

“Their Solitary Way”:
Marital Reconciliation in the Conversion Scene of *Paradise Lost*

by

Michael Gadaletto

A thesis presented for the B. A. degree
with Honors in
The Department of English
University of Michigan
Spring 2008

To Drew, Jim, Becky, and Mike

*The world was all before them, where to choose
Their place of rest, and Providence their guide.*

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

There are many hundreds of people all over the greater Ann Arbor area who deserve my thanks, be it for servicing my ever stronger caffeine addiction or for patiently listening while I pontificated about *unification*, *upward mobility* or *humiliation*, words so deadly dull that they strike fear into all hearts but that of the Miltonist. I will limit myself, however, to acknowledging those few people without whom this thesis would not exist.

First and foremost I would like to thank Professor Ralph Williams. The only thing more thrilling than his agreement to become my advisor was the discovery of his boundless generosity and kindness. His enthusiasm for Milton and for learning has been infectious, and I deeply regret that our weekly meetings will be coming to an end. Yet I cannot help but feel, as almost anyone who comes into contact with him must, that I have gained a lifetime friend and mentor, and for this alone I am blessed in this process.

I would also like to thank Professor Doug Trevor, whose assistance was indispensable and whose office was always open to me.

My mother, Teri Mikan Gadaletto, read early drafts of this thesis and managed as she always does to walk the razor's edge between praise and remarkably insightful criticism. I owe her a somewhat more substantial thanks, however, in that this essay, my English degree and my general love of literature are completely and unequivocally attributable to her intellectual influence. She is the most wonderful woman I know, and I thank her with all my heart.

ABSTRACT

This essay examines the role of marriage in the conversion scene of *Paradise Lost*, the final part of Book 10 that portrays Adam and Eve's rejection of the Satanic model and their ultimate repentance before God. The fate of humanity literally depends on the outcome of this scene, and my thesis argues that Adam and Eve cannot achieve their crucial reconciliation with God until they have first accomplished reconciliation with one another.

Because the conversion scene largely involves marital reconstruction, it is necessary to understand the nature of marriage as presented in the poem as a whole. Not only was this issue much debated during the poet's lifetime, but Milton displays in many of his works a keen interest in the doctrine and discipline of marriage. Many aspects of the ideal union that Milton outlines in his Divorce Tracts appear in *Paradise Lost*—spirituality before physicality, mutual assistance, frequent conversation, and the remarkable ability of this institution to improve society and train the wedded pair for the final union with God.

Paradise Lost presents a universe tailored towards marriage. God's grand design is *unification*, the process in which all obedient and rational creatures rise and become one with Him. Although humans can stand alone, the poem makes it clear that they are stronger and best capable of obedience when they stand together. Marriage, both prelapsarian and postlapsarian, is the best vehicle for reaching the ultimate goal God provides his children: union with Himself. More than any other moment in the poem, therefore, the conversion scene communicates the essential role marriage plays in the unification process, for only with the help of one another do Adam and Eve emerge from the paralyzing muck of Satanic error and become capable of submitting to God, a heroic action that heals their relationship with Him and opens the way for the entire human race to return to their Heavenly Father at the end of time, when "God shall be All in all."

But first the couple must see to their sins. Chapter 1 analyzes three key points in the conversion scene where Adam and Eve manifest certain fallen traits that, in their resemblance to earlier offenses of the demons, threaten the couple's redemption. The three moments considered are Adam's bitter and anguished soliloquy, his misogynist execration of Eve, and Eve's proposition that they abstain from sex or commit suicide.

Chapter 2 investigates the portrayal of marriage in the poem at large, and makes four major points—first, that God founds marriage for the alleviation of human loneliness; second, that marriage is a paradox, being a single unit composed of two distinct individuals; third, that Adam and Eve can rise to the angelic rank by practicing ideal marital love; and fourth, that the fundamental motion of the universe is one of ascension to God, an ascension made possible only by the kind of participatory love inherent to marriage. It is because of this that the prime torture in Hell is isolation, a bar to participating in unification.

Chapter 3 returns to the conversion scene and addresses the two remaining obstacles to Adam and Eve's repentance. First, though both offer to repent on their own, these proposals are narcissistic and counter to the necessary marital reconciliation. Secondly, if participation is good, why does Adam fall after following the "link of nature" and remaining by his wife's side? The chapter concludes with Adam and Eve's walk to the place of judgment, analyzing this key moment with a new appreciation for the poem's singular presentation of the marital institution and its indispensable role in the salvation of the human race.

CONTENTS

Short Titles.....	i
Introduction.....	1
Chapter 1: The Abyss of Fears.....	7
I. Adam’s Soliloquy	
II. Adam’s Harangue	
III. Eve’s Apology and “vehement despair”	
Chapter 2: Wedded Love and Unification.....	24
I. The Institution of Marriage	
II. The Marital Paradox	
a. “Coupledness”	
b. Individuality	
III. “Till body up to spirit work”: Upward Mobility	
IV. “God shall be All in all”: The Unification Process	
a. Animal Pairing	
b. Angelic Interpenetration	
c. “Wedded Love”	
d. Demonic Isolation	
Chapter 3: To the Place of Judgment.....	52
I. “On me, me only”	
II. The “link of nature”: Adam’s Fall	
III. “Of sorrow unfeigned and humiliation meek”	
Conclusion.....	64
Works Consulted.....	69

SHORT TITLES

CPW: Wolfe, Don M., et al., eds. *Complete Prose Works of John Milton*, 8 vols. New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 1953-82.

DDD: *The Doctrine and Discipline of Divorce*. See CPW.

De doctrina: De doctrina Christiana. See CPW.

Empson: Empson, William. *Milton's God*. Westport: Greenwood Press, 1978.

Flannagan: Flannagan, Roy, ed. *The Riverside Milton*. Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1998.

Forsyth: Forsyth, Neil. *The Satanic Epic*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2003.

Lewalski: Lewalski, Barbara. *The Life of John Milton: A Critical Biography*. 2000. Malden: Blackwell, 2002.

Luxon: Luxon, Thomas H. *Single Imperfection: Milton, Marriage and Friendship*. Pittsburgh: Duquesne University Press, 2005.

PL: Milton, John. *Paradise Lost*. Ed. Gordon Teskey. New York: Norton, 2005.

Stone: Stone, Lawrence. *The Family, Sex and Marriage in England 1500-1800*. London: Harper & Row, 1977.

Turner: Turner, James Grantham. *One Flesh: Paradisal Marriage and Sexual Relations in the Age of Milton*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1987.

INTRODUCTION

The ideal prelapsarian relationship is dealt a terrible blow by the Fall. Having eaten the forbidden fruit and engaged in “am’rous play” (9.1045), Adam and Eve suddenly begin to experience troubling new emotions: “anger, hate,/ Mistrust, suspicion, discord” (9.1123-24). The resultant self-consciousness produces acute shame, not godlike wisdom. As Adam puts it,

Bad fruit of knowledge if this be to know
Which leaves us naked thus, of honor void,
Of innocence, of faith, of purity. (9.1073-75)

He expresses an awareness here of the horrible transformation his mind has undergone, for in a sense Adam and Eve have suffered years of trauma compacted into a single apple while remaining painfully cognizant that they are to blame for their mental mutilation. Rather than admitting their guilt, however, each falls to accusing the other, Adam condemning Eve for exposing the both of them to temptation, she him for allowing her to leave in the first place. When they appear before the Son to receive judgment, neither says a word to the other, though Adam sinks to resuming his former accusation of Eve when questioned about his own malfeasance. Thus it is not until the end of Book 10—after Sin and Death have come to earth, after Satan has flown victoriously back to Hell, after the formerly peaceful animals have begun to feed on one another—that the fallen couple reunite to see what can be made of marriage in the harsh new world.

Their marital reconciliation is a difficult and surprisingly dangerous process, one that constitutes the core of the last scene in Book 10, often called the conversion or regeneration scene (10.714-1104).¹ According to John Martin Evans, “conversion” is

¹ See Benjamin Myers, “Prevenient Grace and Conversion in *Paradise Lost*,” *Milton Quarterly* 40 (March 2006): 20. See also Neil Forsyth, *The Satanic Epic* (Princeton: Princeton UP, 2003), 291.

a revolution, a transformation, whether spiritual, moral, physical, or exegetical, from one condition to another, profoundly different one. The first condition is assumed to be so far inferior to the second that the transition from one to the other can take on the characteristics of a second birth or regeneration....²

Evans compares this definition to the one provided by Milton himself in *De doctrina Christiana* (1658-60?):

Regeneration means that the old man is destroyed and that the inner man is regenerated by God through the word and the spirit so that his whole mind is restored to the image of God, as if he were a new creature. Moreover the whole man, both soul and body, is sanctified to God's service and to good works.³

Adam and Eve experience a spiritual regeneration "that includes the emotional and psychological preparation of despair, contrition, and reconciliation between man and wife."⁴ But they are initially isolated from one another both physically and mentally, and in their solitude they risk following Satan's example and teeter on the brink of damnation. Yet by the end of Book 10 they have somehow managed to avoid this fate: not treading the darkness visible, but instead kneeling, hand in hand, on that same ground where last they saw the face of God, and there repenting their trespasses and praying for mercy. How do they get there?

It is the central thesis of this paper that Adam and Eve's repentance before God—the act that firmly differentiates them from Satan and finally appeases God's wrath—cannot occur until *marital* reconciliation has been achieved. This link between conjugal strength and spiritual salvation reveals the poem's profound interest in privileging marriage, an institution that preoccupies Milton in many of his works, from the early love sonnets, to the revolutionary Divorce Tracts, to the late masterpiece *Samson Agonistes*. In these works Milton displays an

² John Martin Evans, *The Miltonic Moment* (Lexington: UP of Kentucky, 1998), 27-28.

³ John Milton, *Complete Prose Works of John Milton*, 8 vols., gen. ed. Don M. Wolfe (New Haven: Yale UP, 1953-82), VI: 461. Although less than ten years ago it would have been necessary to provide a long list of articles on the debate over this treatise's authorship, that storm seems for the most part passed. I am convinced by the overwhelming evidence supplied by such scholars as Dobranski, Rumrich, and Lewalski, who firmly believe, as most now do, that Milton was indeed the treatise's author, contrary to the claims of William Hunter.

⁴ Forsyth, 291.

intense commitment to marital companionship throughout his life and work, devoting himself to the formation of a personal and powerful theory of marriage.

In large part Milton was the product of a long-term Protestant movement to reform the marital institution. The reformers deemphasized the fleshly “Catholic” justifications for marriage—procreation and the avoidance of fornication—and promoted instead the concept of a strong spiritual bond between husband and wife.

Other humanists and Protestant reformers, however, labored hard to recover wedded bliss from the antimarriage and misogynist discourses popular in late medieval Catholic Europe. Often this meant rearticulating marriage using the nomenclature of classical friendship theory.⁵

They believed God had created marriage for the relief of loneliness and that couples were bound to comfort and help one another by a wide variety of means, including prayer, conversation, and mutual work, as well as sex.⁶ Milton inherited this tradition and gives it a new voice in *Paradise Lost*, where marriage plays a central role in both the fall and the revival of the human race.

Chapter 1 will address the greater part of the conversion scene, locating and probing the numerous ways in which Adam and Eve display a dangerous degree of fallenness and a striking similarity to their demonic counterparts. The remarkable power of the scene’s ending is produced by a pervasive sense of danger, a series of disturbing parallels that suggest Adam and Eve could fall to the depths at any moment. The chapter will also introduce certain important concepts that will be developed throughout the thesis, including the evil of self-obsessed isolation, the binary of abstinence and fecundity, the impact of the gender hierarchy on Milton’s idealized marriage, and the poem’s reinterpretation of heroism. Chapter 1 concludes that marital reconciliation is necessary before any repentance can take place, and that only by means of the

⁵ Thomas Luxon, *Single Imperfection: Milton, Marriage and Friendship* (Pittsburgh: Duquesne UP, 2005), 28.

⁶ Eric Carlson, *Marriage and the English Reformation* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1994), 42.

kind of mutual assistance detailed by the Protestant reformers can Adam and Eve escape those Satanic pitfalls that dot the conversion scene.

Chapter 2 takes a wider view of the poem as a whole, focusing in particular on the nature of marriage—how it is supposed to work, how it actually works, and how it is related to larger processes in the poem. The chapter takes as its starting-point Raphael and Adam’s argument in Book 8 concerning the appropriate nature of love (8.521-643). This is a key moment in the poem, as it reveals disagreement between the heavenly and earthly conceptions of love and demands consideration when the Fall occurs. Does the state of Adam and Eve’s marriage directly or indirectly contribute to or even bring about the Fall? If so, and if the reconstitution of marriage is the central process of the conversion scene, then we must understand what marriage is supposed to be in *Paradise Lost* before we can appreciate how Adam and Eve deviate from it and then return to it.

Ideal marriage in the poem is paradoxical, for though Adam and Eve operate as a unit they simultaneously manifest their individuality. This marital paradox is microcosmic of the much larger process of unification. An idea very much in the Neoplatonic mold, unification is the upward movement of all good creation toward God. The fundamental motion of the universe, therefore, is one of ascent and gradated union. I say “gradated,” as hierarchy proves to be an inherent feature of this process—the poem promotes this oneness-of-many model, but the “many” are never completely equal, as Adam and Eve are unequal according to gender. The hierarchical structure of the universe is a recurrent theme in this thesis, for it invariably provides points of tension that encapsulate some of the dominant problems in Milton’s poem as a whole.

Chapter 2 surveys the ontological hierarchy—plants, animals, humans and angels—and shows that the marital paradox expresses itself in one form or another in every rank. It also

addresses God's prophecies concerning the culmination of the unification process, when at the end of time all the blessed shall join him and "God shall be All in all." The chapter concludes with an analysis of the great exception to the rule, namely the fallen angels, whose hopeless existence is primarily characterized by the torture of isolation. Denied physical or spiritual union with one another, they are effectively cut off from reuniting with God and forced to fall further and further in their endless self-regard.

Chapter 3, armed with the poem's general theory of marriage, returns to the conversion to address two remaining tensions: first, Adam and Eve's narcissistic desire to go to the place of judgment alone, and second, the manner of Adam's fall and his mistaken opinion about the "link of nature." Because atonement is so important a part of this scene, Adam must come to realize his great error in "exposing" Eve in the first place. These major issues must be investigated before the final part of the scene, in which Adam and Eve repent as a couple before God.

In the *Doctrine and Discipline of Divorce*, Milton calls "meet and happy conversation" the "chiefest and the noblest end of marriage."⁷ In rebuilding their own marriage, Adam and Eve essentially have what amounts to a conversation, one in which each of them contributes something of value while remaining in need of further help. There is no one speech in the conversion scene that completely solves the dilemma; Adam and Eve engage in a process, with one person uttering a single good word and the other building on it, like two people slowly helping one another emerge from a bed of quicksand. For example, Eve's apology is a key speech that changes the course of the scene dramatically, but it still contains many logical fallacies and selfish inclinations, signs of her continued fallenness. Rejecting the weaknesses, Adam responds to the holy aspect of her speech and becomes capable of helping her in turn. This essay's structure will parallel the dialogic progress of the conversion scene, moving

⁷ CPW II: 246.

chronologically along with the flow of the couple's conversation, building to a conclusion as they themselves move towards the place of judgment. As this essay will show, when they finally do reach that point, they arrive as man and wife, and thus as something infinitely greater—Man.

CHAPTER 1
THE ABYSS OF FEARS

*When I had journeyed half of our life's way,
I found myself within a shadowed forest,
for I had lost the path that does not stray.*

*Ah, it is hard to speak of what it was,
that savage forest, dense and difficult,
which even in recall renews my fear:
so bitter—death is hardly more severe!*

- *Inferno* 1.1-7

The conversion scene follows God's reshaping of the natural world. Angels tilt the earth's axis twenty-three degrees, animals turn from Man, glaring at him from the shadows, and the raging winds and seas produce the first "inclement weather" that shall become such a burden to humankind. Like the tempest reflecting Lear's troubled mind, nature now mirrors the fallen minds of Adam and Eve. Thus it is that the action of Book 10 turns from outer to inner Discord, from the Fall's impact on the earth to its ravaging effect on the human being. Adam observes these dismal changes from a place of isolation, growing ever more despondent and fearful:

These were from without
The growing miseries which Adam saw
Already in part though hid in gloomiest shade,
To sorrow abandoned, but worse felt within
And in a troubled sea of passion tossed
Thus to disburden sought with sad complaint... (10.714-19)

The opening of the conversion scene hardly suggests the triumph to come. Overwhelmed by self-pity and shame, Adam tries to console himself with words, not actions. It is this kind of fallen error—an error hearkening back to Satan and his fellow demons—that will be the focus of this chapter. Although the conversion scene ends with Adam and Eve's return to God, for the majority of the scene they flounder helplessly in arrogant sin.

This may not be readily apparent to the reader, but Milton does not intend it to be. In redefining epic heroism, Milton consistently challenges his audience to deny more traditional heroic models in exchange for a Christian one. For instance, Adam's "troubled sea of passion" alludes to Hamlet's famous "sea of troubles." Hamlet is the great individualist hero, and it is no coincidence that the poem references him before Adam's longest, most emotional, and most postlapsarian speech. *Paradise Lost* is not *Hamlet*, and here the kind of intrepid soul-searching that makes the Dane so beloved of so many readers serves only to accentuate how truly fallen and self-centered Adam has become. Implicit in the comparison is Milton's question as to why Adam chooses to spend so much time agonizing over himself when his own Ophelia is essentially in the next room in great need of support and comfort.

The conversion scene is bestrewn with similar parallels—ostensibly heroic or noble, in truth undermining—but most particularly between the fallen couple and the fallen angels. Milton uses his powerful representation of Hell from Books 1 and 2 to great effect in the conversion scene, paralleling Adam and Eve with Satan in numerous and surprising ways. As we shall see in just a moment, Adam's verbose and hopeless argument against God bears a striking resemblance to Satan's speech on Niphates' top in Book 4. As for Eve, her proposal later in the conversion scene that the two of them commit suicide recalls the demons from Book 2 who attempt to drown themselves in forgetfulness in the river Lethe. More than a series of specific intertextual similarities, however, it is the underlying current of self-destructive isolation and false self-sufficiency—those prime characteristics of Hell itself—that link Adam and Eve to Satan. If not for their actions at the end of the conversion scene, Adam and Eve would follow Satan to Hell. God mercifully grants them grace, but it is they who must use it, and the first half of the scene portrays a couple utterly lost and poised to fall evermore downward. Adam and

Eve's demonic traits then, or what I call the "dangers" of the conversion scene, set the stakes very high; more importantly, as we shall see in Chapters 2 and 3, they serve to underline the significance and power of that agent that ultimately overwhelms them: marriage.

I. Adam's Soliloquy

Adam's soliloquy is a cry from the wilderness.⁸ The 125 lines encapsulate humanity's fallen condition: confusion, estrangement from fellow men and an inscrutable God, guilt for the legacy left to future generations, and the inability of knowledge to quiet these fears. He is still in Paradise proper, but his inner Eden is lost:

O miserable of happy! Is this the end
Of this new glorious world and me so late
The glory of that glory, who now, become
Accurst of blessed, hide me from the face
Of God whom to behold was then my height
Of happiness? (10.720-25)

Adam cannot wrap his mind around the enormous change that has occurred, and it is significant that the second sentence, so full of dire predictions, is framed in the form of a question. He has no idea whether this is the end or not—later he argues in circles about what the end, or Death, even is—but his newly fallen mind offers spacious room in which the foulest imaginings can roam free. David Loewenstein makes a critical point when he links Adam's despondent thoughts and even his physical posture to another character in the poem: "Meditating inconclusively on death and lying outstretched on the cold ground, [Adam] recalls Satan outstretched on the burning lake (see 1.209-10)."⁹ Adam's soliloquy does call Satan to mind, but most of all the

⁸ See Kester S. Svendsen, "Adam's Soliloquy in Book X of *Paradise Lost*," *College English*, 10 (1949), 366-70. See also George M. Muldrow, "The Beginning of Adam's Repentance," *PQ*, 46 (1967), 194-206. Both found in *Milton: Modern Essays in Criticism*, ed. Arthur Barker (Oxford UP, 1965).

⁹ David Loewenstein, *Milton: Paradise Lost* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2004), 110.

Devil's own soliloquy on Niphates (4.32-113).¹⁰ Adam's despair, self-absorption, and maze-like reasoning all mirror this earlier speech, in which Satan, newly-arrived on earth, laments the loss of Heaven and his own inner pain:

[*Satan:*] Me miserable! Which way shall I fly
Infinite wrath and infinite despair?
Which way I fly is Hell, my self am Hell,
And in the lowest deep a lower deep
Still threat'ning to devour me opens wide,
To which the Hell I suffer seems a Heav'n. (4.73-78)

[*Adam:*] O miserable of happy! ...
O conscience, into what abyss of fears
And horrors hast thou driv'n me, out of which
I find no way, from deep to deeper plunged! (10.720, 842-44)

Both Satan and Adam suffer a terrifying vertigo, aware that they could spiral endlessly downwards into the "abyss," a never-ending descent into the disordered self. They realize that Hell is not only a fixed place of punishment, but, in an endlessly disintegrative process, can increase in intensity. Unlike the immutable God, it can evolve. This changeability indicates the significance of internality where Hell is concerned. Although Books 1 and 2 chart a geography complete with fiery lake, burning marl and vast wastelands, Satan and Adam regard Hell most terrifyingly and painfully as an inner world.

Adam tries to comfort himself with philosophy, or seemingly logical argumentation, a practice the poem associates with the fallen state.¹¹ It is a tool the fallen use in place of divine truth, a use of the reasoning faculty that does not show proper respect to God as the creator of reason. Adam reasons that God has no right to punish both him and his posterity for his disobedience:

¹⁰ Many critics have already made this connection between the two soliloquies. See Jun Harada, "The Mechanism of Human Reconciliation in *Paradise Lost*," *Philological Quarterly* 50 (Oct. 1971): 544, n. 9, in which she points to both J. B. Broadbent and George M. Muldrow as earlier explicators of this link. See also Forsyth, 292.

¹¹ E.g., see 2.555-69, where a group of fallen angels has a philosophical debate that seems erudite and impressive, but ultimately fails to discover anything of value, "in wand'ring mazes lost."

Did I request Thee, Maker, from my clay
To mold me Man? Did I solicit Thee
From darkness to promote me or here place
In this delicious garden? As my will
Concurred not to my being it were but right
And equal to reduce me to my dust,
Desirous to resign and render back
All I received, unable to perform
Thy terms too hard by which I was to hold
The good I sought not. (10.743-55)

Milton frequently likens argumentation of this kind to a maze, a labyrinthine construction out of which there is no escape. This maze image is applied to fallen error in general and personified by Satan as serpent:

on his rear,
Circular base of rising folds that towered
Fold above fold, a surging maze. (9.497-99)

In adopting maze-like argumentation, in which he tries to refute God's natural law as if eternal justice were fallible, Adam slips into serpentine error.

Both Adam and Satan grope in the dark for hope and come up empty-handed, becoming increasingly confused and despondent. The memory of former bliss and the knowledge that they are responsible for its loss torture them. Loewenstein's comparison above highlights one of the defining features of both characters: their isolation. In their loneliness they are unable to restore themselves, caught in the endless maze of contradiction, self-justification, and confusion.

Desperate to quell his inner Hell, Satan goes so far as to consider repentance, but at last submits only to pride rather than God:

So farewell hope and with hope farewell fear!
Farewell remorse! All good to me is lost.
Evil, be thou my good. (4.108-10)

Satan fully commits to Hell here, and his words echo throughout Adam's dreadful tour of his newly-fallen mind. Although Adam's speech does not end with the clear decision found in Satan's, one is left with the impression that he is slipping ever further away from God and hope.

II. Adam's Harangue

This pessimistic impression cannot help but be reinforced by Adam's first speech to Eve, which begins appropriately enough with the famous line, "Out of my sight, thou serpent!" (10.867). During the course of this speech, or what I tend to refer to as Adam's harangue or misogynist speech, Adam proceeds to vent his fear, anger and confusion on Eve, blaming her for the Fall and womankind in general for ills that do not even exist yet, "Disturbances on earth through female snares/ And strait conjunction with this sex" (10.897-98). He inveighs against marriage, or "strait conjunction." He prophetically lists different marital misfortunes that will befall men in the future: marrying an unfit partner, loving a woman who spitefully marries a lesser man or is withheld by her parents, or loving someone already married, and wed to an "adversary," no less (10.898-906). All this "infinite calamity shall cause/ To human life and household peace confound" (10.907-8).

Adam has not personally experienced any of these difficulties. Roy Flannagan reads this list as Milton referencing his own marital unhappiness:

The autobiographical references are hard to avoid, since Milton had a long running battle with his in-laws from his first marriage, the Powell family. Mary Powell left him for a time, during which abandonment he apparently considered the possibility either of divorcing (impossible given English law at the time, which permitted divorce only on the grounds of adultery or sexual dysfunction) or marrying a second wife...¹²

¹² Flannagan, n. 299, 651.

There are autobiographical references here, but Flannagan overlooks the speech's relevance to Adam's own situation. To Adam, Eve is the wife that "misfortune" or "mistake" has brought him, a considerable blasphemy in light of the fact that God himself creates her for Adam. He contradicts himself a few lines later, however, when referring to man's "happiest choice ... already linked and wedlock-bound/ To a fell adversary, his hate or shame" (10.904-6). Adam's fallen mind cannot decide whether his wife is a mistake or a blessing. Of course, there is only a contradiction if one believes, as I do, that the phrase "happiest choice" refers to Eve: she is at least included in the referent of that phrase.

What is most interesting about this last figure, however, is the word "adversary," which happens to be the meaning of the name "Satan." Neither Adam nor Eve have up to this point provided any evidence that they know the serpent was Satan disguised. Little more than 100 lines later, however, Adam says,

thy Seed shall bruise
The serpent's head, piteous amends unless
Be meant whom I conjecture, our grand foe
Satan, who in the serpent hath contrived
Against us this deceit. (10.1031-35)

Does Adam already suspect this back at line 906? It is possible. He uncovers no important new clue in between the two speeches, suggesting that he already has sufficient knowledge to make the connection. On the other hand, as will be discussed more fully below, Eve's speech accomplishes such a change in his behavior, bringing him to his senses as it were, that it is also possible that in his present state of mind he cannot arrive at this important truth. Regardless, however, of whether he already knows that it was Satan who tempted his wife, the word "adversary" suggests that Eve binds herself to Satan in a perversion of wedlock when she succumbs to temptation. This temptation scene is blatantly sexual: a naked woman leaning to

take a bite of fruit that the most phallic of animals holds out to her is fairly suggestive. In a symbolic sense, Eve does unite with Satan beneath the tree bearing ripe fruit; his quick scampering off immediately after the dirty deed has been done mirrors the worst kind of sexual tempters.

Eve is momentarily equated with Circe, Paradise is compared to places of violent seduction, and Satan reminds Milton of serpents who coupled with human matrons; he might therefore faintly suggest what Phineas Fletcher declares quite openly—that Eve mated with Satan to produce a sinful progeny.¹³

Even if Adam does not know that it was Satan, the last part of his speech is the first notice of jealousy in married life. Unlike Satan, Adam does not abandon Eve, but he does resent her tryst. Indeed, the beginning of his angry speech gives indication that he has been rolling the idea of her infidelity around in his mind, growing angrier and angrier:

Out of my sight, thou serpent! That name best
Befits thee with him leagued, thyself as false
And hateful! Nothing wants but that thy shape
Like his and color serpentine may show
Thy inward fraud to warn all creatures from thee
Henceforth, lest that too Heav'nly form pretended
To Hellish falsehood snare them! (10.867-73)

He describes Eve as being “leagued” with the serpent, whom he has come to hate. Adam feels betrayed, and though he does not think Eve actually had sex with the creature—“these possibilities are no more than shadowy suggestions”—his response is analogous: she was his, but became the serpent’s.¹⁴

Finally, there is the issue of the “fair defect.” Bursting with anger, Adam says that God should never have created women in the first place:

O why did God,
Creator wise, that peopled highest Heav'n

¹³ James Turner, *One Flesh: Paradisal Marriage and Sexual Relations in the Age of Milton* (New York: Oxford UP, 1987), 291.

¹⁴ Turner, 291-92.

With spirits masculine, create at last
This novelty on earth, this fair defect
Of nature, and not fill the world at once
With men as angels, without feminine,
Or find some other way to generate
Mankind? (10.888-95)

The expression “fair defect” is an allusion to Hesiod’s *Theogony*, in which Pandora, the first woman, is described as a *kalon kakon*, a “beautiful evil.”¹⁵ Zeus creates her to punish mankind for accepting divine fire from Prometheus, and orders his fellow gods to endow her with attractive graces; her charm overwhelms Epimetheus, Prometheus’ foolish brother, to whom Zeus cunningly offers Pandora in marriage. As soon as the marriage is sealed, Pandora’s fatal curiosity gets the better of her and she opens a cursed jar, setting loose all the evils of the world. According to Hesiod, Pandora is emblematic of women in general—beautiful, irrational and destructive:

This was the origin of the damnable race of women—a plague which men must live with ... Zeus the thundergod made women mischievous in their ways and a curse for men: he dispensed a curse to go with a blessing. Whoever seeks to avoid marriage and the troublesome ways of women, and therefore refuses to marry, finds old age a curse without anyone to tend his years ... As for the man fated to marry, even if he get a good wife well suited to his temper, evil is continually balanced with good in his life; if he should get pestilent children, the grief in his heart and soul is unremitting throughout life: this evil has no cure.¹⁶

Hesiod and Adam agree that women are an unnatural curse on men; their feminine charm irresistible, their temperaments tortuous. They cast marriage as an inherently unhappy relationship, a “curse to go with a blessing”; as we shall see in Chapter 2, God creates Eve and marriage as a blessing for Adam, an alleviation of his loneliness, but now Adam cannot understand how God could torture him with a woman in the first place (one has only to reflect on Adam’s delighted description of his marriage in Book 8 to see how shortsighted his thinking is

¹⁵ Hesiod, *Theogony*, trans. Norman O. Brown (Indianapolis: Bobbs-Merrill, 1953), 69.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 70.

here). Hesiod's mentioning of "pestilent children" also pertains to Adam, who returns again and again in his soliloquy to his shame at passing on pestilential sin to his offspring. In short, Adam characterizes Eve and the female sex in general as unnatural snares. As Pandora's divine gifts overcome Epimetheus, so too do Eve's beauty and charm overcome Adam; it is not his fault that he fell, but rather God's and Eve's—the former for coupling Adam with this irresistible time-bomb, the latter for tempting him to fall.

The poem acknowledges that Eve's unparalleled beauty and grace quickly become dangerous once she has decided that Adam should join in her fallenness (see 9.830-33). Before the couple goes to bed in Book 4, the narrative voice disturbs the peaceful scene by ominously likening Eve to Pandora:

in naked beauty more adorned,
More lovely than Pandora whom the gods
Endowed with all their gifts—and O! too like
In sad event when to th' unwiser son
Of Japhet, brought by Hermes, she ensnared
Mankind with her fair looks to be avenged
On him who had stole Jove's authentic fire. (4.713-19)

"In sad event" Eve may be "too like" Pandora, but God makes her so attractive to please Adam, not to bring about his downfall, and thus unlike Hesiod's first woman Eve is not by creation a *kalon kakon*. Her adornments may tempt Adam to disobey, but in *Paradise Lost* "th' unwiser son/ Of Japhet" can choose to withstand temptation. Adam's *kalon kakon* argument is but another example of his unwillingness to accept responsibility.

Milton's referencing a pagan poet in this context undermines Adam's misogyny. The key to this undermining process is Milton's project of reinventing epic heroism. Though an avid student of classical literature, he repeatedly states that the values of his epic are not those of his

Greek and Roman forebears. His is a Christian epic that therefore promotes a new kind of heroism. Introducing the tragic Fall that he will soon relate, he writes,

Sad task! Yet argument
Not less but more heroic than the wrath
Of stern Achilles on his foe pursued
Thrice fugitive about Troy wall or rage
Of Turnus for Lavinia disespoused,
Or Neptune's ire or Juno's that so long
Perplexed the Greek and Cytherea's son, ...
Not sedulous by nature to indite
Wars, hitherto the only argument
Heroic deemed, chief mast'ry to dissect
With long and tedious havoc fabled knights
In battles feigned, the better fortitude
Of patience and heroic martyrdom
Unsung. (9.13-19, 27-33)

He goes on to give even more examples of past epic subject matter that he considers vain and worldly, "Not that which justly gives heroic name/ To person or to poem" (9.40-41). Milton's "advent'rous song" (1.13) converses with other epics, evaluating and then trying to surpass them, soaring "Above th' Aonian mount" (1.15). The passage above links this project of reevaluation to a Christian interpretation of heroism; in *Paradise Lost*, being a hero is less about amassing a high body count and more about patience, obedience and self-sacrifice. Thus classical allusion is often used negatively in *Paradise Lost*. For example, Flannagan writes,

Milton writes against the grain of classical epic in the sense that he rejects the Homeric and Vergilian theme of the wrath of the gods and their irrational and bitter pursuit of heroes ... Milton parodies the belligerent epic hero in the false but convincingly defiant heroism of Satan, and he parodies the epic quest in Satan's long and dangerous, but un-heroic, flights across the boundaries of the universe.¹⁷

While an association with a Homeric hero may arguably speak well of a character in Apollonius' *Argonautica*, in *Paradise Lost* such an allusion is more often indicative of sin. Adam is thus weighed down by echoes of Hesiod in his speech, or rather, his argument is invalidated because

¹⁷ Flannagan, 303.

of its association with that of a pagan writer unfamiliar with the Word of God.¹⁸ Adam's speech, far from being the poem's endorsement of this kind of misogyny, shows the painful birth of an antimyth, the fallen creation of the misogynist tradition that will continue with vigor into the postlapsarian world.

Adam's harangue as a whole is a grotesque expression of his inner corruption. As at the end of Book 9, he is still accusing others, but now with a keener, crueler edge. Describing this speech, Flannagan writes, "His argument has been demonstrably wrong-headed and Satanic in its reasoning; it is obvious from what follows Adam's tirade that he is in the wrong in his passion and Eve is his victim."¹⁹ Forsyth calls this "Adam at his worst—hateful, selfish, egocentric, base in his blame of woman—Adam at his weakest."²⁰ Adam's words not only show who is right and wrong; the speech also serves, by means of the very intensity of its selfishness and cruelty, to throw into relief the utter strangeness and beauty of the words that follow.

III. Eve's Apology and "vehement despair"

The reader must wait a long time to hear Eve speak because Adam dominates the scene, refusing to listen to his wife even when she tries consoling him after his soliloquy:

[Adam] thus afflicted when sad Eve beheld,
Desolate where she sat, approaching nigh,
Soft words to his fierce passion she assayed,
But her with stern regard he thus repelled... (10.863-66)

¹⁸ This is not to say that every classical allusion in the poem has a negative connotation. Milton loved the classics, and it would be impossible to list the rhetorical, structural and poetic techniques of that tradition that are put to work in *PL*. For example, although he alludes to Homer's catalogue of the Greeks in the *Iliad* by composing a similar catalogue of demons (see 1.376-521), he also uses the catalogue extensively during the Creation when discussing the first works of God. Yet it is clear that he tends to heap classical allusion on Satan and the fallen angels, while refraining during the scenes in Heaven and prelapsarian Paradise.

¹⁹ Flannagan, n. 301, 651.

²⁰ Forsyth, 295.

Adam goes on to deliver his tirade against women, but this brief passage warrants our close attention because of an odd feature. It is unusual for Milton to reference a character's speaking without recording their words, but that is precisely what happens with Eve here. The poem emphasizes Eve's silence, as well as the way in which Adam prevents himself from hearing what she has to say. Granted, the word "assayed" makes the moment somewhat ambiguous: does Eve actually speak or merely try to do so before Adam cuts her off? It is arguable that the result is the same: Adam and the reader are denied Eve's words, a matter which the poem goes out of its way to highlight. Before her speech Eve says next to nothing in Book 10, responding only with a single line when the Son asks her to explain herself:

The serpent me beguiled and I did eat. (10.162)²¹

Compared to Adam's verbose excuses, Eve's reply is striking in its humility and conciseness. In a way it foreshadows her future speech, for in both her willingness to accept responsibility contrasts sharply with Adam's moral thrashing about. Eve's forced silence in the passage above serves to emphasize Adam's self-destructive isolation.²² Adam drowns himself and the reader in his despair, egotism and fury; he has fallen so far into himself that he cannot ask for help. His fierce interruption of Eve's attempt at reconciliation alerts readers that they are unwillingly tied to Adam; arguably, we want Eve to interject and break the cycle of self-pity. Her first failed attempt to do so stresses the danger of isolation and the need for intervention, considering that what silences her is one of the most hateful speeches in the poem.

Eve's speech not only marks a turning-point in the conversion scene but is one of the cruxes of the entire poem, catalyzing the necessary revitalization of marriage. As M. M. Pecheux writes, "as it is through the instrumentality of a woman that the first man fell, so it was

²¹ Genesis 3.13.

²² See Stanley Fish, *Surprised by Sin* (Cambridge: Harvard UP, 1997).

also through a woman that the redemption began.”²³ Eve withstands “Adam at his worst”; she apologizes for her wrongdoing and pleads for his renewed good will:

Forsake me not thus, Adam, witness Heaven,
What love sincere and reverence in my heart
I bear thee, and unweeting have offended,
Unhappily deceived. Thy suppliant,
I beg and clasp thy knees. Bereave me not
Whereon I live: thy gentle looks, thy aid,
Thy counsel, in this uttermost distress
My only strength and stay! (10.914-21)

There are of course problems with Eve’s speech. She goes too far in blaming herself and proposes that she alone bear the entire punishment, a seemingly noble suggestion that is actually narcissistic (her errors here will be further discussed in Chapter 3). Her speech is heroic enough that it results in reconciliation. As previously discussed, heroism is a thorny concept in *Paradise Lost*, since Milton rejects the classical model and replaces it with a Christian one: instead of swordsmanship and cunning, the new hero demonstrates the “better fortitude/ Of patience and heroic martyrdom” (9.31-32). Eve exhibits these virtues to a certain extent in her speech: she patiently endures Adam’s insults and offers to sacrifice herself for his sake. She cannot fulfill such a sacrifice, and her belief that she can is a reminder of her precarious position. What is more important than this vain attempt at martyrdom is her similarity to the poem’s greatest hero, the Son. His humiliation and martyrdom suffered for humanity’s sake sets the heroic bar in *Paradise Lost*, and Eve’s speech, though not perfect, bears a strong resemblance to it. Though she acts somewhat self-interestedly, when she begs forgiveness at Adam’s feet her submission reflects the Son’s willing descent from a divine to a human nature. Disdain prevents Satan and Adam from repenting, but Eve manages to overcome this proud anger and admit her need for help. More than that, she reintroduces love to the marital sphere, that emotion which most

²³ As quoted in Harada, 544. M. M. Pecheux, “The Concept of the Second Eve in *Paradise Lost*,” *PMLA*, 35 (1960), 360.

characterizes the Son. The dank tatters of a fallen mind still hang from Eve's speech; she is not Christ and her speech does not in and of itself accomplish the couple's redemption. But it is an indispensable part of that long walk to the place of judgment, for it stirs Adam from his dark mutterings and invigorates him to take the lead and help *her*.

His revival is timely, for Eve immediately requires his "more attentive mind" (10.1011) to correct her fallen impulses; though her speech accomplishes much, Milton quickly reminds us that the gender hierarchy calls for Adam to guide his wife, not the other way around. Having received his forgiveness and contrition, Eve essentially tempts her husband a second time, proposing they circumvent their punishment by one of two means—abstinence or suicide.

Childless thou art, childless remain! ...
But if thou judge it hard and difficult,
Conversing, looking, loving to abstain
From love's due rites, nuptial embraces sweet,
And with desire to languish without hope
Before the present object languishing
With like desire, which would be misery
And torment less than none of what we dread,
Then, both ourselves and seed at once to free
From what we fear for both, let us make short,
Let us seek Death, or, he not found, supply
With our own hands his office on ourselves. (10.989, 992-1002)

This final obstacle to the couple's redemption echoes the demonic as much as Adam's soliloquy does. To avoid conceiving a child tainted by original sin, Eve proposes abstinence, but rightly suspects that "with desire to languish without hope" will be a terrible misery. Indeed, hopeless sexual desire is one of the devils' torments; when Satan sees Adam and Eve kiss, he complains that "fierce desire/ (Among our other torments not the least)/ Still unfulfilled with pain of longing pines" (4.509-11). By suggesting abstinence then, Eve proposes they contravene God's judgment and place themselves in Satan's miserable position. The same holds true for suicide. Demons cannot die, but the infernal explorers of Book 2 attempt the next best thing. Happening

upon the river Lethe, they try to drink from the “tempting stream with one small drop to lose/ In sweet forgetfulness all pain and woe/ All in one moment, and so near the brink” (2.607-09). The desire to end their suffering resigns them to the erasure of their very selves, and Eve’s fear leads her to a similar conclusion, “Destruction with destruction to destroy” (10.1006).

Abstinence and suicide are not linked to the demonic without reason, for they violate the essential fecundity of the universe. God has made a world teeming with life, all of which has his blessing to “Be fruitful, multiply, and fill the earth” (7.531).²⁴ The Creation itself, that ultimate propagative act, abounds with sex and birth imagery. The primal ocean envelopes and nourishes the earth, that “embryon immature” (7.277), until it is fully developed and ready to appear:

Immediately the mountains huge appear
Emergent and their broad bare backs upheave
Into the clouds, their tops ascend the sky.
So high as heaved the tumid hills, so low
Down sunk a hollow bottom broad and deep,
Capacious bed of waters. (7.285-90)

Dry land does not instantaneously materialize but is bred, a gendered and sexual being: the phallic “tumid hills” thrust upwards with tremendous erotic force, differentiating themselves from the vaginal pools of water below, those “broad and deep” wombs from which the “broad bare backs” of mountains upheave. Animals also are born—“Out of the ground uprose/ As from his lair the wild beast” (7.456-57)—and as for the garden, it grows almost to excess. Indeed, the two gardeners cannot keep pace, with Adam noting that these “branches overgrown” require “More hands than ours to lop their wanton growth” (4.627, 629). Life thus calls out for more life, but both of Eve’s suggestions are entirely at odds with what Whitman calls the “procreant urge of the world.”²⁵

²⁴ Genesis 1.28: “And God blessed them, and God said unto them, Be fruitful, and multiply, and replenish the earth, and subdue it.”

²⁵ Walt Whitman, “Song of Myself,” *Leaves of Grass* (New York: Penguin, 2005), l. 37.

Adam's response to these suggestions and the close of the conversion scene must be left to Chapter 3. For the moment it is enough to register the significance of the scene in general. Fallenness is not a static concept, and with each progressive part of the conversion scene Adam and Eve teeter on the brink of even greater damnation. The majority of the scene is a study in Satanic error and cannot truly be understood without recourse to earlier moments in the poem. What differentiates Adam and Eve from Satan and his bold compeers is the revitalization of marriage, a process in which each partner plays an indispensable role. Though both stumble in the darkness, they somehow muster enough light to gently pull one another away from the edge. The conversion scene highlights the privileging of marriage that occurs throughout *Paradise Lost*. Chapter 2 then will analyze this institution as presented by the poem. The walk to the place of judgment that concludes the conversion scene also concludes Adam and Eve's marital reconciliation, but the significance of this event cannot be appreciated without first understanding the poem's ideal of marriage. Let us turn then from the twilight of the fallen world to luminescent Paradise, the seat of conjugal bliss.

CHAPTER 2
WEDDED LOVE AND UNIFICATION

And they shall be one flesh, one heart, one soul.

- Adam, *Paradise Lost* 8.499

As Eve offers him the forbidden fruit in Book 9, Adam sinks into his own thoughts and ponders his decision:

How can I live without thee, how forgo
Thy sweet converse and love so dearly joined
To live again in these wild woods forlorn?
Should God create another Eve and I
Another rib afford, yet loss of thee
Would never from my heart. No! No! I feel
The link of nature draw me, flesh of flesh,
Bone of my bone thou art and from thy state
Mine never shall be parted, bliss or woe. (9.908-916)

If Raphael were present when Adam uses a “link of nature” to justify his imminent damnation, the exasperated archangel would have little else to offer than the advice already given:

Accuse not Nature: she hath done her part,
Do thou but thine and be not diffident
Of Wisdom! (8.561-63)

Raphael responds thus to Adam’s earlier confession about his love for Eve. The new husband is excited but slightly confused by the intensity of his feelings, but Raphael believes Adam has failed to exercise sufficient control over his emotions and thereby allowed Eve an unnatural and unhealthy degree of independence. Because the poem defines male reason as more heavenly and thus superior to female charm and beauty, Adam essentially upsets the natural order by admiring a subordinate to such an extreme degree. Even if Adam lacks complete confidence in his superiority, Raphael says, he should still act the part and thereby at least fool his wife into assuming her appropriate submissive role.

Adam, for the most part, is an ideal student—curious, polite, quick to learn. Here for the first time he disagrees with his teacher, persisting in his amorous devotion to Eve. Later, he is not beguiled by Eve’s praise of the fruit, and is fully aware that death will be the price for eating it, but he cannot imagine happiness in a life without Eve. Like Orpheus in search of Eurydice, Adam feels so strong a connection to his wife that he is willing to brave Hell itself to remain by her side. Though this may sound noble, Raphael would not consider it heroic, but self-serving, weak, and disobedient.

Adam and Raphael’s disagreement points to fundamental marital issues. How is it possible that a prelapsarian marriage can have difficulties? This chapter will focus on the poem’s theory of marriage, for if marital reconciliation must precede repentance before God, one must understand where marriage gets this power from and how it is supposed to operate. What of the tension between coupled repentance and the traditional Protestant emphasis on an *individual* relationship with God? This last question in particular will fuel this investigation of love and marriage, into diverse reaches of the poem and into Milton’s prose, particularly the Divorce Tracts. Marriage in the poem is paradoxical: at its best it is a complete union—“one flesh, one heart, one soul”—yet a union composed of two distinct individuals, each with his or her own particular drives, interests and weaknesses. Can two people have a unified relationship with God, and if so, what would it look like?

I. The Institution of Marriage

Why is marriage instituted, and by whom? In his seminal history of the early modern family, Lawrence Stone claims that one of the chief goals of the Protestant Reformation was the

sanctification and advancement of marriage.²⁶ During the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, Protestants redefined marriage as a union not only of the body but also the soul, elevating the Catholic sacrament of old to a new doctrine of “holy matrimony.”²⁷ Reformers like Luther believed marriage suffered from too low a regard under the Catholic Church and that God intended it to be a more fundamental, perhaps even *the* fundamental, relationship in Christian society.²⁸ Stone writes that the Catholic ascetic ideal was slowly being replaced by a new norm:

The medieval Catholic ideal of chastity, as a legal obligation for priests, monks and nuns and as an ideal for all members of the community to aspire to, was replaced by the ideal of conjugal affection. The married state now became the ethical norm for the virtuous Christian...²⁹

Catholicism did define marriage differently than did its Protestant detractors. According to church doctrine, marriage was intended to fulfill two purposes: 1) the avoidance of fornication and 2) the generation of children. Although Protestants continued to list these as appropriate reasons for marrying, they proceeded to add a third—“mutual society, help and comfort.”³⁰ In time many came to believe that this was in fact the most important reason of all.³¹

Like the Protestant reformers before him, Milton saw marriage as an institution with loftier aims than the satisfaction of bodily desire, and like those others, he looked to Genesis to confirm his view. Adam’s creation story in Book 8 reflects Milton’s understanding of marriage as a divinely instituted relationship, based on his reading of Genesis. Adam tells Raphael how he

²⁶ Lawrence Stone, *The Family, Sex and Marriage in England 1500-1800* (London: Harper & Row, 1977), 135-42.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, 136.

²⁸ Martin Luther, “The Estate of Marriage (27 January 2008),”

<http://www.warwick.ac.uk/fac/arts/History/teaching/protref/women/WR0913.htm>.

²⁹ Stone, 135.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, 136: “It was Archbishop Cranmer who in England first officially added a third to those two ancient reasons for marriage, the avoidance of fornication and the procreation of legitimate children. In his Prayer Book of 1549 he added the motive of ‘mutual society, help and comfort, that the one ought to have of the other, both in prosperity and in adversity.’”

³¹ *Ibid.*, 135: “This theme was developed still further by mid- and late-seventeenth-century Puritans, particularly by the Presbyterian Richard Baxter, who reversed the order of marriage motives in the prayer book, and put mutual comfort and support before procreation—an order of priorities first adopted by William Tyndale as far back as 1528, and followed by a number of later Puritan divines.”

awoke and was transported to the Garden of Eden, how an ethereal voice guided him through his new home, and how he named all the animals, “Approaching two and two” (8.350). But on seeing these bestial pairs he feels unhappy:

But with me
I see not who partakes. In solitude
What happiness? Who can enjoy alone
Or all enjoying what contentment find? (8.363-66)

Adam is lonely, and the naming process has made him recognize this deficiency. He complains to God that Man is a social creature, unable to communicate fully with the inferior order of animals, yet nevertheless requiring companionship just as they do. Unlike God, who in and of himself is sufficient, Man needs a companion with whom to converse, an equal who will “solace his defects” (8.419), an expression that hearkens back to Archbishop Cranmer’s “mutual society, help and comfort.”

God’s kindly response to Adam highlights the link between marriage and the human condition:

I, ere thou spak’st,
Knew it not good for Man to be alone
And no such company as then thou saw’st
Intended thee—for trial only brought
To see how thou could’st judge of fit and meet.
What next I bring shall please thee, be assured,
Thy likeness, thy fit help, thy other self,
Thy wish exactly to thy heart’s desire. (8.444-51)

God says Man should be coupled like the animals, but for a much higher purpose. Adam’s loneliness is not the result of some singular deficiency, but rather an aspect of the human condition itself: Man is meant to marry for the happy alleviation of loneliness.³² God calls the future Eve “Thy likeness, thy fit help, thy other self.” Eve will be a traditional “help-meet” to Adam—being his companion, helping him work and prepare food—but she is also a part of him,

³² See *CPW II*: 253, where Milton refers to “this originall and sinles *Penury* or *Lonelines* of the soul.”

a reflection of him, and most important of all a spiritual completion of him. Adam and Eve as a couple will be more than the sum of their two individual selves, yet simultaneously retain their individuality: this is the central paradox of the poem where marriage, and thus the human condition, is concerned.

II. The Marital Paradox

a. “Coupledness”

Let us begin then by analyzing Adam and Eve as a marital unit, in contrast to those moments in the poem that highlight their separateness or individuality. It should be noted that examples of both these poles of the marital paradox—union and individual—will be prelapsarian, for after the Fall Adam and Eve are obviously separated. Although pre- and postlapsarian marriage must and will be compared later in this paper, the present goal is to show that the marital paradox exists in the prelapsarian world and thus represents the poem’s marital ideal.

Many moments in the poem display Adam and Eve as a marital unit, less an artificial pair and more a single being. Adam expresses this idea of “coupledness” the very first time sees Eve in the flesh:

I now see
Bone of my bone, flesh of my flesh, my self
Before me: *Woman* is her name, of Man
Extracted. For this cause he shall forgo
Father and mother and to his wife adhere
And they shall be one flesh, one heart, one soul. (8.494-99)

This is largely a paraphrase of Genesis 2.23-24, but the addition of “one heart, one soul” is Milton’s own. Whereas the Bible refers only to the fleshly, here marriage is reinterpreted as signifying a much deeper, more spiritual bond that unites two people. Consider prayer: Adam

and Eve pray every morning and every night, always improvising their words of praise rather than merely repeating a set poem or song. Adhering to Milton's personal dislike of presented structure or form where spiritual worship was concerned, this "adoration pure" (4.737) is spontaneous and in "various style" (5.146), a vocalized motion of the inner Spirit exceeding all postlapsarian artistic achievement.³³ John Knott describes Milton's attitude towards prayer in his book *The Sword of the Spirit*:

This sense of active and continuous intervention by God, through the agency of the Spirit, explains Milton's extravagant expectations for the perfecting of the reformation in England, and also his extreme hostility to traditions that prescribed the form of worship and church government. If the renovating work of the Spirit was indeed continuous, those who imposed a set liturgy upon ministers were guilty of the tyranny of 'impropriating the Spirit of God to themselves.' Prayer, as the gift of the Spirit should be spontaneous.³⁴

Despite this spontaneity, the couple prays "unanimous" (4.736). This reinterprets the Protestant belief in an individual relationship with God—especially where prayer is concerned—for Adam and Eve perform their perfect prayer simultaneously as a couple, becoming an individual of their own.

Gardening is another example of union. Though the garden's abundant flora grow apace, Adam and Eve work diligently side by side, weeding, pruning and clipping, and looking forward to the day their children will be able to lend a hand (4.629). Not only do they work as a couple, but their union leaves its mark on the very plants they tend:

Or they led the vine
To wed her elm: she spoused about him twines
Her marriageable arms and with her brings
Her dow'r, th' adopted clusters, to adorn
His barren leaves. (4.215-19)

³³ Concerning paradisaical prayer as art, see Turner, 33, and Gordon Teskey's note in *PL*, n. 5.149.

³⁴ John Knott, *The Sword of the Spirit: Puritan Responses to the Bible* (Chicago: University of Chicago P, 1980), 112.

Here Milton uses a traditional image to show nature mirroring the human state: the submissive vine clings to her strong supportive elm and brings with her the gift of offspring.³⁵ The word “led” suggests a parallel between the two plants and Eve being guided to her husband by the voice of God: “What could I do/ But follow straight, invisibly thus led?” (4.475-76). The fact that Adam and Eve are responsible for bringing the plants together does not suggest that marriage is somehow artificial or unnatural; rather, the couple is fulfilling their responsibility—both as human beings and as a married couple—by standing in for God to impose beneficent order on a lower rank of creation. What Adam says about the hierarchy between humans and animals also applies to plants: “Hast Thou not made me here Thy substitute/ And these inferior far beneath me set?” (8.381-82). If gardening may be read then as also representing postlapsarian work—accounting, farming, ruling—then Adam and Eve are a model for future couples, who must similarly help one another accomplish the day’s work.

b. Individuality

The other side of the marital paradox is individuality. Although Adam and Eve are a marital *unit*, they are also individuals with their own temperaments and desires. In Book 4, for example, Eve asks Adam why the stars shine when no one is awake to admire them:

But wherefore all night long shine these? For whom
This glorious sight when sleep hath shut all eyes? (4.657-58)

Unprompted by her husband, Eve shows a keen curiosity about the new world, and Adam actually has some difficulty answering her question. The couple have different dreams, and Adam comforts Eve after her nightmare. Eve absents herself during Adam and Raphael’s conversation to tend her flowerbed, and because she prefers Adam’s storytelling. Her next

³⁵ Cf. Adriana in *The Comedy of Errors*: “Thou art an elm, my husband, I a vine,/ Whose weakness, married to thy strong state,/ Makes me with thy strength to communicate” (2.2.174-76).

departure from Adam leads directly to the Fall, but even this display of individuality is not so much wrong in and of itself as it is poorly handled by both of them. Adam and Eve are different people, but as a married couple they must work to harmonize their individual motivations.

Individuality is a particularly subtle aspect of the poem's conjugal ideal, for as we shall see below, God encourages union in all ranks of the ontological hierarchy. It may seem counterintuitive then that marriage at its best should involve separateness of any kind, especially when one considers that the defining characteristic of Milton's Hell is isolation—separation taken to the extreme. But individuality and isolation are not one and the same, and individuality is firmly compatible with the poem in three key ways.

First, the inequality between husband and wife starkly differentiates Adam and Eve:

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. (4.295-99)

Mary Nyquist argues that too many critics overlook the gender hierarchy operating in Adam and Eve's marriage out of a desire to make Milton the "patron saint of the companionate marriage":

The undeniable emphasis on mutuality to be found in *Paradise Lost*—the mutual dependency of Eve and Adam on one another, their shared responsibility for the Fall—is for this reason often treated as if it somehow entailed a significant form of equality. Differences that in *Paradise Lost* are ordered hierarchically and ideologically tend to be neutralized by a critical discourse interested in formal balance and harmonious pairing.³⁶

There is no question that Eve's sex renders her definitively inferior to Adam; in *Paradise Lost* and elsewhere, Milton justifies this inequality on the grounds that God created man, not woman, in his image. Though not the focus of this essay, gender hierarchy plays a critical role in the

³⁶ Mary Nyquist, "The Genesis of Gendered Subjectivity in the Divorce Tracts and in *Paradise Lost*," *Re-Membering Milton: Essays on the Texts and Traditions* (New York and London: Methuen, 1988), as quoted in *Paradise Lost*, ed. Gordon Teskey, 504-05.

poem's marital ideal and cannot be made something it is not—indeed, both the Fall and the conversion scene hinge in large part on the couple's failure or success in carrying out their prescribed roles. Adam and Eve's sexual difference acts as the fundamental differentiation between them, the root of their individuality.

Second, much as does the Son's sacrifice, individuality emphasizes human dignity. The poem is sensitive to the complexity and beauty of a single human mind, and Milton does not aspire to humanity-as-hive. Adam excitedly says that he and Eve have a "Union of mind or in us both one soul" (8.604), but this does not mean they must think the same thoughts and have identical goals. In *Areopagitica* Milton argues that the clash of opinions—some good, some evil—is essential both for the moral virtue of a Christian and to the discovery of Truth:

And perhaps this is that doom which *Adam* fell into of knowing good and evil, that is to say of knowing good by evil. As therefore the state of man now is; what wisdom can there be to choose, what continence to forbear without the knowledge of evil? He that can apprehend and consider vice with all her baits and seeming pleasures, and yet abstain, and yet distinguish, and yet prefer that which is truly better, he is the true warfaring Christian. I cannot praise a fugitive and cloister'd virtue, unexercis'd & unbreath'd, that never sallies out and sees her adversary, but slinks out of the race, where that immortall garland is to be run for, not without dust and heat.³⁷

Areopagitica is sometimes misrepresented as an unadulterated call for free speech and plurality of opinion. Milton believes in the existence of one truth, but thinks it requires the efforts of many to fully understand that truth. This reveals an implicit respect for the great variety of human thought, and a recognition of the limited ability of a single mind. *Paradise Lost* does not suggest that husband and wife should incessantly argue, but it does suggest that even in Paradise a couple must work to establish a harmony of two different minds. In the *Doctrine and Discipline of Divorce* Milton praises marital conversation. This term was sometimes used at the time to connote sex and some of Milton's earliest readers mocked his disingenuous use of the

³⁷ CPW II: 514-15.

word.³⁸ Luxon writes that “Milton could hardly have chosen a less unambiguous term by which to denote the nonsexual—and therefore principal—ends of marriage than ‘conversation.’”³⁹ But it is not disingenuous, for conversation is a kind of mental coitus, with the couple both pleasing one another and creating something greater than themselves. And it is a two-way street, with the husband not only teaching his wife but learning from her as well.

Third, individuality allows free will to enter the marital sphere. In Book 5 Raphael explains that angels and humans are free because God desires love that is chosen, not automatic:

Our voluntary service he requires,
Not our necessitated: such with Him
Finds no acceptance, nor *can* find. For how
Can hearts, not free, be tried whether they serve
Willing or no, who will but what they must
By destiny and can no other choose? (5.529-34)

As Milton memorably puts it in *Areopagitica*, “When God gave him reason, he gave him freedom to choose, for reason is but choosing.”⁴⁰ Even in Paradise, the management of free will extends to marriage also. Though to not consume the forbidden fruit is technically their sole responsibility, there are other things Adam and Eve must do in order to fulfill this responsibility, the successful management of marriage being the most important of these. As we shall observe in Chapter 3 for example, Adam’s slack leadership of his marriage is an important factor in the Fall, for by letting Eve garden alone he exposes her to great danger. Marriage is not a Catholic indulgence but a garden in need of regular care, and even in Paradise Adam and Eve must work to achieve a meeting of minds. Individuality satisfies God’s desire for free praise, for a marriage between two people of literally “one mind” would require no synergy—less a marriage than a monologue. Most importantly, God stresses that humans can remain obedient *on their own*,

³⁸ In particular the anonymous answerer to the *DDD* that prompted Milton’s furious *Colasterion*.

³⁹ Luxon, 71.

⁴⁰ *CPW* II: 527.

“Sufficient to have stood though free to fall” (3.99). This is a vital component of Milton’s theodicy, and thus Adam and Eve must be individuals to satisfy the claim that they can stand on their own.

III. “Till body up to spirit work”: Upward Mobility

Having thus defined and illustrated the two sides of the marital paradox, it is time to assess its role in the poem’s larger processes.

True to its genre, *Paradise Lost* portrays a massive and detailed universe, stretching from Hell through Chaos to the ethereal realm of Heaven, from the Paradise of Fools to the Garden of Eden itself.⁴¹ The structure of space is discussed—geo- or heliocentric?—and the poem repeatedly hints at the possibility of life on distant unknown worlds.⁴² And this is not to mention the exhaustive references to terrestrial locations, such as the catalogue of kingdoms at 11.385-411. This discussion exposes the enthusiastic geographer and amateur astronomer. Milton reveled in maps and detailed geographical histories. His *Brief History of Moscovia*, for example, “is an epitome or compilation of facts about Russian topography, regions, climate, curious manners and customs, government, and the fundamental character of the people.”⁴³ Yet there is more to this universe than its physical geography. Milton goes beyond mere mapping, for in *Paradise Lost* the universe is a system endowed with complex and far-reaching processes.

During his meal with Adam and Eve, Raphael explains how it is possible that an angel can eat human food. Although this may seem a technicality none but the most ardent theologian

⁴¹ Thomas Greene, *The Descent from Heaven* (New Haven: Yale UP, 1975), 10: “The first quality of the epic imagination is expansiveness, the impulse to extend its own luminosity in ever widening circles ... Epic answers to man’s need to clear away an area he can apprehend, if not dominate, and commonly this area expands to fill the epic universe, to cover the known world and reach heaven and hell. Epic characteristically refuses to be hemmed in, in time as well as space.”

⁴² Adam and Raphael discuss the heliocentric theory at 8.13-178. Concerning the possibility of extraterrestrial life, see, for example, 3.567-71 and 8.175-76.

⁴³ Lewalski, 212.

would care about, his talk of digestion soon leads Raphael to draw a sweeping outline of the universe at large:

O Adam! one Almighty is, from whom
All things proceed and up to Him return
If not depraved from good, created all
Such to perfection, one first matter all
Endued with various forms, various degrees
Of substance and in things that live of life,
But more refined, more spiritous and pure
As nearer to Him placed or nearer tending,
Each in their several active spheres assigned
Till body up to spirit work in bounds
Proportioned to each kind. (5.469-79)

Although God formed all Creation from a single substance, he divided it into an orderly and precise hierarchy—plants, animals, humans and angels. A creature’s nature, therefore, is determined according to its rank on this Chain of Being: the lowest links in the chain are more bodily, while the highest are defined by close proximity to God and a corresponding spiritual and intellectual nature.⁴⁴ Raphael goes on to illustrate this spectrum by resorting to a plant metaphor:

So from the root
Springs lighter the green stalk, from thence the leaves
More airy, last the bright consummate flower
Spirits odorous breathes... (5.479-82)

Though the different parts of the plant are accorded different ranks—the root lowest and heaviest, the flower highest and airiest—they all form a single whole, just as all ranks of Creation are united in God.

The most important information Raphael discloses, however, is that humans are actually capable of ascending to the angelic rank themselves. According to him, the body can “work up” to spirit:

⁴⁴ E. M. W. Tillyard, *The Elizabethan World Picture* (New York: Vintage, 1959), 26.

Time may come when men
With angels may participate and find
No inconvenient diet nor too light fare.
And from these corporal nutriments perhaps
Your bodies may at last turn all to spirit,
Improved by tract of time, and winged ascend
Ethereal as we, or may at choice
Here or in Heav'nly paradises dwell—
If ye be found obedient and retain
Unalterably firm His love entire
Whose progeny you are. (5.493-503)

When he says that human “bodies may at last turn all to spirit,” Raphael is not referring either to death or the apocalypse, both of which occur only in the postlapsarian world. Rather, the archangel describes a process that could occur in a prelapsarian state, a process in which both Adam and Eve and their progeny could participate. It is a remarkable idea, one that transforms the garden into a training area where Adam and Eve can prepare themselves for their eventual promotion.

What does “upward mobility” have to do with marriage? Raphael says promotion follows obedience: Adam and Eve must refrain from eating the forbidden fruit and thereby express their chosen love for God. The poem treats marriage as *the* divinely sanctioned human relationship, an institution founded by God himself for the alleviation of humanity’s natural loneliness. This places marriage in an ambiguous position. In *De doctrina* Milton cautiously notes that God does not *command* humans to marry—though certainly a good institution, marriage is not an absolute necessity. If it *were*, it would contradict God’s claim that Adam and Eve are each sufficient to stand on their own. However, as we have already seen, the universe is characterized by a tendency toward *participation*—Adam and Eve may not *have* to marry to remain obedient, but they are stronger and happier because of their marriage. Milton personally believed that, though asceticism was admirable, most human beings could not successfully

abstain from human love and devote themselves so completely to God alone. Thus marriage was a blessing from God himself, a means of companionship enabling human beings to love one another, and *in so doing* refine and improve their love towards God. Though not absolutely essential for promotion, marriage, in improving human virtue, becomes the primary means by which a person achieves upward mobility.

IV. “God shall be All in all”: The Unification Process

Promotion is not an end in and of itself but part of the larger process of *unification*, that ascent of “good” creatures toward God which Raphael depicts in his earlier speech:

O Adam! one Almighty is, from whom
All things proceed and up to Him return
If not depraved from good... (5.469-71)

Milton expresses here the Neoplatonic idea of virtue carrying people upward to the One, the contemplation of which fills a person with inconceivable joy and wisdom.⁴⁵ In *Paradise Lost*, to join with God is the ultimate goal of all rational creatures (humans and angels), and even those irrational creatures that cannot participate directly—*sans* free will they cannot choose obedience and thus cannot be promoted—even these are involved in other ways, as we shall see. In the prelapsarian world Adam and Eve can participate in unification by being promoted to the angelic rank, while in the postlapsarian world unification is the endpoint of human history, the great reward of the blessed and the envy of the damned. In both cases, unification is the marital paradox writ large on a universal scale, for it too involves a oneness of many. Marriage, then, is a microcosm of the universal design, *as well as* the primary means of participating in that design. For although not an absolute necessity, marriage, according to the poem, empowers and brings

⁴⁵ Plotinus, “Fifth Ennead,” *The Norton Anthology of Theory and Criticism* (New York: Norton, 2001).

one closer to God; no other aspect of the poem so clearly articulates the central role of marriage as does the unification process.

What Raphael vaguely calls a “return” is clearly understood by God as unification. When the Son pledges himself as humanity’s savior (see 3.236), God rejoices and proceeds to foretell the end of the world, that time at which the fruits of his mercy will finally ripen:

The world shall burn and from her ashes spring
New Heav’n and Earth wherein the just shall dwell...
Then Thou [the Son] thy regal scepter shalt lay by,
For regal scepter then no more shall need:
God shall be All in all. But all ye gods
Adore Him who to compass all this dies!
Adore the Son and honor Him as Me! (3.334-35, 339-43)

The majestically simple “God shall be All in all” is the clearest enunciation of unification in the poem. God is not referring to a prelapsarian system of promotion, but rather to the end of postlapsarian history, at which time all the blessed shall join him in Heaven and become one. This is the ultimate manifestation of the marital paradox, God and Man, and a truly moving portrayal of Man’s final rest achieved after millennia of hardship.

However, William Empson reads this speech as a startlingly unorthodox portrayal of the Last Things; in addressing his argument here, I intend to clarify the nature of unification as well as the significance of gender hierarchy to that process.⁴⁶ Although many different apocalyptic theories were in circulation during Milton’s lifetime, most Protestants believed that after the Second Coming Christ would rule on earth till all angels and humans had been judged, all evil trod underfoot, at which time he would hand over his temporary authority to God and join the blessed, though still superior to all but the Father. This basic premillenarian outline is also the way Milton himself describes the end of the world in *De doctrina*.⁴⁷ But Empson thinks the God

⁴⁶ William Empson, *Milton’s God* (Westport: Greenwood P, 1978).

⁴⁷ CPW VI: 614-33.

of *Paradise Lost* has something quite different in mind. Instead of remaining the head of a universal hierarchy, God will “abdicate” or “dissolve into the landscape and become immanent only.”⁴⁸ Empson goes on to speculate that the inheritors of God’s vacant throne will be the blessed themselves, who will join in “Total Union” in one universal rank of Godhead.⁴⁹

Although Empson correctly interprets God’s words as prophesying Total Union—his term for what I refer to as the last step in the unification process—nevertheless he errs when it comes to the question of God’s abdication. Indeed, he sees the problem himself: anticipating his opponents, he offers a likely counterargument to the abdication scheme:

It may be objected that Milton’s own temperament, because of the pride so evident in his style, would be quite unattracted by an ideal of total union. But certainly; he presents it as very unattractive even to the good angels ... Though capable of re-uniting themselves with God the angels do not want to ... God must abdicate before the plan of Total Union can seem tolerable to them...⁵⁰

Much as one may sympathize with Empson’s dislike of Milton’s authoritarian God, his reiterated claims that even the good angels themselves feel the same way is simply misguided, for they are consistent in their love for God.⁵¹ Furthermore, the angels are not “capable of re-uniting themselves with God”; the last step in a creature’s unification process, the joining with God, is reserved for the end of time. The more important point, however, is that *Paradise Lost* does not suggest that God will abdicate at the very end of unification. For all his *Areopagitic* and *Tetrachord*ons, Milton was a lifelong elitist who did not subscribe to the extreme egalitarian principles that Empson puts in his mouth. Christopher Hill describes Milton as an “elitist intellectual” who was tied to relatively conservative views by class and education:

His ideas, in short, were as radical as is possible without endangering the essentials of propertied society. He could never cross the chasm which separated

⁴⁸ Empson, 133.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, 139.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*

⁵¹ E.g., *PL* 3.344-417, 5.618-41 and 7.180-81.

him from a man like Winstanley, whose position in society predisposed him against inequality and privilege.⁵²

Although Milton did oppose particular hierarchies such as prelacy and monarchy, the idea of a completely egalitarian and property-less England—the goal of his contemporary Gerrard Winstanley—was too much for him.⁵³ Furthermore, while he believed that *most* human beings were equal, Milton nevertheless accommodated the idea that God elected a few to stand above and guide their fellows. Stephen Fallon sees a manifestation of this in Book 3, when God declares,

Some I have chosen of peculiar grace
Elect above the rest: so is my will.
The rest shall hear me call and oft be warned
Their sinful state and to appease betimes
Th' incensed Deity while offered grace
Invites... (3.183-88)

Fallon explains the uneasy accommodation of these two seemingly disparate ideas—the “elect” and free will—by psychologically analyzing the poet. While Milton’s considerable ego demanded the existence of a chosen few, of which he was certain of membership, his belief in the value of choice and his sense of equality demanded free will, that *almost* everyone have the same opportunity to go to Heaven.⁵⁴

Milton believed in hierarchy and thus would not have agreed with Empson that abdication is the only thing that truly justifies God. Although his theory of abdication is incorrect, Empson’s focus on Total Union is suggestive and illuminating. Even with God the Father still in the picture, the Book 3 speech does indicate unification. Just as man and woman

⁵² Christopher Hill, *Milton and the English Revolution* (New York: Viking P., 1978), 250.

⁵³ Lewalski, 143: “According to this Miltonic ideal ... the ‘supreme’ civil and spiritual power is explicitly located in the ‘Aristocratic’ element—the elected parliament of ‘noblest, worthiest, and most prudent men.’”

⁵⁴ Stephen Fallon, “Elect above the rest: theology as self-representation in Milton,” *Milton and Heresy*, Stephen Dobranski and John Rumrich, eds. (Cambridge: Cambridge U. P., 1998), 93-116.

are united in marriage, though the husband is superior, so God and the blessed are united in Total Union, though there too hierarchy remains.

The following section will look at unification as it is expressed in four different ranks of the ontological hierarchy—animals, angels, humans, and demons—and will show how the marital paradox is represented in these ranks (or, in the case of the demons, not represented). It will also address the poem's portrayal of sexuality, and it is because of this that I have chosen to include humans here despite the discussion of Adam and Eve's marriage above. Sex is a vital and innovative aspect of the poem's marital ideal, the most powerful physical representation of unity-of-many, and it will be helpful to discuss human sex in the context of other kinds, such as angelic interpenetration.

a. Animal Pairing

As mentioned above, animals cannot participate directly in unification because they lack free will. Yet they still play an important role in the process. Consider how frequently animals appear in pairs. When Raphael recounts the Creation, he describes the fish as "Part single or with mate" (7.403), and says of the land beasts,

Among the trees in pairs they rose, they walked,
The cattle in the fields and meadows green,
Those rare and solitary, these in flocks
Pasturing at once and in broad herds upsprung. (7.459-62)

Animal coupledness reinforces the progenerative imagery of the Creation: like the mountains and oceans, these new beings are immediately sexualized and propagative, active participants in a universe that encourages growth and life. Not all of the animals are paired, but this simply reflects Milton's belief that marriage was good for most but not for all. By the time Adam

names them, however, most of the animals seem to have found a mate, for they approach him “two and two” (8.350). Milton probably takes his cue here from Genesis, where Adam becomes conscious of his loneliness only after naming the animals: “And Adam gave names to all cattle, and to the fowl of the air, and to every beast of the field; but for Adam there was not found an help meet for him.”⁵⁵ This suggests that the sight of animal companionship causes Adam to desire his own mate, which is how *Paradise Lost* presents the scene. When he asks God for a mate, Adam looks to the animals to support his case:

They rejoice
Each with their kind, lion with lioness,
So fitly them in pairs thou hast combined. (8.392-94)

But Man is not an animal, God says; made in God’s image, should not Man aspire to divine autonomy and shun bestial coupledness?

What think’st thou then of Me and this My state?
Seem I to thee sufficiently possessed
Of happiness, or not, who am alone
From all eternity? (8.403-6)

Adam responds adroitly, recognizing that Man is but a god “in degree” (8.417), whose natural dependency cries out for companionship. Delighted by Adam’s knowledge “not of beasts alone/ Which thou hast rightly named but of thyself” (8.438-39), God creates Eve. The animal pairs thus serve as the Book of Nature, that prime means by which humans can attain deeper knowledge of themselves and God’s universe. By understanding the animals—naming them “rightly”—Adam comes to recognize that the universe encourages companionship, and that he too requires it. Therefore, animals participate indirectly in the unification process both by propagating and by catalyzing human self-realization.

⁵⁵ Gen. 2.20.

b. Angelic Interpenetration

Humans can learn from animal pairing, but they aspire to angelic love. During their conversation about love in Book 8, Adam asks Raphael—who so readily chastises Adam about his sex life—whether or not angels enjoy some parallel of human sexuality, a question that prompts the archangel’s famous blush:

To whom the angel with a smile that glowed
Celestial rosy red, love’s proper hue,
Answered: Let it suffice thee that thou know’st
Us happy and without love no happiness.
Whatever pure thou in the body enjoy’st
(And pure thou wert created) we enjoy
In eminence and obstacle find none
Of membrane, joint or limb, exclusive bars.
Easier than air with air, if spirits embrace,
Total they mix, union of pure with pure
Desiring, nor restrained conveyance need
As flesh to mix with flesh or soul with soul. (8.618-29)

In accordance with the ontological hierarchy then, angels not only have sex—they have it “In eminence.” Angelic interpenetration is the most perfect expression possible of the marital paradox besides Total Union with God. As Satan proves time and again, angelic bodies are remarkably changeable, “so soft/ And uncompounded is their essence pure” (1.424-25). Thus their lovemaking is a complete joining of two bodies, a step above the human system of genitalia, those “restrained conveyance[s].” There is a strong connection between these two kinds of sex though, for just as “carnal matter can be gradually elevated to spirit, so carnal pleasure can be gradually refined into heavenly love.”⁵⁶ William Kerrigan essentially refers here to upward mobility—from one rank to another—which involves an actual change in matter; if Adam and Eve were to become angels, their physical form would change as well. This reflects Milton’s monism, the heretical belief that God made the universe out of one substance (Milton

⁵⁶ William Kerrigan, “Milton’s kisses,” *Milton and Heresy*, Stephen Dobranski and John Rumrich, eds. (Cambridge: Cambridge U. P., 1998), 118.

also subscribed to the heretical belief that this substance was God himself). Monism rejects Pauline dualism, understanding body and soul as nothing more than different points on a single spectrum. Although things are more spiritual and therefore less bodily the closer they are to God, this does not mean that the body is inherently polluted or evil; if handled correctly, it too can be good and holy, but “in degree.” Raphael himself makes this clear when he begins describing angelic love:

Whatever pure thou in the body enjoy'st
(And pure thou wert created) we enjoy
In eminence... (8.622-24)

This is why “flesh” is not synonymous with sin in *Paradise Lost*, why it can actually be beautiful and holy, and why sex, a physical manifestation of union, is treated as such a mainstay of human marriage.

c. “*Wedded Love*”

Paradise Lost is unusual in its explicit presentation of prelapsarian sex. This may seem strange, given that the poem is a representative of the Protestant redefinition of marriage, which tended to emphasize the spiritual over the physical. However, most Protestants were not anti-sex, but merely wanted to elevate the purpose of marriage above procreation and the avoidance of fornication. Indeed, one of the overriding goals of the Reformation was to break the chains of superstition that unnecessarily constrained pleasure, a theme that Milton returns to again and again in his work: “The greatest burden in the world is superstition; not onely of Ceremonies in the Church, but of imaginary and scarcrow sins at home.”⁵⁷ Eric Carlson points out that one of the major catalysts for marital reform was the issue of clerical marriage; Protestants thought priests should be able to marry like everyone else and opposed the “anti-marriage celibate ideal

⁵⁷ CPW II: 228.

of the church.”⁵⁸ Reformers like Zwingli, Anton Firm and Thomas Cranmer, all of whom had been ordained in the Catholic priesthood, began to marry in despite of episcopal law:

after 1521 evangelical priests made a significant advance by putting their doctrine into practice, admitting that true celibacy was such a rare gift that unmarried clergy had little hope of avoiding fornication, and that marriage was a state far more pleasing to God since through it they could satisfy their natural urges without sin as well as propagating children for the increase of the community. In the process of repeatedly defending their doctrine and their actions, the reformers argued with vigor and conviction that the married state was not merely acceptable, not even merely equal to the single life, but was superior to it in every respect.⁵⁹

As early as 1521 then Protestants were arguing that “true celibacy” was too difficult for most people to maintain, moving from that modest claim to the stronger view that marriage was actually superior to abstinence. *Paradise Lost* takes the latter view, associating abstinence with Hell and stagnation and making “wedded love” a holy rite. Thus the Protestant elevation of marriage had roots in a related movement for the sexual liberty of the priesthood.

Sex between a married couple is a physical representation of the marital paradox, of two becoming one; we see this in the poem’s most famous passage concerning human sexuality, the hymn “Hail wedded love” (see 4.736-75). Having prayed together, Adam and Eve retire “into their inmost bower/ Handed” (738-39) and proceed to make love. This epithalamium passionately argues not only that sex existed in the prelapsarian world, but that it continues as a divine blessing in the postlapsarian one. Milton praises these “rites/ Mysterious of connubial love” (742-43) for satisfying the two “fleshly” purposes of marriage, procreation and the avoidance of fornication, and also for providing a model of charity by which all other “relations dear” should be judged (754-57). It may seem an obvious point, but it is wedded love, not love alone, that Milton honors here.

⁵⁸ Eric Josef Carlson, *Marriage and the English Reformation* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1994), 4.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*

d. Demonic Isolation

Interestingly enough, it is wedded love—or, rather, what one might call an initial stage of wedded love—that prompts Satan’s “jealous leer malign” (4.503) earlier that day. Adam and Eve’s kiss is possibly the most sensual moment in *Paradise Lost*, and testifies to the poem’s wholehearted incorporation of sexuality into the marital sphere:

So spake our gen’ral mother and with eyes
Of conjugal attraction unreprieved
And meek surrender half embracing leaned
On our first father. Half her swelling breast
Naked met his under the flowing gold
Of her loose tresses hid. (4.492-97)

This rivals even Donne himself, but these “kisses pure” (4.502) only cause Satan more pain:

Sight hateful! sight tormenting! Thus these two
Imparadised in one another’s arms,
The happier Eden, shall enjoy their fill
Of bliss on bliss while I to Hell am thrust
Where neither joy nor love but fierce desire
(Among our other torments not the least)
Still unfulfilled with pain of longing pines. (4.505-11)

Satan’s complaint indicates that the fallen angels are denied union with one another and are thus excluded from the unification process. The poem is very clear on the latter point. God says that after the Last Judgment, “Hell, her numbers full,/ Thenceforth shall be for ever shut” (3.332-33)—the demons will be confined to Hell, forever barred from their erstwhile sojourns on Earth

and from readmittance to Heaven. Unlike Man, the demons fall “Self-tempted, self-depraved” (3.130) and are thus ineligible for grace.⁶⁰

Paradise Lost is not a poem of vague generalities; it is specific, reflecting Milton’s own crystalline intellect. That the demons simply be excluded from redemption is therefore insufficient, for the poem must provide a mechanism that accounts for this exclusion.⁶¹ The result is isolation, a general punishment that includes a ban on sex. I have already argued that unification with God requires union with another member of one’s own rank, and that such union is not only spiritual but physical as well. Do demons have sex then? Empson, willing as usual to go where (fallen) angels fear to tread, thinks they don’t have sex, though the desire remains:

Milton tells us that one of the chief pains of Hell, as in human prisons, was deprivation of sex, if it may be so called (IV. 510); God had made their substance thicken just enough to keep them from their pleasure of total interpenetration.⁶²

Gordon Teskey concurs by defining Satan’s “fierce desire” as “sexual desire, one of the torments of the devils.”⁶³ It seems to me that these critics are on the right track, for it is after all the sight of Adam and Eve’s physical embrace that prompts Satan’s outburst: they remind him of the angelic interpenetration he once enjoyed and the spiritual oneness such physicality expressed. Sexual deprivation is a punishment which constitutes perhaps the most profound pain of the demonic world—or rather, it is part of a much larger, overriding torture, a physical

⁶⁰ See *De doctrina*: “The second death, the punishment of the damned, seems to consist of the loss of the supreme good, that is, divine grace and protection and the beatific vision, which is commonly called the punishment of loss” (CPW VI: 628).

⁶¹ This is not to say that Milton believed all religious mysteries could be solved: “God indeed in some wayes of his providence, is high and secret past finding out” (CPW II: 297). But these “high and secret” ways were the minority. In *Areopagitica* he argues that a Christian must strive after truth whenever possible, “to do our obsequies to the torn body of our martyr’d Saint” (CPW II: 550).

⁶² Empson, 53.

⁶³ Teskey, n. 509. I have benefited greatly from discussing this issue with Douglas Trevor, who agrees with Empson and Teskey that the demons are impotent.

representation of the mental and spiritual isolation that is the primary characteristic of Milton's Hell.⁶⁴

There is an apparent paradox here as well, for even if one agrees demons cannot have sex, it does not necessarily follow that their primary punishment is isolation. Indeed, they initially strike one as a tight-knit group of comrades who, like the crewmates of Odysseus or Aeneas, have suffered setbacks together only to regroup and soldier on. The demons are legion, and though they number but a third of Heaven's population, there is no comparable sense in Heaven or anywhere else of sheer size. The poem repeatedly emphasizes the vastness of the demonic army, whose "Millions of flaming swords ... Far round illumined Hell" (1.664, 666). The army seems a parallel of the marital paradox, in that it is a united body composed of individual members of different angelic ranks—"Thrones, Dominations, Princedoms, Virtues, Powers!" (10.460). The demons also participate in many group activities that call to mind Adam and Eve's gardening—the building of Pandemonium, the Stygian council, sparring, singing, philosophizing, exploring. If Hell is such a hive of group activity, how can the demons be isolated?

Though they seem to commune with one another, the demons lack any intimacy and find little comfort or rest in interacting with one another. The musicians "sing/ With notes angelical to many a harp/ Their own heroic deeds and hapless fall" (2.547-49); though the song is beautiful, it is only a musical version of Adam's fallen soliloquy or Satan's complaint on Niphates. The singers focus on themselves—*their* battlefield heroics, *their* misfortune, *their* pain. The philosophers debate but reach no conclusions; each demon's words do nothing to bring the group as a whole to some greater truth, and each ends up "in wand'ring mazes lost"

⁶⁴ Hopeless desire is not unique to Milton's Hell. It is also the *modus operandi* in the Limbo of Dante's *Inferno*, where Vergil tells the pilgrim that "we now are lost and punished just with this;/ we have no hope and yet we live in longing" (4.41-42).

(2.561). In a similar fashion the explorers, “in squadrons and gross bands” (2.570), fail to discover a place of rest or even chart the whole of Hell. Some try to lose themselves completely by drinking from the river Lethe and thereby forgetting everything; this is significant because it expresses a desire to escape the burden of isolation by erasing the self. The demons cannot reach the water, however, and must continue suffering self-consciousness. As for the council, it is not a council but a sophisticated piece of stagecraft only. Satan deludes his followers into believing their input will result in a common decision, but he has already decided the outcome before the meeting begins. With Beelzebub as his mouthpiece, Satan uses the form of participatory government to accomplish his despotism. “O shame to men! Devil with devil damned/ Firm concord holds” Milton writes (2.496-98), but agreement between slaves is not the same as companionship. Each demon is “enthralled” to himself, unable to escape the maze of self-regard. Indeed the great irony of Hell is that it perversely fulfills the demons’ rebellious wish: desiring advancement for themselves alone (like snakes crushing each other in the rush for a few ashen fruits), they war on God and are rewarded for their selfish efforts with an eternity of self-interest, accompanied only by a burning but hopeless desire for union with others. They sing, debate and explore together but only succeed in becoming more lost; in the absence of divine revelation they wander in darkness, incapable of finding succor in others. Each demon is his own idol, and each despises himself for his insufficiency.

Satan is the prime example of isolated self-hatred. In his pride he aspires to godhead but simultaneously wishes for reconciliation with God. As a creation he feels the pull of unification but cannot respond to it, for he is trapped in his own internal Hell:

Horror and doubt distract
His troubled thoughts and from the bottom stir
The Hell within him, for within him Hell
He brings and round about him, nor from Hell

One step no more than from himself can fly
By change of place. (4.18-23)

The pain of isolation, that prime characteristic of Hell, never leaves Satan, and thus he carries Hell with him wherever he goes. His mistaken belief in his self-sufficiency is a significant counterpoint to Adam and Eve's humble recognition in Book 10 that they need one another's and God's help. He ventures to Earth alone so as to reap all the glory for himself. When he and Beelzebub exit the lake of fire, they attribute the feat to "their own recovered strength/ Not by the suff'rance of Supernal Pow'r" (1.240-41). The poem mocks the relationship between these two: Satan twice refers to Beelzebub as his "mate" (1.192, 238), which suggests that this is the closest thing he has to fellowship. Although Satan is the most changeable character in the poem, constantly transforming into one shape after another, he praises steadfastness when it comes to submission, and thinks it courageous "never to submit or yield" (1.108). His is a "mind not to be changed by place or time!/ The mind is its own place and in itself/ Can make a Heaven of Hell, a Hell of Heaven" (1.253-55). Satan cannot make a Heaven of Hell, but the belief that he can reveals a desire for godlike autonomy that is unattainable. The satisfaction of his desire to rule others tortures him because of this mistaken belief in his self-sufficiency; the higher he rises the further he is from those he wishes to unite with.

While they adore me on the throne of Hell
With diadem and scepter high advanced
The lower still I fall, only supreme
In misery. Such joy ambition finds. (4.89-92)

Adam and Eve's kiss represents all that Satan has lost—fellowship, sexual pleasure, unification—and his response parallels his Niphates speech. He desires union with God but, incapable of admitting the need for help, chooses to hate him instead. Similarly, he initially feels he "could love" (4.363) Adam and Eve, for they reflect God's image; but the sight of their kiss

inspires in him a dreadful jealousy that hardens the drive to destroy them. His envy makes him crave humanity's demise all the more, an aspiration that confirms these lines from the epithalamium:

Our Maker bids increase. Who bids abstain
But our destroyer, foe to God and Man? (4.748-49)⁶⁵

There are deeper meanings to be garnered from this growth/abstinence binary, but the message first and foremost is this: Satan does not want humans to make love because he cannot. His demonic war on generation—his desire for stasis and the constriction of growth—is also a war on union and marriage. By making evil his good, Satan opposes not only the fecundity of the garden, not only Adam and Eve's "wedded love" and Raphael's "union of pure with pure," but also the unification process itself, which is more than the sum of these its parts—indeed, the fundamental motion of God's universe.

⁶⁵ I Tim. 4.1-3.

CHAPTER 3
TO THE PLACE OF JUDGMENT

*Offspring
Of gods by blood, Trojan Anchises' son,
The way downward is easy from Avernus.
Black Dis's door stands open night and day.
But to retrace your steps to heaven's air,
There is the trouble, there is the toil.*

- *The Aeneid*, 6.185-90

I. "On me, me only"

This chapter will analyze the final stage of the conversion scene—Adam and Eve's walk to the place of judgment. First, however, we must consider two lingering obstacles to their repentance: narcissism and the gender hierarchy, in particular Adam's resumption of his proper role as the leader of their marriage.

The significance of Adam and Eve walking to the place of judgment together is underscored by their individual offers to go alone. During his soliloquy Adam repeatedly suggests that God should punish only him and spare his unborn children:

First and last

On me, me only, as the source and spring
Of all corruption, all the blame lights due.
So might the wrath. (10.831-34)

The knowledge that he will transmit the stain of sin to all future generations tortures Adam, and in desperation he wishes to sacrifice his own life for their sake and cut off the curse root and branch. This would fly in the face of God's judgment, but his fallenness makes it very difficult for Adam to understand God's will as clearly as he once did, and this misty confusion leads him again and again to question God's justice:

[I was] unable to perform
Thy terms too hard by which I was to hold
The good I sought not. To the loss of that,
Sufficient penalty, why hast thou added
The sense of endless woes? Inexplicable
Thy justice seems! (10.752-55)

It is not up to Adam to decide what commands are "too hard" or what punishments are "Sufficient," yet it is in this same spirit of fallen pride that he considers sacrificing himself. He goes back and forth on the issue, at certain moments dimly aware that the desire is misguided:

Fond wish! Couldst thou support
That burden heavier than the earth to bear,
Than all the world much heavier, though divided
With that bad woman? (10.834-37)

Adam seems to feel more sympathy for future generations than for "that bad woman," Eve. He speaks of sharing a burden with her, but if he truly believes he alone is to blame, why does he not exempt her from punishment as well? Furthermore, he comes to the right conclusion, but for the wrong reason: though he rightly acknowledges that he is incapable of revoking original sin, he incorrectly assumes that this is because he lacks the necessary strength. The image of bearing the earth on one's back is a reference to Atlas, the mythological Titan of enormous size and strength who held the world aloft on his back. This is not to say that Adam sees original sin as a

kind of heavy barbell; rather, he is thinking in terms of classical heroism, where preternatural strength is often the surest means of success. His self-sacrifice would be a glorious feat, like Achilles sacking Troy at the cost of his life. As discussed in Chapter 1, however, *Paradise Lost* redefines epic heroism along Christian lines, largely rejecting the old mold of the classical protagonist (see 9.13-47). The poem is clear throughout that love, patience and humility are far more heroic than glory or grand feats. Adam cannot bear all the wrath because he is not a sufficient vicarious sacrifice, not because he might not offer himself.

Moreover, where is this concern for others prior to the Fall? Adam's decision to join Eve in disobedience will be discussed at greater length below, but it should be noted here that that moment actually offers Adam a singular opportunity to sacrifice himself for the sake of Eve and the future human race. Dennis Danielson argues this in his essay "What Adam Should Have Done," stating that the typological pairing of Adam and Christ indicates Adam's responsibility to die for the greater good:

In an act of dazzling heroism such as only an unfallen person could perform, he could have done what the fallen Eve wished *she* could do and what the second Adam ultimately did do: to take the punishment of fallen humanity upon himself, to fulfill exactly 'The law of God,' as Michael puts it in Book 12, 'Both by obedience and by love' (12.402-3).⁶⁶

Called by the "link of nature," Adam of course does not go down this path, but the possibility that he could have renders his later sacrificial drive sadly ironic, especially as he cannot even bring himself to name "that bad woman" for whom he fell in the first place.

The major problem with this sacrificial drive is its inherent narcissism. This may seem counterintuitive, for what could be more selfless than personal sacrifice for the good of others? Yet Adam's proposal to trek to the place of judgment and beg for every last bit of punishment

⁶⁶ Dennis Danielson, "Through the Telescope of Typology: What Adam Should Have Done," *Milton Quarterly* 23 (Oct. 1989): 124.

would not do others any good, as it is contrary to God's will, unjust and born of despair. The fact is that he does not deserve all of the blame for the Fall, and he reveals his own fallen self-obsession by thinking so. However, he is not the only one to narcissistically accuse himself, as Eve does the same when she begs his forgiveness:

[I] to the place of judgment will return,
There with my cries importune Heav'n that all
The sentence from thy head removed may light
On *me*, sole cause to thee of all this woe,
Me, me only just object of his ire! (10.932-36, italics mine)

The repetition of the word "me" is an important signal of her obsessive self-regard and mirrors Adam's own phrase, "First and last/ On me, me only."⁶⁷ Like Satan ("Me miserable!"), Adam and Eve suffer here from a false sense of self-sufficiency, wanting to go to daring extremes, but unwilling to respect God's judgment. Their fallen nature renders them unfit for the necessary sacrifice, one that only the Son can fulfill. The similarity between the hollow offers of Adam and Eve and the Son's legitimate one serves to highlight the difference between dependence and autonomy:

Behold *Me* then, *Me* for him, life for life
I offer. On *Me* let thine anger fall.
Account *Me* Man. I for his sake will leave
Thy bosom and this glory next to Thee
Freely put off and for him lastly die
Well pleased. On *Me* let Death wreck all his rage! (3.236-41, italics mine)

The Son references himself as much as Adam and Eve, but in this case the focus on the self is appropriate rather than narcissistic, for he is actually sufficient to accomplish the task. This sufficiency is neither one of brute strength nor of the kind of supernatural power that forms the universe in Book 7. The Son is sufficiently obedient, loving and humble, as God says when praising him for his sacrificial offer:

⁶⁷ See Harada, 544.

By merit more than birthright Son of God
(Found worthiest to be so by being good
Far more than great or high, because in thee
Love hath abounded more than glory abounds)... (3.309-12)

Adam and Eve cannot go the place of judgment alone because it would be a proud and narcissistic act. Though unaware of it, their desire to assume all the blame for the Fall is vainglorious; the Son, whose sacrificial offer is the only acceptable one in the eyes of God, will humbly lower himself to the human rank. In *Paradise Lost*, love, not glory, achieves redemption.

II. The “link of nature”: Adam’s Fall

When Eve offers the fruit to Adam, he chooses to disobey God because he cannot imagine a life without Eve:

How can I live without thee, how forgo
Thy sweet converse and love so dearly joined
To live again in these wild woods forlorn?
Should God create another Eve and I
Another rib afford, yet loss of thee
Would never from my heart. No! No! I feel
The link of nature draw me, flesh of flesh,
Bone of my bone thou art and from thy state
Mine never shall be parted, bliss or woe. (9.908-16)

In some respects the feelings Adam describes here reflect the ideal marriage discussed in Chapter 2. He says he would miss Eve’s “sweet converse,” a phrase that hearkens back to the theory of conversation. In noting his physical oneness with Eve, Adam paraphrases the same poetic outburst of joy he uttered the first time he saw her (8.494-99). Yet to continue the marriage is to disobey God. I have already argued that marriage is a crucial institution in the poem’s universe, one that allows human beings to participate in the process of unification and ascend to God. How can it be reasonable, then, for marriage to be the fatal snare that catches Adam, dragging him into the dark postlapsarian world?

Adam's fall is often read as noble, since he recognizes the foolishness of eating the fruit but disobeys anyway out of love for Eve.⁶⁸ Obviously he should not choose Eve over God, to whom he owes loyalty before all others, but nevertheless his choice seems tragically difficult. Is it really fair for God to create an incredibly attractive mate for Adam and then turn around and force him to choose between a mysterious divinity and the love of his life? Of course not, were this the full picture. But it isn't, and though I think the poem tempts the reader, it ultimately asks us to overcome this kind of postlapsarian sentiment. Adam is not facing a decision between obedience and "love," at least not the poem's strict definition of love. The fact that his own wife has become his tempter shows that Adam's marriage no longer qualifies for the kind of upward mobility Raphael described. When he falls, it is not for marriage, but for a degraded and undignified parasitic relationship.

The fact is that Raphael's stern advice to Adam back in Book 8 is wholly relevant: Adam *has* become too fond of Eve and failed to wield an appropriate amount of control over the domestic sphere. One historian describing household power roles during the seventeenth century writes that "more men betrayed their command through their own fondness than ever lost it through their wives' rebellion."⁶⁹ The importance of the husband's leading the marital pair just as a captain guides his ship is reiterated again and again in *Paradise Lost*. Man is the wiser sex, Milton says, and therefore he must assume the responsibility this preeminence entails, else the marriage is doomed to founder. The moment that signals how precarious their marriage has become occurs with Eve's decision to garden alone. Raphael explicitly warns Adam to guard against just such an event—"She deserts thee not if thou/ Dismiss not her when most thou

⁶⁸ See A. J. A. Waldock, *Paradise Lost and Its Critics* (New York: Cambridge UP, 1961), 54; also Empson, 182.

⁶⁹ Ralph A. Houlbrooke, *The English Family* (New York: Longman, 1984), 101.

need'st her nigh" (8.563-64)—but Adam still lets her go, the separation emphasized by the symbolic parting of hands (9.385-86).

Thus Adam's choice is not between the kind of ideal marital love described in Chapter 2 and obedience to God. Rather, in choosing to follow the "link of nature," Adam persists in the kind of improper love that led him to this quandary in the first place. He parted from Eve when he should have remained by her side, and now he cleaves to her when it would be best to leave. Again, this desire is somewhat narcissistic. I have already discussed above Danielson's point that Adam has a rare opportunity here to sacrifice himself in order to save Eve; but he neglects this chance to genuinely help his wife, and instead decides to satisfy his own desire for companionship and fear of loneliness. Let us reassess Adam's "link of nature" speech, quoted above. Adam does restate the "one flesh" speech that he delivered on his wedding day, but here the emphasis on oneness actually undermines his claim that love for Eve is what motivates him to disobey. He is too attached to the "couple-ness" side of the marital paradox, forgetting that a couple is nevertheless composed of two individuals and that he is still capable of being his own person. Adam sees himself more and more as "AdamEve," a dangerous misidentification that proves to be his undoing. Furthermore, he makes an important omission here, referring to the connection of "bone" and "flesh" but not to oneness of soul. This does not mean that Adam feels more of a sexual connection to Eve than an emotional one; though Raphael seems to suspect this in Book 8, perhaps the archangel has misunderstood Adam's complex emotions as simply an overexcited sex drive. The omission of "soul" signals the decay of a fundamental aspect of Adam and Eve's relationship, for they are no longer of one mind.

III. "Of sorrow unfeigned and humiliation meek"

As discussed in Chapter 1, it is Eve who ultimately changes the course of the conversion scene. True, her apology is narcissistic, motivated in part by the same fear of loneliness that caused her to tempt Adam; in her hyperbolic condemnation of herself, not to mention her upcoming scheme for abstinence or suicide, Eve reinforces the fact of her fallenness. Yet she also feels genuine remorse and is the first to call for marital peace and renewed participation:

While yet we live scarce one short hour perhaps
Between us two let there be peace, both joining,
As joined in injuries, one enmity
Against a foe by doom express assigned us,
That cruel serpent. (10.923-27)

These are certainly the wisest words yet heard in the conversion scene; Eve not only asks that they cease fighting but that they reunite, if only for a short while. Thus while Adam bewails the fate of their unborn children and slights the flesh-and-blood woman standing in front of him, Eve withstands his attack and begins to repair their marriage.⁷⁰ Her primary accomplishment here is the revitalization of Adam, which she brings about by essentially humiliating herself, by which I mean she voluntarily lowers herself for a higher cause. Humiliation is a heroic act in *Paradise Lost*, one that eschews glory and pride for the sake of love. It is the term God uses to describe the Son's sacrifice, which is the quintessential act of heroism in the poem. As that passage shows, humiliation is not only moral but remarkably powerful. David Loewenstein writes that Milton was personally fascinated by this idea of power through helplessness, which he often referred to as "mighty weaknes":

Indeed, this notion of strength made perfect in weakness turned out to be crucial to his conception of the poet as *vates*—one who is a prophet and seer though blind—and contributed to the intense inwardness of his great poems. 'My strength is made perfect in weakness,' based on 2 Corinthians 12:9-10, became nothing less than the blind Milton's personal motto in the 1650s, one he would inscribe in autograph albums.⁷¹

⁷⁰ Houlbrooke, 97: "On any breach it was up to [the wife] to be the first to seek reconciliation."

⁷¹ Loewenstein, 20.

Eve harnesses some of this mighty weakness in her apology, and in doing so she follows the Son's example, a welcome change in a scene hitherto dominated by demonic parallels. The apology is still narcissistic, the humiliation impure, and Eve should not be mistaken as a second Christ. But then, she does not have to be, as her efforts are sufficient to bring Adam to his senses.

I mark this as the moment when postlapsarian marriage begins to brush the dirt off itself and stand on sore but sturdy legs. Not only does the marriage recover from the brief separation following the Fall, but in some ways it actually becomes stronger than it was before the Fall. The most important change, the mechanism that allows for this marital reconstruction, is Adam's new sense of himself as a leader. The sight of Eve's "lowly plight" (10.937) works a drastic change in him, and I believe that for the rest of the poem he is a somewhat different Adam, a little more reserved with his wife, a little more stern. His first act, however, is to raise Eve from her submissive position, an act that restores a sense of equality between the two partners while simultaneously emphasizing Adam's special moral authority. He immediately chastises her for her impulse to bear all of the blame herself, but those critics who read this as hypocrisy on his part are misguided. Adam has not forgotten his own identical desire from before, but he now understands why it was so foolish:

If prayers
Could alter high decrees I to that place
Would speed before thee and be louder heard
That on my head all might be visited,
Thy frailty and infirmer sex forgiven,
To me committed and by me exposed. (10.952-57)

He rightly admits his guilt in letting Eve garden alone, and this also serves as Adam's apology for his role in his wife's fall. It is certainly not as emotional and moving as Eve's, but then

Adam is not supposed to act that way. More importantly though, he has ceased begging for more blame and punishment than he deserves because he recognizes that “high decrees” should not be circumvented. Note also that he says here he would go the place of judgment for *Eve’s* sake, whereas earlier he gave little thought to her suffering. He then makes an important decision: he and Eve should stay together, striving “In offices of love how we may light’n/ Each other’s burden in our share of woe” (10.960-61). This is not a toss-off sentence, because there really is a question of marriage’s vitality or usefulness after the Fall. Because they believe that they are going to die almost immediately, and because Adam at least is so angry with Eve for her part in his fall, they initially see little reason to continue participating in an institution that only had meaning in the prelapsarian world. It is thus a monumental discovery that marriage might have a place in the postlapsarian world—a discovery, by the way, that is prompted by Eve; Adam merely takes his cue from her bravery. More importantly, the decision to continue the marriage gives Adam and Eve purpose and direction; it is a small glimmer of light that seeps through the suffocating darkness of their former isolation.

There is a final test, however. Eve’s proposal that they abstain from sex or commit suicide is a postlapsarian version of Adam’s temptation in Book 9. Eve’s apology shows Adam the way to redemption, but she remains lost and in need of his guidance. Thus Adam’s responsibility to resist and correct Eve is both to himself and to her, and his response is immediate. He is “with such counsel nothing swayed” and needs no inner monologue to reach a decision; he knows Eve’s suggestions are sinful and patiently corrects her while assessing what “better hopes” remain. Hope is key here, for though Adam and Eve have one another, what do they have to look forward to? Adam returns to the idea of mutually helping one another bear the new challenges of a fallen world (see 960-61 above). This is the third purpose which the

Protestant Reformation introduced to the marital institution; marriage is now not only indispensable as a means of ascending to God, but also of surviving in a far more treacherous world. Together Adam and Eve will bear children, produce food, find shelter and protect themselves against the “inclement seasons.”

This marital reunion culminates in the couple’s powerful reconciliation with God. By means of mutual guidance and support, Adam and Eve are at last in a position to definitively break out of the Satanic mold and repent for their sins, something which even Satan himself yearns hopelessly to do:

O then at last relent! Is there no place
Left for repentance, none for pardon left?
None left but by submission and that word
Disdain forbids me... (4.79-82)

Adam and Eve, however, have taught one another to appreciate the power of submission and are no longer barred from redemption by a false sense of pride. Now far from his former questioning of divine justice, Adam realizes that the God whom he deemed so “dreadful” and “inexplicable” has actually shown them “favor, grace and mercy” and may be willing to show them even more:

His hands
Clothed us unworthy, pitying while He judged.
How much more if we pray Him will His ear
Be open and His heart to pity incline... (10.1058-61)

Thus while Satan slithers over the “burning marl” chewing “bitter ashes,” Adam and Eve set off on a different path toward the place of judgment, where they proceed to make their peace with God:

They forthwith to the place
Repairing where He judged them prostrate fell
Before Him reverent and both confessed
Humbly their faults and pardon begged, with tears

Watering the ground and with their sighs the air
Frequenting, sent from hearts contrite in sign
Of sorrow unfeigned and humiliation meek. (10.1098-1104)

It is difficult to overemphasize the significance of this finale. The couple cannot pray just anywhere but must go to the place of judgment, the last location where they came face to face with divinity itself. Though it seems longer, only a few days have passed since

God or angel guest
With Man as with his friend familiar used
To sit indulgent and with him partake
Rural repast... (9.1-4)

The Fall separates not only husband from wife but also Man from God, and this detachment is the worst torment. What “most afflicts” Adam when Michael says they must leave Eden is that he will never again see those places where God himself once stood:

Here I could frequent
With worship place by place where He vouchsafed
Presence divine and to my sons relate,
‘On this mount He appeared, under this tree
Stood visible, among these pines His voice
I heard, here with Him at this fountain talked.’ (11.317-22)

Adam has been fallen little more than a day, but already he has adopted the nostalgia that characterizes the work of so many Reformation authors who conjectured about Paradise. His speech articulates beautifully a creature’s keen desire for closeness with the Creator. Thus going to the place of judgment symbolizes an attempt to fix the broken mechanism of upward mobility: Adam and Eve have reunited and as a couple they must repair their connection to God. Again, “humiliation meek” proves to be the most heroic action, with the couple literally lowering themselves to the ground. Adam and Eve have found the middle ground between their blaming of each other at the end of Book 9 and the narcissistic self-condemnation earlier in Book 10.

CONCLUSION

“Thus they in lowliest plight repentant stood” (11.1). Book 11 opens where the previous book ends, with Adam and Eve praying at the place of judgment, but the emphasis has changed from submission to exaltation. Though they fall prostrate to beg forgiveness, their heartfelt prayer, their “mighty weakness,” allows them to stand spiritually once again. “Stand” does not simply mean arising from fallenness; a keyword in Milton’s work, it connotes firmness through obedience, or strength that can only be attained through tested faith in God. Raphael uses it in this manner when explaining angelic obedience:

Freely we serve
Because we freely love as in our will
To love or not: in this we stand or fall. (5.538-40)

A similar use of the term may be found in a particularly relevant passage of *Paradise Regained*, when Satan carries Jesus to the apex of the Temple at Jerusalem and challenges him to stand up:

‘There stand, if thou wilt stand; to stand upright
Will ask thee skill. I to thy Father's house
Have brought thee, and highest placed: highest is best.
Now shew thy progeny; if not to stand,
Cast thyself down. Safely, if Son of God’ ...
To whom thus Jesus: ‘Also it is written,

Tempt not the Lord thy God.' He said, and stood;
But Satan, smitten with amazement, fell.⁷²

Jesus' final rejection of Satan is only slightly more remarkable than Adam and Eve's. Although the conversion scene begins with Adam and Eve mirroring Satan—proud, verbose and lost—they eventually come to deny the Fall's downward pull, choosing instead to stand in God by falling on their knees. By moving from prostration to dignified uprightness, Book 11 continues the spiritual ascent that Adam and Eve began in the conversion scene. The poem flies on the wings of their prayer to Heaven, where the Son joyfully intercedes on their behalf, beseeching the Father to forgive Man and lessen the pain of Death, so that they may come “where with me/
All my redeemed may dwell in joy and bliss,/ Made one with me as I with Thee am one” (11.42-44). The Son asks that Man be spared the torments of hell and allowed the opportunity to once more participate in the unification process, even though the upward path must now be lined with thorns.

To whom the Father without cloud, serene:
All thy request for Man, accepted Son,
Obtain: all thy request was my decree. (11.45-47)

His wrath resolved, God makes peace with repentant humanity and spares them from the torments of Hell. This, then, is the somewhat anticlimactic outcome of the conversion scene, the goal towards which Adam and Eve struggle—and yet, as God points out, there was never any question about the outcome. The drama of the couple's reconciliation is also somewhat lessened by the frequent references to grace in the beginning of Book 11. The Son repeatedly notes that without the gift of grace Man would be incapable of repentance. The emphasis here is a powerful reminder of Adam and Eve's dependence and spiritual insufficiency, their recognition

⁷² John Milton, *Paradise Regained*, 4.551-55, 560-62.

and affirmation that dependency distinguishes them in the end from Satan and secures their redemption.

There are two reconciliations, however, and one must precede the other. In Chapter 3, I argued that Eve and Adam's proposals to repent by themselves would fail because of their inherent narcissism; this is true, but there is an even stronger reason. During Yom Kippur, the Hebrew Day of Atonement, Jews attend synagogue and repent all their wrongdoings of the past year, in the hope of atoning to God before he closes the book of judgment. Atonement is not possible, however, without first approaching all those one has wronged and asking their forgiveness. In other words, peace between fellow human beings must precede reconciliation with the Almighty. The conversion scene operates in precisely the same manner: neither Adam nor Eve can make peace with God without first accepting responsibility the wrong they have done one another. This should come as no surprise given the poem's emphasis on hierarchy and ordered ascension: every motion must proceed through the ranks, and it is therefore counterintuitive to assume that one could reconcile with a fellow human after reconciling with God.

In the end, though, the reconciliation that the conversion scene recounts is not one between friends, sisters or acquaintances, but between husband and wife. Milton accords marriage a special rank of honor in *Paradise Lost* and in many ways crafts a universe that revolves around this relationship. Both Eve and Adam marvel at the vastness of Creation and question how beings as tiny as themselves could play such a privileged role in it. But the fierce gusts of Chaos, the frostbitten wasteland of Hell, even the silver streams of Eden—these are as nothing compared to the landscape of Adam and Eve's inner world. Their love story stands at

the center of Milton's epic, casting aside even the great Leviathan himself as he moves toward the shore of the Fiery Lake, great spear in hand and pale moon slung across his back.

Adam and Eve can stand alone, but it is better to stand together. *Participation* is one of the most important concepts in all of Milton's work: whether it be sex, work, conversation or prayer, Adam and Eve's marriage encourages constant interaction and closeness. Marriage is the human vehicle for participating in God's great plan, the means of unification.

God forgives his mortal children, but commands they leave their home forever. Like the demonic adventurers in Book 2, Adam and Eve must trek a strange new world; unlike those hopeless explorers, they are accompanied by God. Like Vergil's Aeneas they go in search of a new home; unlike him, they have each other. As they depart the garden, the nobility of their former nakedness now dimmed by fallen garments, Adam and Eve have little left to remind them of their paradisaal bliss. Much has been lost, but something yet remains. Eurydice regains the sunlight, rescued from Hades' depths by the hand of Orpheus, but also by her own guiding voice, reminding her husband of the need to look ever forward. Adam and Eve, small specks on the vast empty landscape, step out into Eden and do not look back:

Some natural tears they dropped but wiped them soon.
The world was all before them, where to choose
Their place of rest, and Providence their guide.
They hand in hand with wand'ring steps and slow
Through Eden took their solitary way. (12.645-49)

The gorgeous last lines capture in a moment the marital ideal Milton has spent twelve books elaborating. They emphasize Adam and Eve's coupledness by using a surprisingly large number of plural words—"they," "them," "them," "Their," "their," "They," "their." Each of the last four lines also begins with a "th-" word, and this serves to underline the plural words and the theme of the marital unit. But it is the last line that deftly enunciates the marital paradox: "their solitary

way” suggests plurality and individuality simultaneously. Adam and Eve are separate individuals, but as husband and wife they walk a common path. Significantly, this final line illustrates the non-gendered “Man” of the poem’s first line: the married couple achieves a unity of two distinct but vital parts, just as man and woman combine to form the human race. “Of Man’s first disobedience” does not refer to Adam alone but to Eve as well: they share the responsibility, and indeed it is this willingness to do so that gets them through the conversion scene.

Michael reveals a future to Adam rife with hardship and woe; the postlapsarian world will be at times an agonizingly troubled one. Eve cannot foresee this as she withdraws her hand from Adam’s, running into the sunlit forest, but still it occurs. What changes the nature of their punishment and the fate of the human race is the conversion scene. Once they have recovered their marriage, thereby recovering God, there is nothing that can break Adam and Eve’s strength without their choosing. Two mortal hands clasped together, this slender connection between two disparate bodies—this is the fruit of the conversion scene, the hope of humanity, the “device” of the marital paradox, and a truly mighty weakness. The garden is lost, but their hands are linked.

WORKS CONSULTED

Alighieri, Dante. *The Divine Comedy*. Trans. Allen Mandelbaum. New York: Knopf, 1995.

Apollonios Rhodios. *The Argonautika*. Trans. Peter Green. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997.

Auerbach, Erich. *Mimesis: The Representation of Reality in Western Literature*. Trans. Willard R. Trask. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2003.

Bloom, Harold. *Genius*. New York: Warner, 2002. 47-57.

Carlson, Eric Josef. *Marriage and the English Reformation*. Oxford: Blackwell, 1994.

Corns, Thomas N. "Milton's antiprelatical tracts and the marginality of doctrine." Dobranski 39-48.

---. "Radical pamphleteering." Keeble 71-86.

Danielson, Dennis. "Through the Telescope of Typology: What Adam Should Have Done." *Milton Quarterly* 23:3 (1989): 127-27.

Dobranski, Stephen B., and John P. Rumrich, eds. *Milton and Heresy*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998.

- Dzelzainis, Martin. "Ideas in conflict: political and religious thought during the English Revolution." Keeble 32-49.
- Empson, William. *Milton's God*. Westport: Greenwood Press, 1978.
- Evans, John Martin. *The Miltonic Moment*. Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 1998.
- Fallon, Stephen M. "Elect above the rest: theology as self-representation in Milton." Dobranski 93-116.
- Fish, Stanley. *Surprised by Sin*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1997.
- Flanagan, Roy, ed. *The Riverside Milton*. Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1998.
- Forsyth, Neil. *The Satanic Epic*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2003.
- Greene, Thomas M. *The Descent from Heaven: A Study in Epic Continuity*. 1963. New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 1975.
- Hamilton, Edith. *Mythology*. New York: Warner, 1999.
- Harada, Jun. "The Mechanism of Human Reconciliation in *Paradise Lost*." *Philological Quarterly* 50.4 (Oct. 1971): 543-52.
- Hesiod. *Theogony*. Trans. Norman O. Brown. Indianapolis: Bobbs-Merrill, 1953.
- Hill, Christopher. *Milton and the English Revolution*. New York: Viking Press, 1978.
- . *The World Turned Upside Down*. 2nd ed. New York: Penguin, 1991.
- Hobby, Elaine. "Prophecy, enthusiasm and female pamphleteers." Keeble 162-78.
- Hunter, William B. "De Doctrina Christiana: Nunc Quo Vadis?" *Milton Quarterly* 34:3 (2000): 97-101.
- The Holy Bible*. Douay-Rheims Version. London: Baronius, 2005.
- Homer. *The Iliad*. Trans. Robert Fagles. New York: Penguin, 1998.
- . *Odyssey*. Trans. Stanley Lombardo. Indianapolis: Hackett, 2000.
- Houlbrooke, Ralph A. *The English Family 1450-1700*. New York: Longman, 1984. 96-126.
- Keeble, N. H., ed. *The Cambridge Companion to Writing of the English Revolution*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001.

- Kelley, Maurice. *This Great Argument: A Study of Milton's De Doctrina Christiana as a Gloss upon Paradise Lost*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1941.
- Kerrigan, William. "Milton's kisses." Dobranski 117-35.
- Kishlansky, Mark. *A Monarchy Transformed: Britain 1603-1714*. New York: Penguin, 1997.
- Knott, John R. *The Sword of the Spirit: Puritan Responses to the Bible*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1980.
- Lewalski, Barbara K. "How radical was the young Milton?" Dobranski 49-72.
- . *The Life of John Milton: A Critical Biography*. 2000. Malden: Blackwell, 2002.
- Loewenstein, David. *Milton: Paradise Lost*. 2nd ed. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004.
- . "Milton's prose and the Revolution." Keeble 87-106.
- Luther, Martin. "The Estate of Marriage." 27 January 2008.
<http://www.warwick.ac.uk/fac/arts/History/teaching/protref/women/WR0913.htm>.
- Luxon, Thomas H. *Single Imperfection: Milton, Marriage and Friendship*. Pittsburgh: Duquesne University Press, 2005.
- Miller, Timothy C., ed. *The Critical Response to John Milton's Paradise Lost*. Westport, Conn.: Greenwood Press, 1997. 1-23.
- Milton, John. *Paradise Lost*. Illust. Gustave Dore. London: Arcturus, 2007.
- . *Paradise Lost*. Ed. Gordon Teskey. New York: Norton, 2005.
- . *Selected Prose*. Ed. C. A. Patrides. Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 2004.
- Morrill, John. "The causes and course of the British Civil Wars." Keeble 13-31.
- Mueller, Janel. "Milton on heresy." Dobranski 21-38.
- Myers, Benjamin. "Prevenient Grace and Conversion in Paradise Lost." *Milton Quarterly* 40:1 (2006): 20-36.
- Nuttall, A. D. *The Alternative Trinity: Gnostic Heresy in Marlowe, Milton, and Blake*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1998. 71-191.

- Nyquist, Mary. "The Genesis of Gendered Subjectivity in the Divorce Tracts and in *Paradise Lost*." *Re-Membering Milton: Essays on the Texts and Traditions*. New York and London: Methuen, 1988.
- Patrides, C. A. *An Annotated Critical Bibliography of John Milton*. Brighton: Harvester Press, 1987.
- . *Milton and the Christian Tradition*. Hamden, Conn.: Archon, 1979. 121-52.
- Plotinus. "Fifth Ennead." *The Norton Anthology of Theory and Criticism*. New York: Norton, 2001.
- Rumrich, John P. "Milton's Arianism: why it matters." Dobranski 75-92.
- Shakespeare, William. *The Riverside Shakespeare*. New York: Houghton Mifflin, 1997.
- Shawcross, John T. *Rethinking Milton Studies: Time Present and Time Past*. Newark: University of Delaware Press, 2005.
- Stone, Lawrence. *Causes of the English Revolution*. 3rd ed. New York: Routledge, 2005.
- . *The Family, Sex and Marriage in England 1500-1800*. London: Harper & Row, 1977.
- Tillyard, E. M. W. *The Elizabethan World Picture*. New York: Vintage, 1959.
- Turner, James Grantham. *One Flesh: Paradisal Marriage and Sexual Relations in the Age of Milton*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1987.
- Vergil. *The Aeneid*. Trans. Robert Fitzgerald. New York: Knopf, 1992.
- Waldock, A. J. A. *Paradise Lost and Its Critics*. New York: Cambridge University Press, 1961.
- Whitman, Walt. "Song of Myself." *Leaves of Grass*. New York: Penguin, 2005.
- Wolfe, Don M., et al., eds. *Complete Prose Works of John Milton*, 8 vols. New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 1953-82.