those of the angels—“Differing in degree, but of kind the same”—and find themselves inhabiting distinct “bounds / Proportion’d to each kind”: humans are made of the same, monistic stuff as the angels, but they nevertheless stand on the rung of the ontological ladder that duly reflects the unique influence of the maternal mother on human being, and the gender differentiation that precedes and leads to human ontology.

What overcomes this ontological difference is, as I have argued, love. In fact, we see in Raphael’s alchemical/digestive process the ideal union I earlier took to be inexactly simulated by Adam and Eve, and anticipated as essential to the assimilation of the material substratum into God. For as Adam and Eve shed the weight of their material being, they do not leave material behind: they shrink their and “her” distance from God. Their upward hierarchical movement, which sublimes matter into the original *ens*, re-unites the mother and father in metaphorical consummation, in a union which collapses the difference between mother and father. Moving up the great

chain of being, then, represents both an idealized alchemical/digestive process and an idealized sexual union: the re-incorporation of matter into the sublime omnipresence which will bring gendered lovers from a tenuous state of union—“hand in hand” and yet “solitary” (12.648-9)—to a state of being all.

By this union, humankind will also relinquish that mode of reasoning which is bound up with difference, historicity, and language. Raphael makes this connection clear by his reference to “discursive” reasoning which, so John Leonard tells us, involves “the arguing from premises to conclusions.”<sup>94</sup> Human thinking, in contrast with the immediacy of angelic intuition, occurs as a process unfolding over linear time, proceeding from knowns (premises) to heretofore unknowns (conclusions) which are the product of historical intellectual acts. Bound up in linear temporality, discursive thinking, like talk or discourse, does not reach absolute, timeless truth. Thus, discursive thinking will always be metaphorical—inexactly understanding and expressing the sublime through approximations which reflect humans’ metaphorical relationships to God and their temporal constraints.<sup>95</sup> This is why Raphael must accommodate sublime truth to Adam: he must speak to Adam through a series of approximate representations which, until the end of days—until the female and the

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<sup>94</sup> See Leonard, ed., *Paradise Lost*, note to 5.488, p. 361.

<sup>95</sup> John Rumrich describes humankind’s ontological state as a “suspension between God and Satan” (101). He goes on to say that “[h]umanity subsists in a progressive, metaphorical version of eternal truth” (103). Humans, he posits, are metaphors of God. See pp. 99-103.

male, the parent and the child, and the sign and the referent collapse into one—will continue to approach, but will never absolutely attain, sublime truth, the first and final “conclusion” of all discursive reasoning. And, as I have shown, he attributes this suspension from absolute truth, and even from heaven, to human beings’ particular kinship.

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So far I have outlined and emphasized the connections that *Paradise Lost* makes between generative creation, human ontology, free will, and allegory. I would now like to focus on the singular character around whom all of these interconnected themes coalesce—the figure of Sin. Sin, as I argued in chapter 1, erupts into the strained semiotic order of heaven, figuring at once Satan’s attempt to fuse word and thing and the impossibility of sustaining this fusion in the context of the historicity that God’s proclamation of the Son initiated. Here I want to revisit the tension between Sin’s rhetorical representation as an embodiment of Satan’s transgressive thoughts, and her historical-narrative roles as an allegory of the necessarily allegorical state of language. This time, however, I will consider these tensions in light of the linguistic and rhetorical distinctions that emerge between Sin’s status as an incestuous daughter and mother, and her role as builder of a bridge that connects hell to earth. In so doing, I will bring to light the connections that Milton makes between ontology and allegory. More specifically, I will explain the maternal and material basis of Milton’s insistence that allegory—i.e., speaking that is other to the truth it tells—is

the only apt linguistic condition for humankind, the only linguistic condition that allows human beings to negotiate the difference between word and thing, and to author themselves within the context of historical time.

Born out of Satan's disobedient thoughts, Sin is immediately and intuitively named "Sin" (2.260-61). Thus, she appears to achieve rhetorically that identification, that unity of sign and self, which God has relinquished through the proclamation of the Son: she appears to be not different from the thoughts out of which she is born, but rather to be the very thing, sin. This representation betrays what Gordon Teskey has called the violence of personification, which suppresses the difference between the abstract and the embodiment, the referent of the common versus the referent of the proper noun.<sup>96</sup>

Importantly, Sin's rhetorical presentation is at odds with the specific, generative process alluded to in her birth:

All on a sudden miserable pain  
Surprised thee: dim thine eyes and dizzy swum  
In darkness while thy head flames thick and fast  
Threw forth till on the left side op'ning wide,  
Likest to thee in shape and count'nance bright  
(Then shining Heavn'ly fair) a goddess armed  
Out of thy head I sprung! Amazement seized  
All th' host of Heav'n. Back they recoiled afraid  
At first and called me "Sin" and for a sign  
Portentous held me.

(2.752-61)

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<sup>96</sup>See introduction and chapter 1.

Sin's literary and even iconic status as an embodiment and pure projection of Satan's thoughts tends to erase the difference between Satan's abstract idea and Sin's female form—in more specific, generative terms, the difference between the thoughts of the father and the female offspring that his intellectual broodings appear to beget. That is, though Sin is born without a mediating mother, and thus not out of the dialectical and generative context I have been outlining, and though Satan views Sin as his “perfect image” (764), the biological resonances of the description of her birth suggest a difference between Sin and the father who thinks of and identifies with her.<sup>97</sup> As John Mulryan has noted, Satan's birth pains inexactly prefigure those to be suffered by human mothers: “Satan is struck down, rendered powerless, by his own idea, an unexpected mother helpless in the throes of womanly pain.”<sup>98</sup> Though Mulryan is concerned here with Milton's reworking of the Minerva (i.e., Athena) myth, his attention to the pain of birth highlights the mimesis of this representation, and its explicit reference to future experiences of motherhood and childbirth. While Eve's like-but-different offspring sustain her historicity and thus reveal her difference from God, Sin's surprising, original, and violent birth realizes, concomitantly, both linguistic and procreative difference, thus requiring Satan to contend with the difference he wants to collapse. That is, when Satan gives birth to Sin, his thought is

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<sup>97</sup> See also 5.666, when Satan, instead of sleeping through the heavenly night like all of the other angels, spends it awake, “Deep malice thence *conceiving* and disdain” (my italics).

<sup>98</sup> John Mulryan, “Satan's Headache,” pp. 17-18.

violently translated at once into a sign and into a new being who only resembles him: as Sin explains to Satan, she was born “Likest to thee in shape and count’nance bright” (2.726).<sup>99</sup> Satan has written himself into the world and, viewing the product of his authorship, cannot wholly identify with it. Concomitantly, he has birthed a child who is only somewhat like himself.

God purges the disobedient, including Sin, out of heaven. Michael Lieb argues that *Paradise Lost* imagines this purging of the disobedient in terms of abortion and gastronomical excretion. His argument is based in part on two complementary premises: the first, that heaven is “the womb of bliss” (84); the second, that as “wasteful” excretions from the heavenly body, the fallen angels are “unnecessary, residual, or ultimately excremental” (88). The purged angels are both aborted and shat out of the heavenly body, the womb of unity.

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<sup>99</sup> Marshall Grossman, comparing the birth of Eve with the begetting of the Son, points out that only the Son “perfectly expresses the ‘I’ of the Father, whose eye cannot be evaded. The incarnation may thus be looked to as the literal inscription of the Son’s *embodiment* of the Father’s ‘head.’” See “Servile / Sterile / Style: Milton and the Question of Woman,” p. 153. This distinction also holds for a comparison of the Son and Sin. Though Sin, like the Son, is figured as an embodiment of the head (i.e., or the thoughts that gestate within it), and though she, like the Son, “lacks a mother” (153), she is born as a sign different from its origins and thus threatens to achieve the “autonomous” (153) status granted to Eve. See chapter 1.

Lieb argues that when the angels are aborted and shat, they are “uncreated” (132), reduced to the divisions and discord that precede creation, and banished from the unity of the created heavenly body. However, his alignment of creation with unity, and uncreation with division, is difficult to synthesize with the poem’s representation of creation as a whole. Lieb notes that the creation of heaven brings the discordant and divided existence of chaos into a unified and created being, but he misses the division that such a unifying act requires: the fact that God joins the angels and heavenly being into a unified whole by building a “crystal wall” (6.860) between heaven and chaos, by distinguishing heaven from the chaotic reign which is exterior to it. I want to take note here of the division that is concomitant with creation in *Paradise Lost*, the separation of chaos from heaven, and of unlike things that the spirit effects when it conglobes “like things to like” (7.240). For this consideration will bring us to a broader understanding not only of creation, but also of the role of the purged, the residual, in the creative process.

Importantly, even as the angels are aborted and excreted out of the body of heaven, they are also pushed into the womb out of which a new creation will be born:

And Crystal wall of Heav’n, which op’ning wide,  
Roll’d inward, and a spacious Gap disclos’d  
Into the wasteful Deep; the monstrous sight  
Struck them with horror backward, but far worse  
Urg’d them behind; headlong themselves they threw  
Down from the verge of Heav’n, Eternal wrath  
Burn’d after them to the bottomless pit.

(6.856-66)



The disobedient angels are ejected out of the created, unified space of heaven and into the space of creative potential: when the disobedient fall through the opening in the “crystal wall” of heaven, they enter not only the “wasteful” space of heavenly excrement, but also chaos, the disordered maternal space out of which creation will be born.

Read in this light, Satan’s fall appears to be the first of what Lieb observes to be “assaults” of hidden space. For example, Lieb notes that when Satan looks on and then “assault[s]” Eden, he seems to be entering “a living organism that takes on characteristics of bodily functions” (69):

So on he fares, and to the border comes  
Of Eden, where delicious Paradise,  
Now nearer, Crowns with her enclosure green,  
As with a rural mound the champaign head  
Of a steep wilderness, whose hairy sides  
With thicket overgrown, grotesque and wild,  
Access deni’d.

(4.132-7)

The “living organism” of the Edenic landscape takes on the contradictory qualities of the innocent and the hyper-sexualized feminine character. Eden is innocent, and yet, as Lieb attests, implies Chaos: “the implication of Chaos is in the very description: ‘the “overgrown” or untempered ‘thicket,’ the ‘grotesque and wild’ ‘wilderness’ are integral parts of the scenery” (69). Satan breaches the verdant walls of Eden and enters into its overgrown and chaotic space, repeating willfully the movement he was compelled to make when he was purged out of heaven into the original chaotic, and yet fertile, space. This suggests that Satan and his followers are not simply shat out of

the heavenly body, but that they also enter a new, chaotic, fertile one. Thus, Satan and his followers are placed into a paradoxical ontological niche: they are wholly different from and antithetical to heavenly being, and yet they will be integral to—or at least a necessarily by-product of—the generative process out of which creation will be born.

In fact, I believe that Milton signals the ontological niche of the disobedient by use of a generative pun, “monstrous.” As Sara Read argues, “monstrous” in early modern parlance commonly functioned as a pun on menstrosus which reified early modern (and Biblical) associations of menstruation with filth, pollution, and evil. As Read attests, this rhetorical tradition and its implications for understanding menstruation were so strong that Jane Sharp, a seventeenth-century midwife, saw fit to refute it in “The Midwives Book.”<sup>100</sup> We see this pun potentially at play in Milton’s description of the fallen angels. Once fallen, Beelzebub will be known for his “monstrous size” (1.197); Satan will transform into a “monstrous serpent” (10.514); and the devils will take on the “monstrous shapes” (1.479) of Egyptian

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<sup>100</sup> Sara Read, ““Thy Righteousness is but a menstrual clout,”” *Early Modern Women: An Interdisciplinary Journal*, 3 (fall 2008): 1-25. See especially note 28, in which Read cites an excoriation of this rhetorical tradition by the seventeenth-century midwife, Jane Sharp. See also Jane Sharp, *The Midwives Book, or the Whole Art of Midwifry Discovered*, ed. Elaine Hobby (Oxford: Oxford University Press), 215.

mythology. Read in the simplest terms, Milton's repeated figuration of the devils as "monstrous" lends material weight to the spiritual filth that they represent.

In fact, this pun helps us to understand how the devils, when they are purged out of heaven and thrown into hell, are divorced from the influence of the father whose spirit catalyzes the generative process:

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,  
Abominable, inutterable, and worse  
Than Fables yet have feign'd, or fear conceiv'd,  
Gorgons and Hydras and Chimeras dire.

(2.622-28)

Part of the horror of the "Universe" in which the devils are imprisoned is the fact that, despite the absence of the paternal influence of the life-giving spirit, hell continues to generate new growth. That is, despite the all-encompassing presence of "death," and the fact that the "Nature" of this landscape never participated in the father/mother dialectic of creation, it (or she) nevertheless "breeds, / Perverse, all monstrous, all prodigious things..." As postlapsarian women produce menses—that filth which at once signals postlapsarian spiritual degradation and the absence of the paternal imprint—so the mother nature of hell produces unformed "monstrous....things" which, frighteningly, seem to take on their own life. Hell is the realm of the purged, where the stuff discarded from creation becomes the foundation of "Perverse, all monstrous, all prodigious things" and "Abominable, inutterable" being.

But I think there is something more complex going on here, for Milton's pun on menstros signals in generative (and gendered) terms the fact that the fallen angels are necessary by-products of the procreative process. In fact, the importance of the monstrous/menstros pun to Milton's understanding of the paradoxical ontological and spiritual niche that the fallen angels fill becomes even more clear if we consider seventeenth-century notions of just what menses is. As Laqueur describes, early modern anatomists took menses to be a surfeit of maternal material which, produced in preparation for the formation of children, was shed whether creation did, or did not, occur: that is, menses and afterbirth were considered to be the same thing. Reading Milton's representation of creation and his description of the devils with this in mind, we can understand the integral role that the devils play in created ontology, the way that monstrosity is produced out of the dialectic process from which, in hell, it is isolated. The "monstros" devils, it seems, are like the menstros by-products that are necessarily produced (and discarded) out of the dialectic of generative creation: they are, like the "tartareous dregs" which they resemble, "adverse" to life.

Ur-menses is produced because instead of commanding the creative process, the spirit takes on the roll of father, responding to the formal properties of the material substratum that He has infused with life. As such, it is the material signal of God's decision to relinquish His absolute power in favor of the creative dialectic—in favor of a process in which the spirit and the matter it infuses converse and, in so doing, make their own contributions to the form of the earth. As a necessary result of this process, ur-menses thus becomes analogous to the necessary spiritual and intellectual by-product of God's decision to let go the reigns of absolute power, to

make room in creation for wills that are counter to His own. More specifically, the adverse matter, the ur-menses, produced as a by-product of creation, signals in material terms the adversity that God must tolerate in order to create individuals—i.e., the absolute refusal to love that God must make possible in order to receive love as an expression of free will.<sup>101</sup> As some of the matter which has been individuated from God can prove adverse to the loving conversation that produces life, so some of the individual wills that this conversation creates can prove adverse to God himself.

This, I think, is important for our reading of the “monstrous” devils who are produced out of the matter of hell, but who eventually invade earth and tempt humankind. In brief, while the spirit discards menses from the creative process and relegates it to hell, thereby removing from created ontology the matter that is adverse to life, once Sin and Death build a bridge, they create a pathway by which adversity to God might enter the created context. The devils—those monstrous beings who were thrown out of heaven, tossed into hell, and blocked from the creative dialectic which produces and is implicit to earthly ontology—enter earth’s realm, and thereby manifest the potential adversity to God which is a necessarily by-product of the creation of free wills, and of the creative dialectic.

Moreover, the “monstrous” presence of the devils on earth demonstrates that the dialectic tension between the paternal imprint and the maternal matter which is inscribed into each human being’s individual ontology will resolve into absolute unity in only one of two antithetical ways: by a Christian’s choice to love God, and to be

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<sup>101</sup> See 3.103-11.

assimilated into the sublime *ens* at the end of days, or by her choice to reject Him, which will result in the reduction of her dialectic ontology to absolute death and monstrosity. That is, as Milton figures them, the menstros monsters who come to earth and tempt humankind into disobedience, manifest the possibility (inherent to creation but exaggerated by the fall and the building of Death and Sin's bridge) of choosing absolute difference from God, and of thus being discarded from the dialectic, generative process which births new life: banished to a state of eternal damnation, those who follow the devils will be confined to a world in which generation occurs without the infusion of the spirit, producing only menstros monsters.

This is important for our understanding of allegory because, rhetorically speaking, the monstrous/menstros devils represent the breaking point of metaphor: when attenuated resemblance gives way to pure antithesis, to an absolute difference which will never converse with or even refer to God again. This absolute difference culminates in the figure of Sin—that allegorical character who fuses a rejection of the generative dialectic with a collapse of language into itself.

In *Allegory and Violence*, Teskey argues that allegory is an expression of the desire to see the self in the 'imponderable otherness of nature and our equally imponderable embeddedness in nature,' and "to think of the self as the world and the world as the self" (107). This desire, and its potential resolution, is betrayed in the topos of "mutual devouring" (8), which, by incorporating the other into the self and the self into the other, collapses their "symmetrical otherness" (8). This mutual devouring confirms Teskey's notion that "[a]llegory oscillates between a project of

reference and a project of capture.” As a project of reference, allegory “refers upwards, anagogically, toward the absolute other” (8), but as a devouring form of rhetoric, allegory also reduces the other to a consumable and consuming whole, an all-encompassing “I” (8). This oscillation slows to a snail’s pace in Milton’s depiction of Sin. This pace and Sin’s story reveal Milton’s allegorical ethics, and the distinctions he makes between allegory, which refers to sublime truth, and idolatry, which attempts to capture meaning.

Though Sin begins, historically, as the eruption of difference, including gender difference, into the heavenly realm, in hell she is reduced to absoluteness, to the absence of difference and, indeed, to the collapse of the difference between the parent and child. This collapse begins with Satan’s sexual erasure of the difference between himself and his daughter, between his thoughts and their birth into a visible, readable signifier. That is, when Satan sleeps with his daughter, he collapses her different, individuated being into an incestuous sexual union which mimics and mocks the idealized union which will fuse Adam and Eve, and God with the individuated maternal substratum He has created. Satan, who wants to project himself as the new origin of sublime absoluteness, the new defining and unspeakable “I,” devours difference by overcoming the distinction between himself and his offspring, by uniting with her in sexual intercourse.

This union produces Death, who, as God foretells, will gorge himself on “the draff and filth / Which man’s polluting Sin with taint hath shed” (10.630-1) until the Son hurls him into hell, where he will be eternally blocked from both the created and the sublime. Thus, Death forwards historical time, for by assimilating the “draff” or

“filth” produced by Sin into his un-being, he purifies creation, preparing it for its final assimilation into the *ens*. Difference-from-God, which is manifested on earth by this “filth,” thus becomes the basis of the non-being that, at the end of days, will stand as the absolute antithesis to the “All in All,” the Death to God’s life. Thusly dividing being from non-being, creation from residual filth, and preparing the way for human beings’ and matter’s collapse into the total being of God, Death contributes to human beings’ gradual movement out of the reign of difference and metaphor, and into the unity of the sublime.<sup>102</sup>

In a way, then, Death is always engaging with history. However, in hell, that history is overwhelmed by the a-historicity of the discarded, whose hellish ontology is defined by its antithetical state, its empty mimicking of the “all in all.” Thus, in hell Death suspends the creative dialectic and instead engages in the very devouring out of which he is born, incest. As Sin explains, Death rapes her, and a litter of insatiable hellhounds results:

Mee overtook his mother all dismay’d,  
And in embraces forcible and foul  
Ingend’ring with me, of that rape begot  
These yelling Monsters that with ceaseless cry

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<sup>102</sup> It is worth noting the striking similarity between my reading of this scene and Steven Knapp’s reading of William Collins’s “Ode to Fear,” in which the “incestuous mother...becomes the unwilling leader of a parade of allegorical monsters” (93): “Incest here is itself a figure: it stands for the compression of ordinary difference into an extreme and essentially reflexive identity” (93).



Surround me, as thou saw'st, hourly conceiv'd  
And hourly born, with sorrow infinite  
To me, for when they list, into the womb  
That bred them they return, and howl and gnaw  
My Bowels, thir repast; then bursting forth  
Afresh with conscious terrors vex me round,  
That rest or intermission none I find.

(2.792-802)

These hellhounds effect for Sin an entrapment akin to Eve's fixation before her mirror image. With offspring who refuse fully to individuate, to depart permanently from the womb, Sin is entrapped in a state of absolute a-historicity: suffering their eternal return, she is not offered the historical context in which to retrospectively read herself as mother of a new race, as the origin of beings different from herself. Sin simply is, and her authorship and experience of time collapse into a vortex of incest and identity.

That is, by returning to the womb of their mother and consuming her insides, the hellhounds collapse the difference potentially offered to them by their generative (if incestuous) creation, thereby enacting and mimicking the cyclical and absolute structure of heavenly cosmology in torturous, hellish form. Everything for them is eternal repetition, without change over time. Blocking Sin from the dialectical ontology and the historical freedom of the created, the hellhounds aptly fulfill the role of the literary children of Cerberus, who guards the river Styx and prevents the dead and living from crossing in and out of Hades: their appetites fix Sin in hell, block her from the dialectic of generative creation, and entrap her in the absoluteness of the anti-sublime. Thus, Sin, overcome by Death the devourer of difference, and suffering

the eternal return of the dogs born of her rape, becomes the central figure around which hellish a-historicity and a-maternality circulate: while Death, by devouring the “pollution” left by Sin on earth, sets up hell to be the absolute anti-thesis of the sublime “all in all,” Sin ostentatiously displays the suspension of the creative dialectic, and the end of historical motherhood, that is effected when adversity to God becomes the defining characteristic of being—or, more aptly, of un-being. That is, in hell, there is no motherhood, no creative dialectic marking or sustaining the difference between mother and child or the historical progress therein inscribed: there is only anti-maternal a-historicity, the absence of historical progress that is effected by the devouring of material and maternal difference.

Not coincidentally, all of this entrapment, this divorce from the sublime, figures Sin as a project of “capture” rather than “reference,” and exposes the meaninglessness of allegory divorced from the sublime ur-referent. That is, Sin is named by an abstract noun which Milton’s readers recognize as having a particular meaning. But because she is here captured by identity, entrapped in circumstances which divide her from the sublime will according to which she means “Sin,” she begins to lose that meaning.<sup>103</sup> What does she, a stagnant figure suffering the torments of violence, and obsequiously blocking the gates of hell, signify? What does

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<sup>103</sup> The Oxford English Dictionary defines sin as “[a]n act which is regarded as a transgression of the divine law and an offence against God; a violation (esp. willful or deliberate) of some religious or moral principle.” OED, “sin” n. 1.a. Second Edition 1989.

“Sin” mean if she is stuck in a state of identity and a-historicity which is entirely separate from the sublime?<sup>104</sup> Sin here certainly does not represent a transgression of the sublime will. She is difference devoured, nothing except antithesis, the absolute end of metaphorical difference, not engaging in an adverse struggle with sublime will, but simply banished from it. Thus, she becomes a figure at once anti-maternal and unallegorical: she does not experience or reflect the dialectic of creation, or derive meaning from her relationship with the sublime. She represents instead verbal idolatry: posing as meaningful but meaning nothing.

However, when Sin disobediently opens the gates of hell and builds a bridge to creation, she emerges again as a transgressor of providential design. Samuel Johnson’s infamous excoriation of the allegory of Sin and Death, then, misses the point:

Milton’s allegory of Sin and Death is undoubtedly faulty. Sin is indeed the mother of Death, and may be allowed to be the portress of hell ; but when they stop the journey of Satan, a journey described as real, and when Death offers him battle, the allegory is broken. That

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<sup>104</sup> Knapp similarly notes that the “moment of speculative leisure” described by Sin’s description of her time in hell—“Pensive here I sat” (2.777)—“endows her with an empirical consciousness wholly inexplicable in allegorical terms” (138). But while I take Milton to be consciously distinguishing between Sin’s allegorical status and her static, a-historical, hellish existence, Knapp alleges that Sin loses and regains her allegorical status because “Milton was simply indifferent to the mixing of literal and figurative agency” (136).

Sin and Death should have shewn the way to hell might have been allowed ; but they cannot facilitate the passage by building a bridge, because the difficulty of Satan's passage is described as real and sensible, and the bridge ought to be only figurative. The hell assigned to the rebellious spirits is described as not less local than the residence of man. It is placed in some distant part of space, separated from the regions of harmony and order by a chaotic waste and an unoccupied vacuity ; but Sin and Death worked up a 'mole of aggregated soil,' cemented with asphaltus ; a work too bulky for ideal architects.

This unskilful allegory appears to me one of the greatest faults of the poem ; and to this there was no temptation, but the author's opinion of its beauty. (185-86)

Johnson complains that Milton's allegory of Sin and Death, while at first perfectly allegorical, becomes too real to sustain its status as an allegory. Inappropriately given the tremendous task of constructing a material bridge that crosses a vast, chaotic space, Sin and Death stop fulfilling their allegoric roles and instead become agents in a "real" narrative story.

The trouble with the distinction Johnson wants to draw between "figurative" and "real and sensible" is that it falsely (and perhaps defensively) divides allegory from its ontological base: it posits Sin's allegorical presentation as a personification to contrast with her presentation as an active being (and especially as a being whose birth helped to precipitate difference and history).<sup>105</sup> But to make this distinction

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<sup>105</sup> Steven Knapp suggests that this is a defensive move. Eighteenth-century critics were afraid that conflating the figurative and the literal would confuse figurative

between rhetoric and reality is to overwrite the history that backs and sustains language, and to seek in language the kind of finality and stability made impossible by difference and historicity. That is, rhetoric and language for Milton do not achieve or establish truth: rather, they are part of a historical process in which each individual either approaches or departs from the truth that remains ineffable and unattainable until the apocalypse. Thus, Milton's Sin cannot be figured as a resting place for the reader, holding meaning so that it may be reliably and consistently found and understood. On the contrary, Sin becomes an allegorical figure, a meaningful figure, only when she enters the foray of created difference and historicity, when her meaning is understood within a historical context that requires language to negotiate its difference from sublime truth. Indeed, the stabilized meaning that Johnson seeks, this linguistic and rhetorical stagnancy, is only achieved against the grain of history, and against the grain of the dialectical, generative process out of which human beings and history are born. The figure of Sin ought not to be divided from her historical context for the same reasons that Eve's mirror image cannot capture Eve: because authoring and reading the self occurs over time, because that time is born out of maternal, material difference, because reading and knowing are dynamic processes reflecting our mediated access to sublime truth, not singular events that establish what truth is.

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and realistic genres, thereby potentially reducing being into a merely figurative state (2). See introduction.

When God creates humankind out of the maternal stuff of the material substratum, He voluntarily engages in a dialectical negotiation with the material mother of mankind, from whom He has retired His informing presence and will. The generative dialectic He initiates produces “adverse” remnants, which, in turn, signal humankind’s maternally-inherited otherness to and difference from God, and the implicit possibility of rejecting God which accompanies this inborn difference. In other words, monstrous matter displays the possibility for absolute difference-from-God that is built into the material substratum, and that is bequeathed to human beings. Thus, it represents both humankind’s ability to refuse God’s love and, in the end, the threat of eternal banishment that accompanies that refusal, for the adverse, the dregs, will not be incorporated into the ideal conversation which will bring God and his children into the absolute wholeness and union of the “All in All.” Instead, these dregs—including the original ur-placenta of creation, the monstrous devils tossed out of heaven, and the “filth” produced by Sin on earth—will be devoured by Death, will become the stuff of annihilation, and thus the basis of a mimicking and false absoluteness which is antithetical to heavenly ontology, and which turns out to be absolutely nothing.

Language anti-allegorical, language that “captures” truth outside of the generative and historical context which makes language and allegory necessary, also faces this dreadful end: false, idolatrous, rhetorical constructions will be relegated to their antithetical reign, lost to the meaninglessness of an identity not in conversation with the sublime. Readers who follow these rhetorical idols will lose their interpretative capabilities, their freedom to negotiate the difference between the signifier and the

sublime ur-referent, to choose and discover meaning in the gap between the text and the truth it accommodates. Indeed, as the poem suggests, when read outside of the context of history and attenuated difference, Sin will be sin not according to her transgressive role, but rather because she is so named. Her absolute beingness, her rhetorical “capture,” will erase and write over the original and final source of meaning and being—the eternal, stable, and determined “I am that I am” (Exodus 3:14), the father who releases creation into an individuated being, lets fly the signifiers that tentatively and progressively refer to Him, and waits for them to capture Him again.

Indeed, Sin’s role as a figure of identity and entrapment, and of anti-maternality and a-historicity, stand in stark contrast to the human mother with which this chapter began. For as Eve leaves her mirror image behind and exchanges an illusory identity for a world of difference, she becomes a willing and free participant in a history which will be constituted in part by her actions and choices—actions and choices that are motivated and informed by the fact that Eve negotiates the difference between the “I” and the self. Moreover, by this departure from an illusory identity, Eve becomes the mother of mankind, the woman whose maternal role sustains the generative dialectic, and the gender difference, that was inscribed into history at the spirit’s creation of the earth. Eve, an active and willing participant in and reader of the world of difference into which she was born, acts and chooses within that history, and thus helps to forward the progression toward the sublime “all in all.” In contrast, Sin, the anti-maternal, anti-allegorical figure of hell, demonstrates in rhetorical and maternal/material terms the erasure of history and the deprivation of life that results,

necessarily, from absolute adversity to God, and the absence of meaning that is effected when someone other-than-God—namely, Satan—attempts to achieve the absolute rhetorical identity that can only be reclaimed at the assimilation of all life into the “all in all.”



## Chapter 4: Allegorical Ethics and Universal Language Schemas

Be of good courage, I begin to feel  
Some rousing motions in me which dispose  
To something extraordinary my thoughts.

(*Samson Agonistes*)<sup>106</sup>

According to Victoria Kahn, *Samson Agonistes* displays how an aesthetic experience—for example, the experience of reading a play—can rouse hermeneutic, and indeed political, activity. She locates one of the play’s primary spurs to such activity in “the deliberate opacity of [the play’s reference to] Samson’s rousing motions” by which “the reader is provoked to a sublime activity of interpretation which is itself rousing. In [Walter] Benjamin’s vocabulary, the aesthetic appearance of totality is extinguished by a strange and fragmentary ostentation that provokes a surplus of interpretation; in Milton’s vocabulary, sight is displaced by reading.”<sup>107</sup> Given Kahn’s description of this provocation to hermeneutic activity, what she calls “opacity” might be akin to what I have been calling allegorical difference—the

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<sup>106</sup> Milton, John, *Samson Agonistes*, in *John Milton: Complete Poems and Major Prose*, ed. Merritt Hughes (New Jersey: Prentice Hall, 1957), pp. 548-93, lines. 1381-83.

<sup>107</sup> Victoria Kahn, “Aesthetics as critique: Tragedy and *Trauerspiel* in *Samson Agonistes*,” in *Reading Renaissance Ethics*, ed. Marshall Grossman (New York: Routledge, 2007), pp. 104-27, esp. p. 119.

difference between language and the truth to which it refers. “[R]ousing motions” provokes a “surplus of interpretation” because it so ostentatiously fails to capture what it means to say.

According to Kahn, the hermeneutic activity provoked by linguistic “opacity” is an essential part of Milton’s aesthetic strategy. By provoking hermeneutic activity, *Samson Agonistes* offers an aesthetic alternative to Restoration drama, which arrested such interpretation and action by encouraging audience members to wallow in “sentiment and pity” (114) for the suffering (and seemingly powerless) characters onstage. Contrary to the predominant Restoration aesthetic, Milton’s play aims not to incapacitate audiences whose passions have been aroused, but rather to stimulate them to take intellectual, hermeneutic, and political action. “The goal of *Samson Agonistes* is to turn such passions into action, to make passion the spur to action, through the mediation of dramatic representation or aesthetic form” (114): if nothing else, *Samson Agonistes* provokes its readers to think about what “rousing motions” means.<sup>108</sup>

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<sup>108</sup> Kahn’s assertion that Milton sets out Samson as an exemplar of political activity seems to accord with Feisal G. Mohamed’s argument that the play “provides a preponderance of evidence pointing to Samson’s heroic status” (329). It must be noted, however, that the violent end of *Samson Agonistes* has historically raised many questions about whether the play unequivocally encourages such activity in all of its forms. For example, David Norbrook compares Samson’s actions with those of Christ in *Paradise Regained*: “the contrast between [*Samson Agonistes*] and *Paradise*

This, I think, is a helpful jumping off point for understanding what I take to be the confrontational, polemical status of *Paradise Lost* in the cultural and intellectual milieu of the Restoration. For while Kahn sees linguistic “opacity” in *Samson Agonistes* overturning a dramatic aesthetic that supported Restoration ideology by encouraging intellectual, hermeneutic, and political complacency, I see Milton in *Paradise Lost* emphasizing the allegorical nature of his language in order to counter and confront a Restoration ideology which itself threatened to subdue, if not halt, hermeneutic activity: the idea of a universal language schema. According to its proponents, a universal language schema would perfect language by capturing the thing in a word, and would, by erasing the difference between speaking and truth make hermeneutic activity (i.e., interpretation) redundant.

As David Cram notes, while the notion of a universal language schema circulated in England from the mid-seventeenth century onwards, it gained significant support in the years after the Restoration.<sup>109</sup> Most notably, John Wilkins, a founding

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*Regained* presents us with different responses to the question of action that may have been appropriate to each circumstance, rather than a clear contrast between godly passivity and ungodly action” (139). See Feisal G. Mohamed, “Confronting Religious Violence: Milton’s *Samson Agonistes*,” *PMLA* 120, no. 2 (March 2005): 327-40; and David Norbrook, “Republican Occasions in *Paradise Regained* and *Samson Agonistes*,” *Milton Studies* 42 (2003): 122-48.

<sup>109</sup> David Cram, “Universal Language Schemes in Seventeenth-Century Britain,” *Histoire Epistémologie Language* 7, no. 2 (1985): pp. 35-36.

fellow of the Royal Society, published *An Essay Towards a Real Character, and a Philosophical Language*, in which he promised to design a language that captured *what is*, thereby authoritatively determining what the English people could take to be true. This notion, of course, runs counter to the allegorical ethics that are so prominent in *Paradise Lost*. For, as I have already demonstrated, the poem deems language to be an inexact mediator of the sublime, and takes reading to be an active process of judging and choosing that is provoked by the insufficiency of language to tell us exactly *what is*, to tell us a definitive truth. Thus, whereas proponents of universal language schemas promised to eliminate hermeneutic activity, *Paradise Lost* asserts that linguistic “opacity,” and the hermeneutic activity that it inspires, are inevitable aspects of the human condition—of being different from God and thus of speaking a language that does not capture truth.

In this chapter, I want to draw out the contrasts between the universal language schema proposed by Wilkins, and the linguistic ethics of *Paradise Lost*. In so doing, I will show that Milton’s poem not only offers an alternative to, but actually purposefully challenges, the totalizing linguistics to which Wilkins and other proponents of universal language schemas aspired. I will begin by explaining how *Paradise Lost* re-applies a rhetorical strategy that Milton had already used, in the mid-seventeenth century, to counter Prelates, Presbyterians, and Charles I’s various attempts to suppress individual hermeneutic activity. More specifically, I will demonstrate that *Areopagitica*, *Eikonoklastes*, and *Paradise Lost* all overturn the metaphors by which figures of political, theological, and intellectual authority seek to establish what is true by pointing out their metaphorical standing—i.e., the fact that

truth always exceeds our capacity to know and represent it. By so doing, Milton insists that they can never determine definitively what truth is, and, perhaps more importantly, that they can never exclude the activity of interpretation from the reading (or hearing) process.

In fact, in this chapter I will draw a continuous line between the polemics of *Eikonoklastes* and *Areopagitica*, in which Milton takes aim at the architectural metaphor by which Adam Steuart validates church hierarchy, and the polemics of *Paradise Lost*, in which Milton exposes the futility of John Wilkins's attempt to impose his orderly linguistic framework onto the natural world, of his desire to establish the form and content of truth and cease hermeneutic activity. I will show that Milton counters this linguistic epistemological model, as he did with Steuart's architectural metaphor, by asserting that truth exceeds it. More specifically, Milton emphasizes the difference between the logic that is inscribed into Wilkins's language and the complicated and even ineffable ontology of the created world. Moreover, by turning the serpent in the garden of Eden into a sort of Wilkinsonian character who articulates the epistemology and echoes the linguistic idealism found in Wilkins's *Essay*, Milton suggests that the ideology of the universal language schema motivates Eve's decision to eat the forbidden fruit. Eve falls because she, like Wilkins, forgets that language stands in an allegorical relationship to truth, because she, like Wilkins, privileges the logic of language over her experience of the world, over the material text—the natural world—which God Himself left for her to read. She falls because instead of engaging in the hermeneutic activity invited by the "opacity" of the prohibition's allegorical language, she reads as if words told her the absolute truth.

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In *Zerubbabel to Sanballat and Tobiah*, Adam Steuart, a Presbyterian and that infamous “A.S.” of Milton’s “On the New Forcers of Conscience under the Long Parliament,” responds to Congregationalist claims of hermeneutic and theological independence and self-determination by contending that only a central authority (i.e., the Presbyterian synod) should decide on matters of theology, and that theological tenets ought to be disseminated from this centralized place of authority to the congregations spread across England.<sup>110</sup> In an introductory letter “To Monsieur Buchanan, a Scottish Gentleman at London,” Steuart argues that disrupting this hierarchical system will weaken the church:

And is not this Communion [of a united holy church] extreamly weakened by means of the distractions of the severall members of the Body, and by reason of the obstruction of the Vessells, which should serve her as so many Conduit-pipes? How should this Spirit freely passe up and downe from one part of the Body to the other, for the entire aggregation of the Body of the Saints, by its influence if a singularity of Discipline, as a thick Hedge, interpose, and choake up its way? How should ever this Body grow into a perfect man,

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<sup>110</sup> Steuart, Adam, *Zerubbabel to Saballat and Tobiah: or, The first part of the duply to M.S. alias Two brethren*, 2nd ed. (London: John Field, 1645), in Early English Books Online, [http://gateway.proquest.com.proxy-um.researchport.umd.edu/openurl?ctx\\_ver=Z39.882003&res\\_id=xri:eebo&rft\\_id=xri:eebo:citation:99868747](http://gateway.proquest.com.proxy-um.researchport.umd.edu/openurl?ctx_ver=Z39.882003&res_id=xri:eebo&rft_id=xri:eebo:citation:99868747)

according to the measure of that perfect state of Christ in all its joints, if so be that the Foot have no need of the Eye; if the inferiour members disjoynt, and loose themselves from the noble parts, and the noble despise the lesse honourable, which yet are the more necessary? (5-6)

Steuart, hoping that Christians will achieve a “Communion”—a spiritual “Union” that emulates the “unity” of the Father and the Son—provides his readers with a metaphorical understanding of how Independency, and the free hermeneutic reign to which Independents aspire, make such a union impossible. By “choak[ing] up” “the Vessels” through which the “Spirit” circulates, the Independents disjoin “inferiour members” (such as feet) from the “noble parts” of the church “Body,” a body that aspires to “grow into a perfect man.”

Steuart’s reference to the “thick Hedge [that] interpose[s], and chaoke[s] up its way” invokes two complementary images. The first is of those rows of bushes which marked and maintained English property lines in the seventeenth century, thereby “interpos[ing]” the movement of animals and people across the countryside, and physically, economically, and politically dividing the inferior from the noble, the landed from the landless.<sup>111</sup> More importantly for our interests, the second image

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<sup>111</sup> See Oxford English Dictionary, “hedge,” n. 1a, 2nd ed. 1989: “A row of bushes or low trees (e.g. hawthorn, or privet) planted closely to form a boundary between pieces of land or at the sides of a road: the usual form of fence in England.” On how enclosures divided English classes and helped to precipitate social, political, and economic chaos in the seventeenth century, see Christopher Hill, *The World*

shows how Stuart aesthetically contrasts Presbyterian hierarchy with egalitarian Independency: the “thick Hedge” imagines a botanical body which, unlike the circulatory system Stuart describes, appears to be a congeries of branches and leaves devoid of system or design—one whose growth, like a parasitic vine suffocating its host, potentially “choake[s] up” the church Body.<sup>112</sup> Stuart’s metaphor indicates not only that Independency disrupts the circulatory system he sketches, but also that, as a growing and tangled conglomerate of competing beliefs, it fails to display the systematic certainty which Stuart validates church hierarchy—that is, the circulatory metaphor by which Stuart explains hierarchy’s importance to spiritual “Communion.” The “thick Hedge” is dismissed because it cannot be incorporated into the orderly, anatomical system that Stuart uses to conceptualize and commend the right form of English society, and because, as a “thick Hedge,” it does not display the orderly and definitive truth so beautifully exhibited by the English church’s emulation of the “perfect man.”

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*Turned Upside Down* (London: Penguin, 1975), esp. chapt. 3, “Masterless Men,” and chapt. 7, “Levellers and True Levellers”. See also Mark Kishlansky, *A Monarchy Transformed: Britain 1603-1714* (London: Penguin Books, 1996), esp. pp. 18-19.

<sup>112</sup> See Oxford English Dictionary, “choke,” v. 7, 2nd ed. 1989: “To kill (or injuriously affect) a plant, by depriving it of air and light. Often *fig.* (from the parable of the sower).”



Milton directly challenges this kind of evaluation of truth, which takes the certainty of a comprehensible system of organization, and the conformity of a body of people to a mechanistic metaphor of the circulatory system, to be a sign of right. In fact, Milton appears to have taken specific umbrage at the analogous evaluation of right that defines and dominates Stuart's text:

EZRA 4.1, 2,3.

The Adversaries of Judah came to Zerubbabel, and to the chiefe of the fathers, and said unto them : Let us build with you , for We seek your God, as ye do, and we do sacrifice unto him since the dayes of Esarhaddon king of Assur, which brought us up hither. But Zerubbabel, and Jeshua, and the rest of the chief of the fathers of Israel, said unto them, You have nothing to do with us, to build an house unto our God, and we ourselves together will build unto the Lord God of Israel.

Steuart places this quotation in the frontispiece of his text and draws an analogy between the characters in this Biblical story and the antagonists in contemporary theological and political debates. He alleges that while the Presbyterian synod, like the Jews who had escaped the Babylonian captivity, are set "upon the re-building, or the Reforming of the spirituall Temple" the schismatics, like Sanballat and Tobiah, are excluded from this project because they "discouraged the Worke-men, and retarded the Worke" (6). He then poses a rhetorical question to the schismatics of seventeenth-century England:

How can the Building of the Spirituall Temple be advanced, if the worke-men will needs doe their worke every one a part, and will not

maintaine a close correspondence, and understanding the one with the other? (6)

Steuart urges that the building of the spiritual temple requires each Christian to understand how his contribution fits into an authorized and agreed-upon design. If each determines his role independently, i.e., “every one a part,” then the construction of the temple will not “be advanced.”

Moreover, Steuart gives his architectural metaphor itself the deterministic force of the architectural design he describes. By imagining the ideal English society in architectural terms, Steuart alleges that difference is dangerous: like a misplaced stone, whatever diverges from his metaphorical architectural scheme threatens the stability of the ideal society he seeks rhetorically to uphold. Thus, Steuart’s metaphorical vehicle does not admit its difference from the tenor it seeks to accommodate—i.e., the form and structure of an ideal Christian society in touch with spiritual truth—but rather asserts itself as the foundation against which the ideal Christian society should be measured, and according to which the unity of design and purpose ought to be enforced.

In *Areopagitica*, published approximately eight months after the appearance of *Zerubbabel to Sanballat and Tobiah*, Milton exposes and embraces the difference that Steuart seeks to suppress. He opines that England can become “a Nation of Prophets, of Sages, and of Worthies” if the “opinions” born of “arguing...and writing” be let free, if men are allowed “to reassume the ill departed care of their Religion into their own hands again” (554). Yet, the Prelates, for fear “of sect and schism,” cry out against the unfettered, unmappable process of building the house of God:

As if, while the Temple of the Lord was building, some cutting, some squaring the marble, others hewing the cedars there should be a sort of irrational men who could not consider there must be many schisms and many dissections made in the quarry and in the timber, ere the house of God can be built. And when every stone is laid artfully together, it cannot be united into a continuity, it can but be contiguous in this world; neither can every peece of the building be of one form; nay rather the perfection consists in this, that out of many moderat varieties and brother dissimilitudes that are not vastly disproportional arises the goodly and graceful symmetry that commands the whole pile and structure. Let us therefore be more considerat builders, more wise in spirituall architecture, when great reformation is expected. (555)

Perhaps because they do not recognize that the architecture of the church is a kind of “spirituall architecture,” or that it stands in a metaphorical relationship to the sublime truth—i.e., to the true church that will emerge at the end of days—“irrational men” worry that building the house of God does not conform to earthly standards of sound architectural construction. Because the constructive metaphor by which they describe the ideal Christian society has come, inappropriately, to dominate their understanding of how the house of God ought to be built, of how religious truth is discovered, these men have lost sight of the difference between the metaphor and the spiritual thing it represents—the difference between earthly architecture, which is grounded in human experience, and “spirituall architecture,” which reaches toward the incomprehensible.

But even this distinction between the earthly and “spirituall” construction does not quite situate “spirituall architecture” in the progressive reaching toward truth. Milton also alerts his readers to the difference between the spiritual temple they build

and the final temple that will be realized at the end of days. The temple to which we actively contribute, he urges, “cannot be united into a continuity, it can but be contiguous *in this world*” (my italics).<sup>113</sup> The apparent disorder of the construction of the temple results not only from the fact that it does not conform to earthly designs, but also from the fact that it has not yet realized, or been assimilated into, the perfect form of the final church. Instead of treating the house of God as an edifice that must conform to the apparent perfection and order of design, we ought to be “more wise in spirituall architecture” and wait for the “great reformation [that] is expected,” for the revelation of the true church to whose structure we blindly, yet faithfully, contribute. Until then, the temple we build will navigate the difference between the earthly and the sublime, and will conform absolutely to neither form.

By asserting that “spirituall architecture” reflects the difference between earthly understanding and sublime truth, Milton implies that true spiritual progress does not require the kind of order Steuart embraces. Thus, he challenges Steuart’s threat that Independence will dissolve the perfect Christian society, his warning that to allow each Christian, or even each congregation, to self-determine, to break from the church design authorized by the synod, would be “Anarchie” (27):

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<sup>113</sup> See also p. 550: “There be who perpetually complain of schism and sects, and make it such a calamity that any man dissents from their maxims. ‘Tis their own pride and ignorance which causes the disturbing, who neither will hear with meekness, nor can convince, yet all must be suppress which is not found in their *Syntagma*.”

As to that, that they permit any one whatsoever, if he have the ability, to Preach publickly in their Assemblies, notwithstanding that he have not *Orders* , This is one of the greatest *Disorders*, that can possibly happen in the world; This, what is it other, but to bring in all kinde of Fanatiques, and Enthusiasts, and to expose Christian Religion to be made a laughing-stock to the Enemies of Gods Truth ; And to make of the House of God, which is an House of *Order*, a Babell of *Disorder*; and horrible Confusion? (34)

In contrast, from the start of *Areopagitica*, Milton places himself in the rhetorical position of St. Paul speaking before the Areopagus, thus pronouncing himself to be speaking in the kind of disordered speech against which Steuart warns:

Then certain philosophers of the Epicureans, and of the Stoicks, encountered him. And some said, What will this babbler say? other some, He seemeth to be a setter forth of strange gods: because he preached unto them Jesus, and the resurrection.

(Acts 17.18)

As Marshall Grossman has noted, by placing himself in this rhetorical position, Milton turns the threat of linguistic confusion on its head.<sup>114</sup> For while the Epicureans and stoics, faced with the strange message he spoke, charged that St. Paul was a “babblers,” that he was “utter”[ing] inarticulate or indistinct sounds,” Parliament

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<sup>114</sup> See “*Areopagitica*,” in Marshall Grossman, *The Seventeenth Century Literature Handbook* (in press, Oxford: Blackwell, 2011).

knows that St. Paul was speaking prophetic, Christian truth.<sup>115</sup> Speech that sounds disordered, then, is a sign of spiritual progress.

In fact, Milton not only frames his rhetorical task of telling uncomfortable truths to Parliament by alluding to St. Paul's speech before the Areopagus. He also re-articulates the truth-teller's rhetorical conundrum in his description of the Roman censor's ignorant response to the polemics of Carneades, Critolus, and Diogenes, placing in Cato's mouth the very word that had been hurled against St. Paul:

The Romans also for many ages train'd up only to a military roughness, resembling most the *Lacedaemonian* guise, knew of learning little but what their twelve Tables, and the *Pontifick* College with their *Augurs* and *Flamins* taught them in Religion and Law, so unacquainted with other learning, that when *Carneades* and *Critolaus*, with the Stoick *Diogenes* coming Embassadors to *Rome*, took thereby occasion to give the City a tast of their Philosophy, they were suspected for seducers by no lesse a man than *Cato* the Censor, who mov'd it in the Senat to dismisse them speedily, and to banish all such *Attick* babblers out of *Italy*. (497)

Echoing the responses of the stoics to St. Paul, Cato responds to the polemicist peripatetics who have come to Rome to speak new truths by accusing them of being

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<sup>115</sup> Oxford English Dictionary, "babble," 1, 2nd edition 1989. While the OED plaintively attributes the origin of the word "babble" to "*ba, ba*, one of the earliest articulate sounds made by infants," and finds "No direct connections with *Babel*," its editors nevertheless concede that "associations with [Babel] may have affected the senses."

“babblers.” Thus, Milton subtly recommends to Parliament that they not mimic the pagan Greeks or the ignorant Cato, that they not respond to Milton by accusing him of talking nonsense.

More importantly for our interests, by implying that new truths are not amenable to the linguistically-limited powers-that-be (i.e., to Romans “train’d up only to a military roughness”), Milton carefully places language in his progressive vision of reaching toward truth. Confusing language, it seems, is evidence of spiritual and intellectual achievement, of a speaker’s verbal delivery of new truths that exceed the customary linguistic schema that upholds a stagnant and limited understanding of the world. While Milton places spiritual architecture in the space between earthly understanding and sublime truth, thereby freeing religious belief and worship from the bindings of Stuart’s earthly architecture and validating apparent theological dissonance as a sign of Christian progress, he also places language in this space, thereby recovering verbal dissonance as a sign of spiritual and intellectual growth. Language, especially prophetic language, exceeds earthly paradigms. But because it is not yet united with the sublime truth to which it can only refer, such prophetic language can sound like “horrible Confusion.”

In fact, Milton’s treatment of architecture and language not only follow the same paradigms. In *Eikonoklastes*, Milton fuses them, placing the division of both tongues and hands at the building of the temple:

He [Charles] censures, and in censuring seems to hope *it will be an ill Omen that they who build Jerusalem divide thir tongues and hands*. But his hope fail’d him with his example; for that there were divisions both of tongues and hands at the building of Jerusalem, the

Story would have certifi'd him; and yet the work prosper'd; and if God will, so may this; notwithstanding all the craft and malignant wiles of *Sanballat* and *Tobiah*, adding what fuel they can to our dissensions; or the indignity of his comparison that lik'ns us to those seditious *Zelots* whose *intestine fury* brought destruction to the last *Jerusalem*. (562-63)

As the emerging form of the earthly temple exceeds human design and exposes the difference between earthly architectural form and the final form of the heavenly church—i.e., between earthly metaphor and divine truth—so prophetic language refers to a truth it cannot capture, and thus challenges the stagnation of human thought that is inscribed into language. The prophetic, polemical speech that to customary thinkers and speakers sounds like mere babble, and that appears to divide tongues in linguistic and theological dissonance, will, like the contiguous bricks of the temple, prove to be continuous with a final truth we cannot yet comprehend.

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As I have already demonstrated, *Paradise Lost* also insists that language exposes and negotiates the difference between human thinking, human expression, and sublime truth. For example, as I argued in chapter 2, a vast difference emerges between who Eve is and how she is spoken by Adam. And as I argued in chapter 3, Raphael tells us that the discursive reasoning to which he must tune his speech is merely an accommodation of a sublime truth that exceeds human reason, and that will be revealed only at the end of days—when the difference between the *ens* and the



created individual collapses into absolute unity, into the singular “I am” from which human beings were divided and out of which they were created. Thus, Milton’s mid-century linguistic aesthetic—his sense of the difference between absolute truth and human capacities for knowing, framing, and speaking truth—is sustained in *Paradise Lost*. Moreover, the poem’s depiction of the creative process—in which God individuates maternal matter from Himself, thereby releasing creation into an individuated state—and its references to and figuration of the absolute unity that will collapse this individuation, give this linguistic and intellectual difference material, ontological grounding. That is, *Paradise Lost* offers an historical and material explanation for the difference that emerges between speaking and truth, and between the truth that can be accessed within created historicity, and the truth that will be revealed at the end of days.

The fact that *Paradise Lost* exposes and explains linguistic difference, and describes the generative process out of which difference emerges suggests that it follows those epistemological paradigms by which Milton, in *Areopagitica* and *Eikonoklastes*, countered the authoritarian texts of the mid-seventeenth century. But what does this mean for what I am taking to be the polemical strain of *Paradise Lost* itself? How might the continuities I have traced between Milton’s polemical prose and his epic poem characterize *Paradise Lost* as a confrontational, or even an iconoclastic, text? In order to understand the poem’s polemical stance, it will be necessary to consider in some detail the genealogy of the ideology which it confronts—specifically, how Wilkins and his fellow Royal Society members, Abraham Cowley and Thomas Sprat, came to imagine that language could capture

truth, and the epistemological and aesthetic results of the linguistically-bounded thinking they supported.

Abraham Cowley's "To the Royal Society," an encomium to Bacon included in the introductory text of Thomas Sprat's *History of the Royal Society*, provides a condensed narrative of how linguistic idealism developed out of the promising birth of empiricism. Postulating Bacon to be the father of scientific inquiry, the poem credits him with initiating a new, clear, and transparent style of expression. While the "Guardians and Tutors" of Bacon's age fed "Philosophy" only the malnourishing sweets of discourse, the "Desserts of Poetry," rather than the "solid meats" of true intellectual pursuit—that is, of empirical investigation—Bacon rescued Philosophy from this malnourished, "Captive" state by observing things directly:

From Words, which are but Pictures of the Thought,  
(Though we our Thoughts from them perversly drew)  
To Things, the Minds right Object, he it brought,  
Like foolish Birds to painted Grapes we flew;  
He sought and gather'd for our use the Tru;  
And when on heaps the chosen Bunches lay,  
He prest them wisely the Mechanic way,  
Till all their juyce did in one Vessel joyn,  
Ferment into a Nourishment Divine,  
The thirsty Souls refreshing Wine.<sup>116</sup>

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<sup>116</sup> Abraham Cowley, "To the Royal Society," in Sprat, Thomas, *The History of the Royal-Society of London, For the Improving of Natural Knowledge* (London: J.R. for J. Martyn and J. Allestry, 1667), in Early English Books Online, <http://gateway.proquest.com.proxy-um.researchport.umd.edu>

Rather than wasting time on a fruitless focus on “Words” or “Pictures of the Thought,” Bacon led us to the “Tru” things, observing and testing their mechanical properties so that they might reveal themselves, produce their own truths, and nourish our Souls.

Bacon’s favoring of “Things, the Minds right Object” over the “Pictures of Thought” resulted in a new rhetorical style:

His candid Stile like a clean Stream does slide,  
And his bright Fancy all the way  
Does like the Sun-shine in it play;  
It does like Thames, the best of Rivers, glide,  
Where the God does not rudely overturn,  
But gently pour the Crystal Vrn,  
And with judicious hand does the whole Current guide.  
T’ (sic) has all the Beauties Nature can impart,  
And all the comely dress without the paint of Art.

Infused with Bacon’s “fancy” as is the “clean Stream” with sunlight, Bacon’s “candid Stile” openly reveals, rather than clouding over, the products of his imagination.

Assuring us that these products are, for all their “play,” not simply poetic fantasies or sources of rhetorical and intellectual confusion, Cowley metaphorically aligns Bacon’s “fancy” with the water that “the God” “gently pour[s]” into the Thames as he “judicious[ly]” guides it along its peaceful (or un-overturned) path. Like the smooth flowing of the river Thames as it is pushed by “the God” along its path, Bacon’s prose is direct, truthful, and transparent.

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Cowley thus champions the idealistic linguistic ethos of the Royal Society, whose members sought to erase the difference between expression and thinking and to represent their observations of the natural world in a direct, transparent way. Moreover, by stressing the similarity of Bacon's style to the movement of the Thames—a liquid stand-in for the English landscape that Bacon explored—and by asserting that Bacon's language achieves a *natural* beauty, Cowley insists that Bacon's language (and the writing of the scientists he inspires), fuses thinking, word, and thing. Cowley's metaphor for Bacon's clear style thus reveals the erasure of difference—between thinking, expression, and truth—that serves as the optimistic premise of the universal language schema.

The main text of Sprat's *History* follows up on this optimism. Sprat promises that Wilkins's *Essay* will “separate the knowledge of *Nature*, from the colours of *Rhetorick*, the devices of *Fancy*, or the delightful deceit of *Fables*...by settling on inviolable correspondence between the [writing] hand and the brain...to render it an Instrument, whereby Making may obtain Dominion over *Things*” (63). Divorced from the confusing twists and turns of poets and scholastic rhetoricians, Wilkins's universal language schema will achieve a perfect correspondence between human beings' understanding of the world and their expression of that understanding. This correspondence of thinking and expression will achieve “Dominion” because, as

Sprat attests, there is an inherent agreement between thinking about the world and the world itself:<sup>117</sup>

'Tis true, the mind of Man is a Glass, which is able to represent to it self, all the Works of *Nature* But it can onely shew those Figures, which have been brought before it: (97)

Given that our thoughts about the world are necessarily apt, as soon as we find a way to express accurately our intellectual responses to the world, we will find a way to write the world exactly as it is, and to disseminate textually the knowledge that we, as members of the Royal Society, have accumulated.<sup>118</sup>

This optimism takes a striking turn, for Wilkins and Sprat projected that once the exact expression of the world is realized, once the exact correspondence of thinking, expression, and thing is set in place, language would no longer be an inexact

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<sup>117</sup> Sidonie Clauss calls this epistemological assumption “univocal thought,” and notes, “[c]learly the presumption that all people share the same thoughts is prerequisite to the invention and institution of a philosophical language whereby they will use uniform signifiers to express universal ideas theory” (546). See Sidonie Clauss, “John Wilkins' *Essay Towards a Real Character*: Its Place in the Seventeenth-Century Episteme,” *Journal of the History of Ideas* 43.4 (Oct. - Dec., 1982): pp. 531-53.

<sup>118</sup> This appears to be part of the motivation for the Royal Society's collection of descriptions of natural things found all over the world. See p. 61, where Sprat describes the “purpose” of the Royal Society: “to make faithful *Records*, of all the works of *Nature*, or *Art*, which can come within our reach.”

metaphor of the world, one whose tenuous and shifting relationship to truth breeds misconceptions and divergences of opinion. Rather, it would serve as an exact verbal model of truth, as a linguistic replica according to which our understanding of truth would be formed.

Indeed, this is part of what Wilkins and Sprat promise, as they anticipate that the universal language schema will silence what they take to be the Babylonian confusion that had threatened England's stability during the Civil Wars. By eliminating linguistic ambiguity and polysemy, and thus making redundant the individual, hermeneutic activity that led to the insolence of the multitudes and the theological discord of competing religious sects, the universal language schema will become the linguistic foundation of peace and theological agreement:

So that if men should generally consent upon the same way or manner of *Expression*, as they do agree in the same *Notion*, we should then be freed from that Curse in the Confusion of Tongues, with all the unhappy consequences of it. (Part I, Chap. V. Sect I.)

The disruption of the true church, and the chaos of the Civil Wars, resulted from individual hermeneutic activity, from the willy-nilly reading and interpretation that were provoked by variety of expression. By establishing finally and authoritatively what words mean, Wilkins's universal language "will....contribute much to the clearing of some of our Modern difference in Religion, by unmasking many wild errors, that shelter themselves under the disguise of affected phrases" (Dedicatory Epistle), thereby helping us to recover from the theological dissonance that resulted from the "Confusion of Tongues."

Wilkins is not alone in making this assertion. In fact, Sprat more explicitly maps Babylonian confusion onto the English Civil Wars, and promises that by freeing England (and eventually the world) from Babylonian confusion, the Royal Society's universal language schema will also end the sectarian divides as well as political and social tumults that led to and characterized the English Civil Wars:

In the Wars themselves (which is a time, wherein all Languages use, if ever, to increase by extraordinary degrees; for in such busie, and active times, there arise more new thoughts of men, which must be signifi'd, and varied by new expressions) then I say, it receiv'd many fantastical terms, which were introduc'd by our *Religious Sects*; and many outlandish phrases, which several *Writers*, and *Translators*, in that great hurry, brought in, and made free as they pleas'd, and with all it was inlarg'd by many sound, and necessary Forms, and Idioms, which it before wanted. And now, when mens minds are somewhat settled, their Passions allai'd, and the peace of our Country gives us the opportunity of such diversions: if some sober and judicious Men, would take the whole Mass of our Language into their hands, as they find it, and would set a mark on the ill Words; correct those, which are to be retain'd; admit, and establish the good; and make some emendations in the Accent, and Grammar: I dare pronounce, that our *Speech* would quickly arrive at as much plenty, as it is capable to receive; and at the greatest smoothness, which its derivation from the rough *German* will allow it. (42)

The restoration of the king to the English throne, and the intellectual settling it effected, marked a propitious occasion to recover from the Civil Wars by correcting language and establishing a universal system of clear signification. This new language, in its turn, will model and enforce the right kind of thinking about things,

and will maintain the peace that Charles II's kingship has already installed. Thus, Wilkins and Sprat not only propose to make individual hermeneutic activity redundant. Revisiting the threat of Babylonian disorder that Stuart and his peers had leveled against the Independents, they also promise that a universal language will establish and ensure the linguistic, hermeneutic, and religious conformity that is key to maintaining English peace.

Clearly, Milton would have been appalled at this assertion of linguistic and religious authority, and at the notion that a linguistic schema could capture truth, for it runs in direct contrasts to his politics, and to his allegorical ethics. In fact, we see the ethical opposition between Wilkins and Milton, first and foremost, in their aesthetic contrasts, and, indeed, in Wilkins's rejection of the aesthetics of the Miltonic sublime. For example, while in *Paradise Lost* even angels are unsure of the authority of their language, asking "...to recount Almighty works / What words or tongue of Seraph can suffice" (7.11203), Wilkins, claiming to ground his language in observation and logic, takes the "prophetic strain" (Milton, *Lycidas*) of religious enthusiasts and modern prophets to represent a dangerous form of religious and rhetorical charlatanism.<sup>119</sup> He hypothesizes that by grounding our epistemology in the logic of words, he will expose the fiction of the sublime aesthetic:

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<sup>119</sup> See Catherine Gimelli Martin on other cues that much of Wilkins's *Essay* was written in direct response to Milton ("Rewriting the Revolution: Milton, Bacon, and the Royal Society Rhetoricians," in *Science, Literature, and Rhetoric in Early*



To which it will be proper for me to add, That this design will likewise contribute much to the clearing of some of our Modern differences in <sup>Religion,</sup> by unmasking many wild errors, that shelter themselves under the disguise of affected phrases; which being Philosophically unfolded, and rendered according to the genuine and natural importance of Words, will appear to be inconsistencies and contradictions. And several of those pretended, mysterious, profound notions, expressed in great swelling words, whereby some men set up for reputation, being this way examined, will appear to be, either nonsense, or very flat and jejune.<sup>120</sup>

Truth, Wilkins insists, should be understood according to the perfectly ordered and transparent language he has designed. When we are captivated by linguistic paradoxes and the rhetorical flourishes of those sectarian swindlers who claim prophetic powers, when we are convinced that truth exceeds the capacities of language to decipher or explain it, we become lost in religious confusion, captives of the discourse of counterfeit prophets. While Milton achieves the sublime effect by asserting the truth of logical contradictions or unimaginable, inconceivable truths—for example, by calling the space between heaven and hell “the palpable obscure” (II.406)—and thus asserts the linguistically and logically impossible status of the

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*Modern England*, edited by Janet Cummins and David Birchell [Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2007], pp. 97-124).

<sup>120</sup> “To the Right Honourable WILLIAM LORD VISCOUNT BROUNCKER, PRESIDENT; Together with the rest of the COVNCIL and FELLOWS of the ROYAL SOCIETY,” in *An Essay*.

referent to be evidence of its overwhelming and sublime character, Wilkins argues that the sublime excess of the referent that is implied by a signifier's supposed "opacity" is, in truth, evidence of rhetorical "nonsense," of the fictionality of the referent.

Wilkins appears to take aim directly at Milton's sublime poetics. Milton's poetics, in turn, place Wilkins's rhetorical grandstanding in the mouth of the serpent, who asserts that truth is dominated, even defined, by both language and the human mind. This enables the serpent to convince Eve to reject the sublime experience invited by the words of the prohibition.<sup>121</sup> In fact, carefully preparing Eve to join him in his rejection of the sublime experience, the serpent begins his speech by repositioning the putative source of the sublime effect:

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<sup>121</sup> Given Angelica Duran and Catherine Gimelli Martin's explications of the frequent correspondences and interactions between members of the Royal Society and Milton, it is possible that Milton might have read Wilkins's *Essay* before it was published in 1668. However, it is more plausible that the idea of a universal language schema, along with the support of its epistemological premises, was in the air, so to speak, in the early years of the Restoration, and that Milton's familiarity with the people and the goings-on in the Royal Society led him to respond to what he saw as its flaws and its hubris. See Angelica Duran, *Milton and the Scientific Revolution* (Pittsburgh: Duquesne University Press, 2007), esp. chap. 31; and Catherine Gimelli Martin, "Rewriting the Revolution," pp. 98-99 and 111.

*Wonder* not, Sovran Mistress, if perhaps  
Thou canst, who are sole *Wonder*, much less arm  
Thy looks, the Heav'n of mildness, with disdain,  
Displeas'd that I approach thee thus, and gaze  
Insatiate, I thus single, nor have fear'd  
Thy *awful* brow, more *awful* thus retir'd.

(9.532-37, my italics)

The serpent's double use of both "wonder" and "awful" in this brief speech echoes the very words that the poet used to describe Satan's earlier experience of the sublime:

Such wonder seiz'd, though after Heaven seen,  
The Spirit malign, but much more envy seiz'd  
At sight of all This World beheld so fair.

(3.552-55)

...abasht the Devil stood,  
And felt how awful goodness is.

(4.845-6)

Satan, who now inhabits the body of the serpent, has experienced the sublime before, and appears to know the language by which it is described. However, while the poet's description displays the difference between the sublime and Satan, and the shock that such a difference arouses, the serpent's use of these terms is more circumspect. While "wonder" in the poet's diction refers to a state of mind, and "awful" describes an abstract quality of overwhelming "goodness" as experienced from the fallen state, the serpent makes Eve the cause of these two responses. He tells Eve that rather than

“Wonder,” rather than experience and try to contend with a mysterious event, Eve ought to consider herself the object of “wonder[ment],” the mystery itself. And while the poet describes the “goodness” as “awful,” the serpent takes just one part of Eve, her “brow,” to be the awful presence in the garden, the thing that strikes awe. Thus theorizing that Eve gives off the sublime effect, the serpent resituates and focuses the sublime: he grounds it in the individual, closing off the broader perspective, the omnipresent and ineffable ontology, which is the true source of the sublime experience.<sup>122</sup>

Eve, perhaps because Adam has indoctrinated her into the authority of language, picks up on this contraction of the sublime into the individual, so that where she initially only “mark[ed] his play”—the curious movement, and the standing posture of the serpent—she now responds to the serpent’s speaking, so she says, with “wonder” (9.566). She thus indicates that an ontological-linguistic discrepancy in the serpent’s speaking strikes her as the very mystery of her existence once had: “I first awak’t, and found myself repos’d / Under a shade on flow’rs, much *wond’ring* where / And what I was, whence thither brought, and how” (4.450-2, my italics). The sublime effect has contracted: at first given off by an existential question about the origin of the self, its source is now reduced to a snake’s strange capacity to speak.

Moreover, Eve’s shifting references to the experience of wonder betray a significant change in her epistemology. For while Eve in her first waking moments “wonders” at the fundamental question of her being, and, following “ a murmuring

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<sup>122</sup> See chapter 2.

sound / Of waters” (4.453), responds openly to the cues that the landscape gives her, she responds to the “miracle” (9.562) of the speaking serpent by urging him to explain himself:

...say  
How can't thou speakable of mute, and how  
To me so friendly grown above the rest  
Of brutal kind, that daily are in sight?  
Say, for such wonder claims attention due.

(9.562-66)

Eve's response to the serpent's speaking shows that, quite naturally, her mind is no longer a sort of blank slate, that she has expectations for what should and should not be, and that when those expectations are violated, she sees a “miracle.” This results in a different kind of approach to knowledge than Eve had demonstrated in her first waking moments: Eve acquires knowledge not by an open and patient exploration of what the world has to offer her. Instead, she acts as an empirical investigator, seeking to extract from the serpent (as Bacon did from the fruit), a logical explanation for his verbal abilities.

More importantly, in pressing the serpent to supply a narrative explanation for his abilities, Eve suggests that his mysterious, wonder-full linguistic capacity is mysterious only because the serpent has not yet produced the words that will explain it. “Wonder” is no longer inspired by a truth perhaps unattainable, a mystery perhaps left unexplained, or explained only according to sounds and the sensory experiences

that the world has to offer her. On the contrary, “wonder” now lends itself to inquiry and to verbal explication.

Much of this shift, as I have already indicated, can be attributed to the fact that Eve is no longer newly born, that she has accumulated experience. Yet, I think it also reflects Eve’s further indoctrination into linguistically-bounded speaking and thinking, and the rejection of the sublime that accompanies this indoctrination. For Eve does not just cease to admire the object of wonder from the overwhelmed perspective of an amazed, humbled, and grateful onlooker. She investigates it, armed, so she thinks, with the intellectual and linguistic ability to dominate and define it. Following the serpent’s Wilkinsonian cues, Eve has overturned her notion of the relationship between the human mind, human speaking, and the sublime object of both.

The serpent validates this reversal as he describes his own, intellectual experience of the forbidden fruit:

Thenceforth to Speculations high or deep  
I turn’d my thoughts, and with capacious mind  
Consider’d 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 Beauty’s heav’nly Ray  
United I behold; no Fair to thine  
Equivalent or second, which compell’d  
Mee thus, though importune perhaps, to come  
And gaze, and worship thee of right declar’d  
Sovran of Creatures, universal Dame.

By prompting Eve not only to “speculate” on things “high or deep,” but also to “consider” them—“To view or contemplate attentively, to survey, examine, inspect, scrutinize—”<sup>123</sup> the serpent de-elevates the sublime even as he elevates Eve, and her intellectual capacities, to the height of “all things visible in Heav’n.” He thus implies that the sublime, which was once the source of an overwhelming aesthetic effect, will become an object of Eve’s critical instrument. Eating the forbidden fruit will, as Sprat says of empiricism, give her the intellectual perspicacity of a God.<sup>124</sup>

But while the serpent echoes the rhetoric of the sublime, and suggests that for Eve there are, at this point, mysterious things about which she can only “speculate,” his rhetoric takes a different turn once Eve begins to resist the temptation to eat the fruit. Eve repeats the prohibition to the serpent:

...Of the Fruit  
Of each Tree in the Garden we may eat,

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<sup>123</sup> Oxford English Dictionary, “consider,” 1, 2nd edition 1989.

<sup>124</sup> See Sprat’s *History*, in which he imagines the intellectual dominance that empiricism and a perfect language will enjoy:

...this is the highest pitch of humane reason; to follow all the links of this chain, till all their secrets are open to our minds; and their works advanc’d, or imitated by our hands. This is truly to command the world; to rank all the varieties and degrees of things, so orderly one upon another; that standing on top of them, we may perfectly behold all that are below, and make them all serviceable to the quiet, peace, and plenty of Man’s life. (110)

But of the Fruit of this fair Tree amidst  
The Garden, God hath said, Ye shall not eat  
Thereof, nor shall ye touch it, lest ye die.

(9.659-63)

The serpent, mimicking righteous “indignation” (666) at the words of the prohibition, postures as an “old Orator renown’d” (670) and gives an “impassion’d” (678) speech against it:

O Sacred, Wise, and Wisdom-giving Plant,  
Mother of Science, Now I feel thy Power  
Within me clear, not only to discern  
Things in thir Causes, but to trace the ways  
Of highest Agents, deem’d however wise.  
Queen of this Universe, do not believe  
Those rigid threats of Death; ye shall not Die:  
How should ye? by the Fruit? it gives you Life  
To Knowledge: By the Threat’ner? look on mee,  
Mee who have touch’d and tasted, yet both live,  
And life more perfect have attain’d than Fate  
Meant mee, by vent’ring higher than my Lot.  
Shall that be shut to Man, which to the Beast  
Is open? Or will God incense his ire  
For such a petty Tresspass, and not praise  
Rather your dauntless virtue, whom the pain  
Of Death denounc’t, whatever thing Death be,  
Deter’d not from achieving what might lead  
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?



(9.679-99)

The serpent here echoes the empiricist epistemology that undergirds the universal language schema: he asserts that truth lies not in the authority of truths passed down, but rather in the landscape itself, in the “Wisdom-giving Plant, Mother of Science.” Again, this “Science” fosters epistemological dominion, the ability not merely to “speculate,” but to “discern” and “trace the ways / Of highest Agents.” More importantly, he takes the “Science” granted him by the plant to give him, also, a discernment that undercuts the sublime aesthetic. Once the “divine ways” are placed under his purview and consideration, they no longer inspire reverence, or give off the sublime effect.

Even more importantly, the serpent applies the linguistic and epistemological paradigm we have already seen articulated by Wilkins in order to raise doubts about not only the threat, but even the very existence, of death and evil. We can detect the serpent’s epistemology, and his elevation of the logic of language over truth, in the contrast between his dismissive reference to death—a thing that appears not to fit into the logical framework of language—and Adam’s speculation that death, which for him remains undefined and unknown, must be a “dreadful thing”:

...of all the Trees  
In Paradise that bear delicious fruit  
So various, not to taste that only Tree  
Of Knowledge, planted by the Tree of Life,  
So near grows Death to Life, whate’er Death is,  
Some dreadful thing no doubt.

(4.421-26)<sup>125</sup>

Adam responds to the prohibition with gratitude and faith, assuming that its signifiers refer to something at once true and, at least for him, incomprehensible, uncaptured by words. He avers that “Death” refers to “Some dreadful thing,” thus implying that the word invokes dread in great part because it is ambiguous and imprecise, because “death” does not tell us what death is.

The serpent, in contrast, takes up these signifiers in order to dismiss their dreadfulness. With a slight of tongue—“whatever thing Death be”—he not only reminds Eve that she does not know what death is, but also cynically implies that death is, in fact, not a thing: that the word “death” is without referent and therefore ought not detract Eve from tasting the fruit. In fact, the serpent applies the same tactic in his treatment of evil, questioning, “if what is evil / Be real.” The word “evil,” like the word “death,” is a word without thing, an empty signifier meant “to awe” and “keep ye low and ignorant, / His worshippers.” Whereas Adam responds with wonder to the uncaptured referent, the serpent, like Wilkins, insists that such heightened

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<sup>125</sup> Note that Adam here first acknowledges the proximity of the tree of death to the tree of life, and yet does not engage in a comparative analysis of the two. Death, he avers, is a mystery, not to be accounted for by its proximity to the life with which he is so familiar. Thus, Adam here appears to resist the dialectical, comparative form of thinking which might be invited by the proximity of the two trees, and which Eve later embraces.

speech is a form of rhetorical trickery meant to keep us in abject awe. Thus, while the serpent speaks as if his primary motive were to release Eve from the grasp of God's rhetorical trickery, in truth he convinces Eve to bind her thinking to the logic of words: he urges Eve to base her thinking solely on what can be captured by a name, to reject the fiction of the allegorical signifier, and, concomitantly, of the referent that appears to exist outside of the purview of logic and definition.

Unfortunately, embracing this Wilkinsonian epistemology means that Eve's thinking, her access to knowledge, is limited to what words can say. Indeed, the serpent's linguistically-bounded paradigm of thinking places even the experience of "knowing" under the provenance of words. For by arguing that if "evil" is to be avoided or "shunn'd," it must first be "known," the serpent subjects knowledge to the dialectic, comparative paradigm of definition. Asserting that to prohibit Eve from actively pursuing the "Knowledge of Good and Evil" is, on the one hand, "[un]just,"—for why should Eve not know good?—and, on the other, impractical— for how will Eve resist evil (and thus maintain the good) if she does not "know" what "evil" is?—the serpent argues that Eve cannot know good either intuitively or by experience. Instead she can only come to know, recognize, and successfully maintain good according to the dialectical process of comparatively defining and understanding words. She can only know good by knowing its antonym, evil.

Unfortunately, Eve embraces this paradigm. Thus "impregn'd / With Reason, to her seeming, and with Truth" (738-39), Eve approaches the tree, insisting, quite radically, not only that she does not know evil, but also that she does not know good:

Thy praise hee also who forbids thy use,  
Conceals 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 infers the good  
By thee communicated, and our want:  
For good unknown, sure is not had, or had  
And yet unknown, is as not had at all.

(9.750-58)

Eve looks forward to “the good” (754) that will be “communicated” (755) by the tree, and offers a two-fold, and somewhat contradictory, argument in support of her assumption that this communication will occur. She pontificates that if you do not know good then you do not acquire it—“For good unknown, sure is not had”—but, perhaps realizing that she does indeed have good, resolves that even if she has had good, not knowing good nullifies this having—“or had / And yet unknown, is as not had at all” (756-7). Eve here stubbornly privileges the dialectical experience of knowing good versus evil over the having of good that God has already granted her. Despite the fact that she has indeed “had” good, she insists that the comparative intellectual experience she currently lacks—the definitive knowledge of good versus evil—determines her experience of having.

Thus, although Eve, as if following the empiricists, touts the importance of the “assay” (747), in reality she rejects experience in favor of the dialectical form of

thinking that is inscribed into language.<sup>126</sup> Strikingly, Eve's hypocrisy mirrors both the serpent's and Wilkins's, who claim to reject the sublime in favor of a direct and active testing and observation of things, but who actually embrace logical and linguistic divisions which run counter to the empirical experience. In fact, Eve's rejection of experience in favor of dialectical logic betrays the very epistemological and logical contradiction which, I believe, contributed to Wilkins's quick fall into disrepute.<sup>127</sup> We can understand this fall if we consider how Wilkins's language

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<sup>126</sup> Observing that the serpent offers Eve the "faulty empiricism...of mystified or alchemical correspondences" (281), Catherine Gimelli Martin remarks that "Eve is undone, not by a 'femininely' vain desire for the universal adulation promised by Satan, but only by her relentless curiosity and desire for experimentation without recourse to the more careful checks of abstract reason" (280). See Martin, *Ruins of Allegory*.

<sup>127</sup> This fall has been explained by Sidonie Clauss, who, along with David Cram and Vivian Salmon, observes that while universal language gained popularity in the seventeenth century and received a great deal of intellectual backing, Wilkins's *Essay* received "a cool reception after its dedication to the Royal Society" (Clauss, 532) and was, for years, considered "a famous failure" (Clauss, 531). Cram suggests that the Royal Society was trying to meet too many different goals simultaneously with the *Essay* (42). Clauss, for her part, points to the philosophical and theological impossibility of attaining intellectual and linguistic universalization in the late-seventeenth century, especially given the vast

schema diverged from its putatively scientific origins: in other words, if we take into account the difference between the science that purportedly inspired the universal language schema, and the form in which Wilkins's proposal finally emerged.

In the first decade of the seventeenth century, Galileo was performing experiments that he would publish in *Dialogues Concerning Two New Sciences* (1638). During his experimentation, Galileo proved that through Euclidian mathematics he could produce a parabola that was also a model of how a body moves through space, a model that helped him to represent, quantify, and predict the behavior of real things in the world.<sup>128</sup> Inspired by this and other experiments,

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theological differences which set nations and religious sects at odds with one another. Additionally, she argues that Wilkins's schema proved to be intellectually and politically unfeasible because each person's experience of the world was too distinct, and too particular, for universalization (547). I think, however, that the failure of Wilkins's universal language schema might be found in his and his peers' accounts of the difficulties of subjecting the natural world to his structural taxonomies. See Sidonie Clauss, "John Wilkins' Essay"; David Cram, "Universal Language Schemes"; and Vivian Salmon, "John Wilkin's 'Essay' (1668): Critics and continuators," in *The Study of Language in 17th-Century England*, ed. Vivian Salmon (Philadelphia: John Benjamins Publishing Company, 1988), pp. 191-206, esp. p. 191.

<sup>128</sup> Galileo Galilei, *Dialogues Concerning Two New Sciences*, ed. and trans. Henry Crew and Alfonso de Salvio (New York: MacMillan, 1914), esp. p. 252. For a

Galileo, in *The Assayer* (1628), claimed famously that the universe was written in the language of mathematics:

Philosophy is written in this grand book, the universe, which stands continually open to our gaze. But the book cannot be understood unless one first learns to comprehend the language and read the letters in which it is composed. It is written in the language of mathematics, and its characters are triangles, circles, and other geometric figures without which it is humanly impossible to understand a single word of it; without these, one wanders about in a dark labyrinth.<sup>129</sup>

Taking the world to be written in a mathematical language, Galileo hypothesized that as mathematicians and astronomers developed new, formulaic systems for modeling the world, they could decipher this language and learn to reveal the world as it is. The texts and formulae they produced would correspond exactly with the text of creation, which, according to Galileo, was written in forms and “geometric figures.”

Inspired in part by the success of Galileo’s empirical methods, and his assertion that we will know the world once we know its mathematical language, proponents of universal language schemas aspired to know the world through their own, natural language—one that, like Galileo’s mathematics, would rewrite the world as it is and

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helpful and clear explanation of Galileo’s discovery, see John Gribbin, *Science: A History 1543-2001* (New York: Penguin, 2002), p. 84.

<sup>129</sup> Galileo Galilei, “The Assayer,” in *Discoveries and Opinions of Galileo*, trans. Stillman Drake (New York: Doubleday, 1957): p. 237-38.

thus clarify and cement our understanding of it.<sup>130</sup> In fact, Wilkins and Sprat propose not only that they can find the right names for things, but also that they will develop a linguistic system that corroborates and clearly maps the relationship of one thing to another, and that will therefore serve as a universal model of what is.<sup>131</sup> Sprat, for

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<sup>130</sup> Margreta de Grazia, tracing what she calls the “secularization of language” in the seventeenth century, offers a similar account of how Galileo inspired universal language proponents to “fashion language on the model of mathematics” (320). See Margreta de Grazia, “The Secularization of Language in the Seventeenth Century,” *Journal of the History of Ideas* 41, no. 2 (April – June 1980): 319-29.

<sup>131</sup> Other proponents of universal language schemas more directly grafted mathematical precision onto language. For example, in *The Universal Character* (1657), Cave Beck recommends assigning numbers to each part of a word, so that “honor thy father and mother” would be written as “1eb 2314 p2477 and pf2477.” See “An Example of writing and speaking the fifth Commandment” at the end of *The Universal Character* (London: Thomas Maxey, 1657), in Early English books online, [http://gateway.proquest.com.proxy-um.researchport.umd.edu/openurl?ctx\\_ver=Z39.882003&res\\_id=xri:eebo&rft\\_id=xri:eebo:citation:1168348](http://gateway.proquest.com.proxy-um.researchport.umd.edu/openurl?ctx_ver=Z39.882003&res_id=xri:eebo&rft_id=xri:eebo:citation:1168348) 2. And in *A Universal Characteristic*, Gottfried Leibniz, the German philosopher who visited the Royal Society and competed with Newton for the title of inventor of calculus, proposes that “infinitesimal calculus” will close the gap between natural science and geometry. Thus, he attaches numbers to various parts of his characters, asserting that arithmetical comparisons of these numbers will reveal



example, anticipates that the Royal Society will attain a language of “Mathematical plainness” (114), and concludes his tract with a promise that the Royal Society will “promote the same rigid way of *Conclusion* in all other *Natural things*, which only the *Mathematics* have hitherto maintained” (327). Meanwhile, Wilkins aspires to graft the modeling capabilities of mathematical formulae onto common nouns. His introduction to Part I, Chap 1, Sect 2 of the *Essay* gives us a hint of this grafting:

The second Part shall contain that which is the great foundation of the thing here designed, namely a regular *enumeration* and *description* of all those things and notions, to which marks or names ought to be assigned according to their respective natures, which may be styled the *Scientifical* Part, comprehending *Vniversal Philosophy*. It being the proper end and design of the several branches of Philosophy to reduce all things and notions unto such a frame, as may express their natural order, dependence, and relations.

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the relationships between members of the natural landscape to which they are attached. See *New Essays on Human Understanding*, trans. and ed. Peter Remnant and Jonathan Bennett (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1982), Book 4, chap. 3, sect 389. See also Leibniz’s claim that “number is, as it were, metaphysical shape, and arithmetic, in a certain sense, the Static of the Universe, that by which the powers of things are investigated” and that we might invent “a language whose marks or characters perform the same task as algebraic marks do for magnitudes considered abstractly” (“Preface to a Universal Characteristic,” in *G.W. Leibniz Philosophical Essays*, ed. and trans. Roger Ariew and Daniel Garber [Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing, 1989], pp. 5-6).

Wilkins and Sprat aspire to achieve a mathematical level of certainty in the realm of natural language, so that observations and conclusions about the world will become “rigid” and “Scientifical.” In fact, Wilkins’s emphasis on “enumeration,” and his interest in establishing a linguistic model that expresses the “natural order, dependence, and relations” of the things of the world, reveal that language for him will not serve as an inexact means of expressing a world whose organizational premises (i.e., design) are unknown to him, but rather as a new *model* that will become itself an object of empirical investigation—a system of signs that maps and models created ontology as Galileo had mapped and modeled the parabolic trajectory of a body moving through space.

Herein lies the rub: as a speaking that does not acknowledge its metaphorical distance from truth, that seeks to subject our observations of the world to order and exactness, Wilkins’s universal language schema becomes, like Steuart’s architectural metaphor, a determinant of what will be considered true. In fact, Wilkins’s schema turns out to be designed not according to the demands of empiricism—demands which compelled Galileo, for example, to admit that because of “resistances” (i.e., friction), the object will diverge from a precisely parabolic path (*Dialogues*, 252). On the contrary, Wilkins seems more determined to impose a Ramist system of logical categories onto the world, than to design his schema according to observation and empirical analysis.

Indeed, Wilkins’s interest in logical order posed a problem for him as he sought (and promised) to name things in the world exactly as they are. For example, in “To

the Reader,” Wilkins promises that John Ray, the person he appointed to write “those most difficult tables of Plants,” is up to the task, for he “besides his other general Knowledge, hath with great success applyed himself to the Cultivating of that part of Learning” (To the Reader). But he is forced later in the *Essay*, to admit the difficulty, perhaps even the impossibility, of such an endeavor:

The more *perfect* kind of *Vegetables* are called by the name of *Plants*, the several kinds of which are so exceeding numerous, as must needs render it a very difficult task for any man who is most versed in the study of them, either to *enumerate* them so fully or to *order* them so accurately, as will not be liable to many exceptions; especially considering the streining and force that must sometimes be used, to make things comply with the institution of these tables into which they are to be reduced.

Wilkins acknowledges the trouble of submitting the cornucopia of natural plant life to the structure of the taxonomy he has outlined, citing their tendency not to “comply” with the logic he seeks to impose upon them. Even Wilkins sees the difference between the linguistic schema by which he tries to express and model the world, and the world as it is.

Yet, according to John Ray, Wilkins insisted that the tables of plants be designed according to his rigorous logic. In a letter to his friend Lister, Ray complains about the impossibility of subjecting plants to the logical structure of Wilkins’s tables:

I was constrained in arranging the Tables not to follow the lead of nature, but to accommodate the plants to the author’s prescribed system. This demanded that I should divide herbs into three squadrons or kinds as nearly equal as possible; then that I should split

up each squadron into nine ‘differences’ as he called them, that is subordinate kinds, in such wise that the plants ordered under each ‘difference’ should not exceed a fixed number; finally that I should join pairs of plants together or arrange them in couples. What possible hope was there that a method of that sort would be satisfactory, and not manifestly imperfect and ridiculous? I frankly and openly admit that it was; for I care for truth more than for my own reputation.<sup>132</sup>

Ray’s letter reveals the difference not only between natural ontology and Wilkins’s language, but also between the natural world and the particular, Ramist logic that is inscribed into Wilkins’s schema. That is, following Ramus, Wilkins applies a neat, dichotomous logic to nature, trying to divide it into “equal,” pre-apportioned categories—categories which, according to Ray, Wilkins inappropriately imposes onto the empirical process that he supposedly supports. Moreover, Ray’s repeated reference to Wilkins’s “differences” suggest that Wilkins, in following this dichotomous logic—this thinking by means of distinguishing one thing from another—emphasizes neat, categorical distinctions which do not correspond with the complexities of the natural world—where, for example, plants that supposedly fall

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<sup>132</sup> “John Ray to Lister, May 7, 1669,” *Correspondence of J.R.* (London: The Ray Society, 1848), p. 41-2, qtd. in Charles E. Raven, D.D., *John Ray Naturalist: His Life and Works* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1942), p. 182.

into different categories turn out to be as much like each other as they are distinct.<sup>133</sup>

Wilkins, perhaps following Ramus's assumption that the "order of nature" and the logical thinking he promotes correspond, requires Ray to submit the natural world to the dichotomous logic inscribed into his linguistic schema, at the expense of the natural world's resistance to such logic.<sup>134</sup>

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Ray's objections are important for our understanding of how *Paradise Lost* engages with the idea of a perfect, universal language, for Eve, like Wilkins, claims to embrace empiricism or the "assay," yet privileges logic and categorical distinction

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<sup>133</sup> Ray, according to Clauss, was "one of the most vociferous objectors" to Wilkins's project (543). Nevertheless, as Charles Raven tells us, he undertook to produce said tables within a period of three weeks (Raven, 182).

<sup>134</sup> Walter Ong, Introduction to *A Fuller Course in the Art of Logic*, in *Complete Prose Works of John Milton*, v. 8, ed. Merritt Hughes (New Haven: Yale University press, 1962), p. 157. See also Erland Sellberg, "Petrus Ramus," *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (2006), <http://plato.stanford.edu/entries/ramus/>, in which Sellberg posits that Ramus, following the Stoic philosophers, took the universe to be "rationally organized in a way that was directly equivalent to human reason," and "regarded logic as a part of philosophy and defined it as an art that truly gives us knowledge of being."

over that experience. Moreover, whereas John Ray observes that the plants will not conform to Wilkins's linguistic taxonomies, and whereas Wilkins's lack of empirical responsiveness leads to a public excoriation of his project,<sup>135</sup> in *Paradise Lost*, Milton gives sublime voice to the difference between Eve's dialectic, linguistically-bounded reading of the world around her and her true experience of it.

Eve's mistake leads not only to her fall, but also to God's correction of her epistemology:

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.

(11.84-89)

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<sup>135</sup> See Raven on Ray's follow-up to the tables he produced for Wilkins's *Essay*, and on Robert Morison's accusation that Ray did not do enough "field-work" in producing the tables (186-67). According to William Kneale and Martha Kneale, Ramus's logic also lost ground to the prominence of empiricism, which came to divide observation from logic. Descartes and Hobbes, for example, relegated logic to "only the manipulation of signs" (312). See Kneale, William and Kneale, Martha, *The Development of Logic* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1962), esp. pp. 307-12.

Contra Eve's claims that she knows good by knowing evil as well, God asserts that the knowledge of goodness is not bound in dialectic, at least not until the fall. If Eve had embraced the experience of having and knowing "Good by it self," if she had rejected the linguistic manacles offered to her by the serpent, she could have recognized that having good was sufficient to maintaining it, and that knowing good in dialectical opposition to evil was unnecessary. Indeed, she might have continued to experience good as she initially experienced herself in the world, outside of, and thus unmediated by, the dialectical logic of language. Instead, Eve precipitates the inscription of goodness into the comparative logic which defines good as the opposite of evil.<sup>136</sup>

Wilkins' invective against the sublime aesthetic can be heard in Eve's decision to eat the forbidden fruit. For even before she eats the forbidden fruit, Eve takes the logic of language to reveal what the prohibition wants to hide: "Thy praise hee also who forbids thy use, / Conceals not from us, naming thee the Tree / Of Knowledge, knowledge both of good and evil" (750-52). As Wilkins proposes that a perfect language "may express...[the] natural order, dependence, and relations" of things and may rewrite the world as it is in comprehensible and certain form, so Eve avers that the name of the tree has exposed the once-hidden interdependency of the knowledge

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<sup>136</sup> My argument complements Angelica Duran and Catherine Gimelli Martin's observations on Milton's intellectual and philosophical allegiances to Baconian, empirical methods, for it suggests that Milton, like Ray, treats experience as a potential corrective to Wilkins's attempt to establish and frame truth.

of good and the knowledge of evil. Spurning linguistic opacity, she takes the dialectical logic of language, especially as presented to her by the name of the tree, to tell her truths that she might not otherwise readily comprehend. By thusly ventriloquizing Wilkins and his peers in Eve's seduction scene, Milton provides his Christian readers with a new way of understanding the Genesis story they have long known, and with which they have long contended. He avers that the serpent's seduction of Eve supplements the logical and linguistic temptation presented by the tree itself, the fact that its name posits the "Knowledge of Good and of Evil" to be bound together in a dialectical, comparative relation.

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If every action which is good, or evill in man at ripe years, were to be under pittance, and prescription, and compulsion, what were virtue but a name, what praise could be then due to well-doing, what grammercy to be sober, just or continent? Many there by that complain of divin (sic) Providence for suffering *Adam* to transgresse, foolish tongues! When God gave him reason, he gave him freedom to choose, for reason is but choosing; he had bin else a meer artificiall *Adam*, such an *Adam* as he is in the motions.

(*Areopagitica*, 527)

In *Areopagitica*, Milton famously defines reason as a process of "choosing," thereby locating the exercise of right reason beyond the bounds of law and prescription. Reason, he argues, does not follow authoritative pronouncements of what can or cannot be done, including what can or cannot be read or believed. In *Paradise Lost*,



God makes a similar claim, arguing that free will is based in angels' and mankind's ability to choose either disobedience or "constant Faith or Love" (3.104):

Not free, what proof could they have giv'n sincere  
Of true allegiance, constant Faith or Love,  
Where only what they needs must do, appear'd  
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, or freedom both despoil'd  
Made passive both, had serv'd necessity,  
Not mee.

(3.103-11)

As if following up on *Areopagitica*, God places the expression of "Will and Reason" outside of the jurisdiction of law and "necessity." For if the gift of right reason which "also is choice" were not exercised outside the bounds of deterministic directives, then God could not experience and enjoy the reward of having human beings and angels choose to love Him, and human beings could not receive "praise" for making the right choice.

If, as these quotations suggest, reason is exercised only when there is a choice to be made, when there is no necessary or definitive answer to the question of what is true, or of what should be done, then reason is also exercised when language's "opacity" is revealed. The choosing that is the essential activity of reason only occurs when language (sometimes ostentatiously) does not capture truth, when, instead of telling us definitively what is, or what is to be done, language invites us to engage in the hermeneutic activity of interpreting and choosing both. With this in mind, we can

begin to understand the ethical and spiritual disaster implicit in Eve's decision to eat the forbidden fruit, and how the effect of this decision follows from its cause. Eve decides to eat the forbidden fruit because she rejects the very notion that "good" and "evil" can be experienced, understood, or chosen outside of the dialectical logic that is inscribed into logic. Instead of embracing the hermeneutic opportunity to speculate and choose that is presented to her by the prohibition's vague reference to things (i.e., to death and evil) she does not definitively know, she opts to grasp onto the logical certainty that is promised her by the name of the tree, and by the serpent's seductive words. Eating the tree, she expects, will place goodness, evil, and perhaps even death, under her consideration, will subject it to the dominion of her logical mind. Thus, it will release her from the ethical obligation to take hermeneutic action, to make a choice that is not captured by language, to find truth beyond the logic of words. Eve's decision to reject this obligation, this opportunity to exercise will and reason, results, not coincidentally, in the degradation of both.

This degradation, from Milton's perspective, is what designers of the universal language schema threatened to effect in the souls and minds of the English people, as they seduced them into embracing the comforts of linguistic (and thus religious) certainty. Indeed, given this threat, and the fact that Milton places it at the disastrous cusp of human history, we can conclude that late-seventeenth-century universal language ideology was an important spur to Milton's allegorical ethics. No wonder he repeatedly emphasizes the allegorical state of his poetic language and counts on it to give off the sublime effect. For allegory, it turns out, is not only the linguistic condition that aptly reflects human beings' created ontology (our state of suspended

difference from the *ens* into which we will eventually be assimilated), it is also one of our primary opportunities to exercise right reason, to assert our individual will and choose for ourselves the truth in which we believe, even against the grain of authoritative language.

When Christian readers are struck with “wonder,” when they acknowledge the difference between themselves and the sublime, and, concomitantly, between a word and the truth to which it refers, they are roused to exercise right reason, to choose the truth (or the action) whose aptness to the final truth cannot in this world be known. As Milton’s allegorical ethics recommend, and as Victoria Kahn’s analysis of Samson’s own hermeneutical and political activity suggests, readers who find in representation’s “opacity” an opportunity to make this kind of choice—i.e., readers who take note of the necessarily allegorical state of language and its difference from final, sublime truth—find in themselves the hermeneutic power to subvert, and even the iconoclastic power to break down, those verbal idols which conflate word and thing. They find themselves able to resist and even destroy those figures of authority who (sometimes by making verbal idols of themselves) obfuscate the revelation that is promised at the end of days, and who do so by claiming the intellectual and spiritual power to capture truth in a word, to speak in a language that is not allegorical.

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