

SATAN'S POETRY:
FALLEN ART FROM HOMER TO SPENSER IN *PARADISE LOST*

A Dissertation
Presented to the Faculty of the Graduate School
of Cornell University
In Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree of
Doctor of Philosophy

by
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August 2006

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Cornell University 2006

This dissertation reconsiders Satan in *Paradise Lost* outside of the well-worn hero vs. fool debates by linking Satan's meaningfulness in the narrative directly to the conditions of meaning that underlie the poem. Because Satan is for Milton both the embodiment of fallenness and its cause, his journey through the poem demonstrates how the world in which *Paradise Lost* constructs itself comes to be. For this reason, "Satan's Poetry" argues that Satan's development in the poem underlies the poem's own development, providing us with a way to understand how the poem situates itself as a part of the fallen world and what it means for it to be thus fallen. The first chapter demonstrates that the language of poetry is the language of Satan, or fallen language more generally, and that this language is negatively constructed, a language of "enigmas" in the Adornian sense. By making this connection between Satan and Milton's poetics, this dissertation then goes on in the second and third chapters to rethink *Paradise Lost's* relation to its poetic tradition, arguing that this negative language produces negative relationships between individuals (human or poetic) in the fallen world. These relationships demand that we read allusion as the use of old words and images to mean something new, demonstrating *Paradise Lost's* distance from its predecessors rather than its proximity; reading in this way, as the second chapter demonstrates, allows us to read Milton's poem against multiple texts at once, rather than confining our readings to the linear model of influence relations. The third

chapter argues that these differential relationships force us to rethink Milton's tradition not as a coherent whole or "canon" whose authority restricts subsequent literary endeavors, but as a constellation of specific relationships between individual texts that demands creation instead of repressing it. This turn to the creative individual that is the result of the fall is, the final chapter argues, the crucial problem with which *Paradise Lost* grapples, and "Satan's Poetry" ends by demonstrating that the very negativity that is the symptom of fallenness also bears with it the promise of redemption.

BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH

Danielle A. St. Hilaire was born on August 31, 1979, in Lewiston, Maine, to parents Richard St. Hilaire and H el ene Moreau. She attended public school in Auburn, Maine, and graduated valedictorian from Edward Little High School in May of 1997. After high school, Danielle attended Brandeis University in Waltham, Massachusetts, where she majored in English and Latin literature. Danielle earned her B.A. from Brandeis in May 2001, graduating *summa cum laude* with highest honors in English for an honors thesis on *Paradise Lost*. Unwilling to take a break from school, Danielle then immediately went on to begin her graduate work at Cornell University in Ithaca, New York, where she adopted two cats, met and married her husband, acquired her M.A. (August 2004), and continued her work on *Paradise Lost*. Danielle graduated from Cornell with her Ph.D. in August of 2006.

for Robin

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Projects of this size and scope always accumulate more debts than they can properly acknowledge, and I am grateful for the support and love of a great many more people than I can name here. In particular, however, I owe the achievement of this dissertation and the degree that comes with it in large part to my mother and father, as well as to my maternal grandmother and grandfather, all of whom supported me without question through the long slog from kindergarten through graduate school; their faith in me was absolute, and it kept me going during those darker periods of self-doubt. I also owe a great deal to my sister Aimée, who brought out the teacher in me from very young age, and who still remembers the mathematical powers of two I taught her when she was five.

Many teachers go into the education of a single student, and I am grateful to all of mine not just for giving me the knowledge I possess but for teaching me to think and to love to think. I owe a particular debt of gratitude to my high school English teacher, Diane Ackerman, under whose tutelage I learned to hone my writing skills, and to my advisors in college, Cheryl Walker, Laura Quinney, and William Flesch, who first introduced me to Milton; without the advice and encouragement of these teachers I would never have gone on to graduate school in the first place. At Cornell, I have benefited immeasurably from the guidance of Walter Cohen, whose advice has been invaluable in my years here, William Kennedy, who was always ready to extend a helping hand, and Pete Wetherbee, who was kind enough to take a stranded Milton scholar under his wing and who never stopped trying to make me a Medievalist. I additionally owe a special debt of gratitude to Kenneth Gross, who agreed to serve on my committee from one hundred miles away and with whom I spent many hours on the phone and over email working through some of the tougher problems I faced on

the way to my completed dissertation. I am also very grateful to Gordon Teskey, with whom I was fortunate enough to take two classes in my first year at Cornell, and who kindly put me in contact with Ken in the first place.

Of my friends and colleagues who have brightened my life throughout the years, I would particularly like to thank Curtis Jirsa, Johanna Kramer, John Sebastian, Sunjay Sharma, Audrey Wasser, Rob Lehman, Douglas McQueen-Thomson, Aaron Hodges, and, more generally, the Hegel Reading Group and Theory Reading Group. Conversations with these people, usually late at night and over drinks, helped me to sharpen my arguments, pointed me in new philosophical directions, and generally enriched and expanded my experience at Cornell.

Finally, I would like to thank the one person I haven't the words to thank, my partner in life and in all intellectual pursuits, who daily endured my thinking out loud and constant questions, who comforted me in my troubles and shared with me my triumphs, and who somehow managed to do it all while finishing his own dissertation. To Robin Sowards I owe more than I could ever pay.

*“a grateful mind
By owing owes not, but still pays, at once
Indebted and discharged: what burden then?” (Paradise Lost V.55-57)*

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Biographical Sketch	iii
Acknowledgements	v
Table of Contents	vii
A Brief Introduction	1
Chapter 1: The Satanic Question and the Poetics of Creation	5
Chapter 2: Negative Relation and <i>Paradise Lost's</i> Allusions	35
Chapter 3: The Particular, the New, and the Tradition	69
Chapter 4: Justifying the Ways of God to Men	110
Bibliography	154

A Brief Introduction

Paradise Lost is a fallen poem. As a work telling the story of “man’s first disobedience” and designed to “justify the ways of God to men” (I.1, 26), Milton’s epic voice speaks after the fall of man to others living with the consequences of that fall, thereby making the poem both an inhabitant of and a participant in the fallen world whose creation it describes. For this reason, my argument in this dissertation is that, in order to understand what *Paradise Lost* means, or how it means, we first must ask what fallenness entails and how that fallenness must affect and implicate the poem. In order to pursue this question, I am returning to the most controversial of Milton’s characters, Satan.

This dissertation does not aim to join the ranks of Satanist readers of the poem, now greatly diminished in numbers, in claiming that Satan is the hero of the poem or in using him to show Milton’s heterodoxy; neither does it attempt to show Satan to be the fool, to deflate his importance in the poem. Instead, I turn to Satan quite simply because, in order to understand fallenness, it makes sense to begin with the first to fall. Satan is in a very real sense the creator of fallenness, both as the first in God’s universe to fall himself and as an instigator of fallenness, one who leads others to fall. In a poem that so self-consciously recognizes itself as fallen, Satan is thus an important figure: he is, as Book I notes, the “cause” (27) of man’s fall, and thereby also both the cause of the fallen world the poem inhabits and the cause of the narrative itself, the force that sets in motion the central action of the poem. For this reason, I would like to argue, Satan’s meaningfulness in the poem must be intimately connected with the conditions of meaning that underlie the poem itself, and so in my first three chapters here I look closely at the relationship between Satan’s self-construction and the poem’s in order to see how *Paradise Lost* comes out of the world Satan creates.

Neil Forsyth, himself a Satanist critic, writes of anti-Satan criticism,

The mistaken assumption ... is usually that Satan is to be equated with 'evil,' and the result has been to ignore what seem to me obvious features of the poem. Thus Satan's ambivalent and constantly shifting relationship to the poem's narrator has been buried beneath the insistence that the narrator must somehow always be the mouthpiece for a stern and moralizing Milton. (*Satanic Epic* 4)

Forsyth is right that anti-Satan critics too often begin with the notion that Satan is evil,¹ but more interesting here is the connection between this assumption and the intentionalism that underwrites the belief that the narrator is Milton's "mouthpiece." Structuralism and its announcement of the death of the author never managed to stamp out (or really even dent) intentionalism in Milton criticism; thus in 1991, when formidable Miltonist John T. Shawcross published *Intentionality and the New Traditionalism: Some Liminal Means to Literary Revisionism*, the excitement in the Milton community was great enough to produce a volume of essays filled with articles by some of the field's best living critics, dedicated to Shawcross and aimed at producing more or less intentionalist readings of Milton's work (*Literary Milton: Text, Pretext, Context*, 1994). Because *Paradise Lost*'s stated purpose is to "justify the ways of God to men," and because we know Milton himself to have held very specific views on religious issues, the tendency is to read *Paradise Lost* according to those views, with the narrator serving as the Milton's "mouthpiece."² But such intentionalism isn't bound to anti-Satanist criticism; Forsyth himself argues earlier against Satan's inherent evilness on the grounds that Satan's literary history "is the combat myth ..., and Milton knew it" (1). Yet his own susceptibility to intentionalism doesn't change the fact that Forsyth is (maybe unintentionally) right when he points

¹ See, e.g., Chapter 1, n. 4.

² See, e.g., Guillory's claim, following Kerrigan, that "The 'I' of the poem ... always refers to John Milton" (104). Guillory is less interested in Milton's theology, however, than in his "conception of his authority as a poet."

out how understanding any character as Milton's "mouthpiece" can distort or cover over "obvious features" of the text itself.

While I do not wish to situate my discussion in this dissertation as Satanist or anti-Satanist, I do think that assumptions that underlie my reading of the poem are strictly anti-intentionalist. In reading Satan, I have proceeded in the belief that the first context in which Satan must be considered is the context of the poem itself, not in the context of Milton's theological beliefs or, as Forsyth reads him, in the context of an accumulated tradition of Satanic imagery. And the poem, as my dissertation I believe shows, is a self-standing individual, capable of being read as internally coherent without reference to anything external to the text. This does not mean that I read the poem adhering to naïve illusions about the "autonomy" of the artwork or that I am trying to read as though the poem is divorced from all human and historical concerns; as Chapters 2 and 3 show, the poem is constituted by its relationships with other works, and, as Chapter 4 shows, it is engaged in speaking to (and perhaps for) the world of human beings. But in order to understand what relationships the work has to the outside, I think we have to begin with the poem by examining the world it constructs and specifically how it constructs relations between individuals within that world; anything less would be to miss what *Paradise Lost* has to say about itself.

For the same reasons, in my discussions of allusion and the literary tradition, I have begun first with close readings of specific moments in the poem, and particularly the moment of Satan's rebellion that creates the fallenness the poem inhabits, before moving out to larger historical and theoretical considerations. Instead of beginning with a model of allusion or of tradition, as William Porter or John M. Steadman do, or simply assuming a model, as most critics who talk about Milton's allusions do, I have attempted here to discover how the fallen world that the poem imagines constructs relationships and then to read the poem's allusions in the context of that construction.

But this is not an attempt to claim an “objectivity” for my reading. As an individual reader coming to the text, my own philosophical positions of course inflect my interpretation: that my readings take a Hegelian cast should be obvious to anyone reading this dissertation, and the very fact that I proceed from an object-oriented aesthetics should reveal my Adornian commitments. But in encountering the text as a self-standing individual, I have tried to allow the text to challenge my philosophical positions and to change them, to modify them, rather than allowing those positions to determine the reading in advance.

In the end, this comes down to the conviction that an ethical relation to the object in part requires that the object not be generalized as an example, as a mere instance that can be subsumed under a greater whole, and that instead we approach the object as something particular and individual, like ourselves—which is just to say that we approach the object in the understanding that it is another subject. Satan is neither an instance of a “combat myth” nor an instance of “evil,” but a character within a world that acts for motivations that are his own, not located outside of him. *Paradise Lost* is neither an instance of a larger tradition nor an instance of Milton’s political or theological thought; though constituted by both, it demands to be considered on its own terms, only compared to what is external to it and not determined by it. And because the poem describes the creation of the fallen world as the it does, I think this demand for an ethical relation to the object is precisely what *Paradise Lost* is about.

Chapter One

The Satanic Question and the Poetics of Creation

It was Harold Bloom who, in his *Anxiety of Influence*, found in Milton's Satan the beginning of all modern poetry (20-45).³ As an allegory of the "strong poet," Satan in Bloom's thinking "shadows forth gigantically a trouble at the core of" poetry from Milton forward, acting out in his fall—a fall which has only begun in Book I of *Paradise Lost* and which is not complete at least until Book X—the dilemma of the poet struggling to overcome a poetic past too weighty, perhaps too actual, to be withstood. For *Anxiety*, of course, this reading of Satan as the allegory of the modern poet is brief, a short "experiment" that Bloom calls "apparently frivolous" before moving on to lay out his full theory of influence; yet that a book subtitled *A Theory of Poetry* should begin with a reading of the Satan of *Paradise Lost* is no accident, nor anything "frivolous" (as Bloom well knew). What Bloom recognized but did not fully elaborate, and what I will be taking up here, is that *Paradise Lost* is in some sense not only about "man's first disobedience," but also about poetry itself.

While Bloom's interest in Satan, at least in *Anxiety*, is largely adventitious, serving to illuminate Bloom's theory rather than to put forth a reading of *Paradise Lost*, the instinct to read Satan as something more than a fallen angel or an epic character, to read him as a figure deeply connected to the creation of the poem itself,

³ Bloom was of course neither the first nor the last critic of *Paradise Lost* to link Satan to poetry. Blake was the first, with his assertion in "The Marriage of Heaven and Hell" that Milton "was a true poet, and of the Devil's Party without knowing it" (ll.52-55). Arguing that Satan is the representative of imagination in Milton's epic, John Guillory makes a similar claim to Bloom's in *Poetic Authority*, calling Satan "a successful poet" (106). More recently, Neil Forsyth has called Milton's poem a "Satanic epic," arguing by examining Satan's relation to the development of the text on many levels that "the structure of the whole poem, and even its final scene, may be read as Satanic" (*Satanic* 4). Even Stanley Fish recognizes that Satan's error in the poem is "a creative error," though he immediately asserts that this creativity is not a good thing for Milton (*Milton* 36-37). But whereas for Guillory *Paradise Lost* abandons the Satanic project of imagination for divine inspiration, and for Forsyth the "Satanic" elements of the poem exist mostly at the level of plot and narration, I want to show here how Satan is fundamental to the most basic component of the poem—the ontology of its poetry.

recognizes Satan's unique status among epic characters as both the first, insofar as he opens a poem that sets itself at the origins of human—and by extension poetic—existence, and the last epic character, inasmuch as his long-recognized “classicism” makes him the sole and final heir of a tradition that comes to an end in Milton. This fact alone puts Satan at the center of *Paradise Lost*, a poem that takes place between two creations: God's and man's. The “alpha and omega” of his kind, Satan naturally fills the space between these two moments, possessing a strange agency that has prompted so many readers to view Satan as the hero of the poem, and that prompted Bloom to call Satan a poet. But if Satan is an agent in the poem, he is often an agent of ruin. His assertion of his creative power, “The mind is in itself its own place, and in itself / Can make a heav'n of hell, a hell of heav'n” (I.255), by Book IX has given way to the desire “that destruction wide may range” (134), the ultimate realization of an agency that founds itself on a denial of the most powerful Creator in the poem, God. Satan's “creation” is in this way always bound up with destruction, thereby causing serious problems for any attempt to understand Satan as a creator of anything, let alone of poetry. Yet precisely this tension between creation and destruction, between positive and negative agency, gives Satan his poetical significance in *Paradise Lost*, his role as the poetry within the poem, and it is Satan's struggle with this tension that gives rise to the poem itself.

I. “SELF-BEGOT, SELF-RAISED”

Bloom skirts the problem of Satan's destructive impulses by declaring Satan's role as a poet over by Book IV, where he becomes “a mere rebel,” and by situating Satan's poetic instincts solely in his claims to positive agency: “Modern poetry begins in two declarations of Satan: ‘We know no time when we were not as now,’ and ‘To be weak is miserable, doing or suffering’” (20). What is perhaps most interesting about Bloom's readings of these two quotations is that neither says what Bloom thinks

it does; while Bloom's strange paraphrases can more or less be derived from the lines *following* these cataclysmic declarations, his interpretations are not to be found in the lines he actually quotes. This incongruity is most glaring in his gloss of "We know no time when we were not as now" as "What I see and hear come not but from myself" (22), a paraphrase that conflates Satan's assertion of self-origination with his evidence for that assertion. In response to Abdiel's argument that the soon-to-be fallen have no right to question the God that made them, Satan defiantly replies:

That we were formed then say'st thou? and the work
Of secondary hand, by task transferred
From Father to his Son? Strange point and new!
Doctrine which we would know whence learnt: who saw
When this creation was? Remember'st thou
Thy making, while the Maker gave thee being?
We know no time when we were not as now;
Know none before us, self-begot, self-raised
By our own quick'ning power, when fatal course
Had circled his full orb, the birth mature
Of this our native heav'n, ethereal sons. (V.853-863)

The line which Bloom quotes in *Anxiety* is not an answer to Abdiel's objections, but rather an answer to the questions that Satan himself poses. After asking Abdiel whether he remembers his own creation, Satan claims "We know no time when we were not as now" in order to reply for Abdiel by referring to their common experience, or rather common lack of experience: do *you* remember? No, you don't, and neither do I. As a response to what might be read as a purely rhetorical question, Satan's declaration here is surprisingly non-positive. He is not in this line making an assertion about his creation, but rather about their lack of knowledge about this creation. Not until the following line, when he claims that they are "self-begot, self-raised," does Satan approximate something like Bloom's "What I see and hear come not but from myself." Yet the gap between lines 859 and 860 is an astounding distance. As C.S. Lewis points out, "if a creature is silly enough to try to prove that it was not created,

what is more natural than for it to say, ‘Well, I wasn’t there to see it being done’? Yet what more futile, since in thus admitting ignorance of its own beginnings it proves that those beginnings lay outside itself?” (97-98).⁴ In reading Satan’s claim that he does not remember his creation as the declaration of his self-origination, Bloom leaps over the logical gap right after Satan, and to hell with the consequences.

Yet Bloom may have seen something here that Lewis missed. To read “We know no time when we were not as now” as the equivalent of Satan’s claim that they are self-begot requires that a reader understand line 859 as itself sufficient argument for the angel’s self-origination; such a reading is upheld by Satan’s syntax in line 860, where “self-begot, self-raised” is not an argument that Satan makes, but rather an appositive phrase subordinated to the claim that they “Know none before” them. Just as in the sentence, “Sally, my teacher, drinks tea,” where the claim being made is that Sally drinks tea and *not* that she is my teacher (and if someone said, “No, that’s not true,” he would be denying that she drinks tea, not that she is my teacher), Satan here only leaves open to dispute the claim that they know none before them, while he presupposes that they are self-raised as a fact already predicated of the angels. This differs from the argument “We know no time when we were not as now, and so therefore we must be self-begot” insofar as this second formulation implies the logical gap that Lewis perceives; to this second argument, a reader can rightly ask how it is that Satan gets from the premise to the conclusion. In Satan’s actual formulation,

⁴ Fish makes almost the exact same point about Satan’s argument: “The assertion cannibalizes itself: if the ‘I’ that comes to this conclusion did not exist at the moment of its claimed potency, then attributing ‘puissance’ to it [V.864] is obviously absurd (compare to Adam’s ‘how came I thus, how here? / Not of myself; by some great Maker then, / In goodness and in power preeminent [VIII, 277-279])” (*Milton* 93). John M. Steadman makes a similar comparison between Satan and Adam to discredit Satan’s logic, claiming that “the archangel confuses cause and effect and ignores the etiological argument for God” (*Epic* 164); he restates the argument in *Milton and the Paradoxes of Renaissance Heroism*, claiming, “the premise [“We know no time when we were not as now”] does not support the conclusion—that the angels were not created but “self-begot, self-raised” (*Paradoxes* 150). This final formulation asserts what all of the others arguments assume: that the claim to be “Self-begot, self-raised” is the conclusion of Satan’s assertion at 859.

however, there is no “getting from premise to conclusion,” because the premise *is* the conclusion; by the time Satan gets to line 860, he does not need to say “and therefore we are self-begot” because he has already said it when he claimed, “We know no time when we were not as now.” The question then, if we want to understand what Satan means by “self-begot, self-raised,” is how exactly Satan is able to assume that lines 859 and 860 are logically equivalent.

The key lies in understanding the epistemological method that Satan employs both in these lines and throughout *Paradise Lost*. When he wants to cast doubt on Abdiel’s assertion that they are God’s creations, Satan does not immediately retort with “We know no time when we were not as now”; he arrives at this claim only after a series of questions that get him there. This is no aberration in *Paradise Lost*. Nearly every time Satan speaks in the poem, he speaks in questions; indeed, the very first words of his epic existence, at far as the chronology of the poem goes, take the form of a question (V.673-674). While critics nearly always assume that these questions are rhetorical and designed to manipulate Satan’s audience (be they angels or readers), such a reading neglects the effect these questions have on Satan himself. The first speech of Book I provides a typical example. Recognizing his fallen comrade amidst the ruin, Satan lifts his voice at line 84 to sing of their despair, lamenting the loss of Heaven and pitying those who fell with him. No note of resolve breaks through, no flicker of hope shines. Only once he comes to a question does a new theme emerge: “and till then who knew / The force of those dire arms?” (93-94). With this, Satan turns his notes from tragic to triumphant, turning away from their losses and concentrating on, in Bloom’s words, “rally[ing] everything that remains”—and to Satan’s mind much still remains (21). He effects a similar change at line 105, when he asks, “What though the field be lost?”, and again at line 109, with “And what is else

not to be overcome?”, each time adding vigor to his argument and certainty to his defiance.

While we may well read these questions as “rhetorical,” observing de Man’s separation in *Allegories of Reading* between grammar and rhetoric (3-19), their effect on the trajectory of Satan’s argument suggests that they are more than simply figures of speech, or, in de Man’s terms the “rhetorization of grammar” (16).⁵ Faced with nothing but suffering in his immediate purview, Satan must in this first speech, if he is to find any hope in his situation at all, find a way out of his present context; the medium of a question, which may imply an answer but which nevertheless does not itself declare, opens up a gap in discursive logic wide enough for the Arch Fiend to slip through. In contrast to the nine and a half lines which precede Satan’s first question, all statements which describe his present situation, the question “and till then who knew...?” opens up a moment of possibility. Regardless of whether the question seems to be implying a specific answer, the fact remains that the question *could be* answered many different ways. “Who knew?—No one knew.” Or, perhaps, if we stop to think about it, “God knew,” or even, if Satan is being particularly honest, “Well, we probably knew.” The question itself, regardless of whether we think it

⁵ De Man’s famous example of this “rhetorization of grammar” is Archie Bunker’s answer to his wife, “What’s the difference?”, wherein the “same grammatical pattern [i.e., the question asked] engenders two meanings that are mutually exclusive: the literal meaning asks for the concept (difference) whose existence is denied by the figurative meaning” (9). For de Man, this denial of the literal by the figural is aporetic, ending in “a suspended uncertainty that [is] unable to choose between two modes of reading,” i.e., the literal and the figurative/rhetorical (16). While I agree with de Man’s impulse to read every seemingly “rhetorical” question as a question demanding an answer, his equation of the grammatical with the literal complicates the issue unnecessarily. Grammar, as we are taught it in elementary school, is a set of rules imposed upon language to explain the parameters of *syntax*. The sentences “I give this book to you” and “To you I give this book” are both grammatical sentences and are indeed both identical in terms of grammar—the object, indirect object, subject, and verb are the same in each—but they are nevertheless different sentences because they are syntactically dissimilar; the first, to a native English speaker, would appear as the unmarked case, whereas the second would seem to emphasize the recipient by moving the indirect object forward. The difference of emphasis, which is generally regarded as a rhetorical effect, is thus quite “literal,” in that it comes from the language of the sentence itself. What de Man sees as the aporia between grammar and rhetoric I thus locate entirely in syntactical ambiguities, in the “literal” meaning of the text which is more often a multiplicity of meanings.

rhetorical (which would be just to refer to Satan's intentions, to which we have little access in this passage) refuses to supply a single, definitive answer. As a result, the question breaks through the barrier of descriptive statements about their fall to open up the possibility that perhaps, after all, this horrible world that Satan now finds himself in isn't the only world imaginable.

My students at this point in the text, along with not a few critics,⁶ like to argue that this first speech, addressed to Beëlzebub, is little more than the polished product of Satan's crafty and deceptive rhetoric, that we are not seeing in this first speech any real soul-searching on Satan's part, and that therefore whatever devices he uses must exist solely to deceive Beëlzebub and the reader and whoever else might be paying attention; and they would be right, were it not for the fact that Satan employs the same rhetorical and epistemological strategies when he is by himself.⁷ On Niphates' top, addressing his anger to the Sun, Satan in Book IV shows his skill as a reasoner through a tortured series of questions and answers aimed at understanding both his new context and himself within it. "Hadst thou the same free will and power to stand?" he asks himself; the reply, "Thou hadst," only leads to another question: "whom hast thou then or what to accuse, / But heav'n's free love dealt equally to all?", which he answers with, "Be then his love accursed" (66-68). As in his first speech, these questions might all be read as rhetorical, insofar as they seem to presuppose an answer. Yet Satan, now addressing himself rather than Beëlzebub, nevertheless feels the need to answer these questions himself and then to reason from these answers to

⁶ See, e.g., Steadman (*Paradoxes* 113-116), for whom nearly all of Satan's speeches are aimed at deception because Satan's *ethos* is that "of the archsophist, the archetypal deceiver" (114), and so we cannot expect him very often to be truthful when he is speaking to others besides himself. Steadman's argument here relies on his earlier assertion that Aristotle's difference between *ethos* and *dianoia* is "of primary importance" to Milton, but in deciding what Milton found important Steadman is quite willing to explicitly (and rather scathingly) dismiss "fidelity to the text" (113).

⁷ Though I do not generally agree with his readings, I am inclined to side with William Empson's prescient and typically scathing assessment of critical response to Satan's first speech in Book IV: "On the other hand, it is often confidently asserted that this speech admits his previous speeches to have been all lies; a view which makes the character consistent by making him ridiculous" (64-65).

new questions, indicating that neither the questions nor the answers are merely “rhetorical,” and that Satan is in fact relying on these questions to think through his situation. Nowhere is this more apparent than in his cry, “is there no place / Left for repentance, none for pardon left?” (79-80). If this were merely a rhetorical question, the answer would clearly be a simple “no, there is no place left”; but instead Satan replies, “None left but by submission” (81), where the recognition of submission as a possible route to pardon, an option not suggested by the question, demonstrates that Satan poses this question seriously in order to discover what possibilities of action remain for him.

All of this questioning of course leads Satan to his infamous conclusion, “Evil be thou my good” (110), the inevitable end point of Satan’s attempts at self-understanding; but what makes this conclusion inevitable is less the content of Satan’s argument than the form it takes. His soliloquy atop “th’Assyrian mount” is not pure expository poetry but is instead a dialogue in which the interlocutor speaks solely in questions that move, turn, and shape a discourse that vacillates between hope, doubt, and resolve. Thus only by asking himself “which way shall I fly / Infinite wrath, and infinite despair?” can Satan come to recognize the hell within him, and only the question “is there no place / Left for repentance...?” leads Satan to conclude that the only choice open to him is to pervert goodness. While these questions beg answers, and in some cases suggest them, they are significant for Satan’s thought because they are themselves *not* answers, and in fact signal the *absence* of an answer: Satan asks questions because he does not know. This is the basis of Satan’s epistemology. Instead of building his understanding from what he *does* know, Satan, here and throughout the poem, begins with what he does *not* know, with those dark and empty spaces not illuminated by knowledge that suggest possibility precisely because they do not provide a single answer. Such an epistemological method is antithetical to the

demands of faith and obedience placed on an angel (or for that matter a man) in Milton's universe, as Abdiel makes clear when he argues that Satan cannot "dispute / With [God] the points of liberty" because "by experience taught we know how good, / And of our good, and of our dignity / How provident [God] is" (V.822-823; 826-828). We *know* that God is good, the faithful angel argues, and so we cannot question him: everything he does must, according to our knowledge, be as good as he. By basing his inquiries on non-knowledge, Satan thus has already made the choice, "Evil be thou my good," by denying the one bit of knowledge that all creation in *Paradise Lost* should have: God is good.

This of course brings us back to Book V and Satan's original sin, the overt claim of non-knowledge in "We know no time when we were not as now." Far from being rhetorical devices designed to shore up Satan's arguments against Abdiel's objections, the questions which lead Satan to this conclusion, already implicit claims of not-knowing, are themselves the substance—or rather the non-substance—of Satan's great blasphemy. The first question, "who saw / When this creation was?", is double-edged. The most obvious paraphrase of this question is "who saw the creation?", where the when-clause is the object of the verb "saw"; here then Satan inquires whether there were any witnesses to the creation. If, however, the when-clause is adverbial (probably the more plausible reading given the syntax), then the question reads, "who was *capable* of seeing at the time of the creation?" This second meaning does not merely question whether there are any witnesses to creation, but whether witnesses are even possible; if no one could see at the time of creation, then the creation is necessarily and irremediably an irrecoverable event. By asking this question, and asking it in this way, Satan thus casts into doubt not only knowledge of their creation, but the very possibility of such knowledge, positing an epistemological emptiness—or at least the potential for such emptiness—as the inception of their

knowing. In other words, Satan's question, already a statement of non-knowledge, suggests that in fact all knowing begins with not-knowing, that all knowledge begins with such questions. "Remember'st thou / Thy making, while the Maker gave thee being?" goes a step further in suggesting the impossibility of knowing their origins, insofar as the demands Satan's question puts on knowledge make that knowledge impossible. "While" suggests duration, and so Satan here asks Abdiel whether he remembers the *process* of being made; but presumably Abdiel did not have being until God had *finished* giving him being, since until that moment Abdiel was not a fully-created being. It's hard to imagine that something without being might remember anything, and so the terms of the question shut the door on the possibility of knowing anything about their beginnings.

The statement "We know no time when we were not as now" is an answer to these questions, but it is an answer that claims that there are no answers: it is a statement of non-knowledge, of the unknowingness that was already presupposed by the questions Satan asked.⁸ As such, it is also a clear refutation of Abdiel's earlier claim that they cannot question God because they know from experience that God is good and interested in their good, for if all they know rests upon a void—a great unanswerable question—then God's goodness is, like everything else in Satan's thinking, subject to doubt, to interrogation and to uncertainty. This gesture already implies "Evil be thou my good," insofar as doubting God's goodness is blasphemous, but the devastating perversion of Satan's claim that he does not know runs far deeper than a simple moment of uncertainty. Earlier in Book V, Raphael tells Adam that "reason is [the soul's] being, / Discursive or intuitive; discourse / Is ofttest yours, the latter most ours" (487-489); thus human reason relies on trial and error, on running

⁸ In contrast, Adam's recognition of his own lack of knowledge about his origins becomes itself a positive form of knowing: "Tell, if ye saw, how came I thus, how here? / Not of myself; by some great Maker then" (VIII.277-278). For both Fish and Steadman, this is the right answer, in contrast to Satan's conclusions (see n. 2 above).

“different ways” or “to and fro,”⁹ while the reason of angels admits of no error, and is simply “intuitive”—literally, the angels simply “view” knowledge.¹⁰ Adam recognizes this disparity between his own and Raphael’s modes of knowing as a result of his relative distance from God, and thanks Raphael for teaching “the way that might direct / Our knowledge” so that “In contemplation of created things / By steps we may ascend to God” (508-512). According to this understanding of God’s creation, this “scale of nature,” as Adam calls it (509), the closer one is to God, the closer one is to pure knowledge, to knowing without searching, without discourse, without error: divinity consists in knowing. By beginning with what he does not know, by claiming “We know no time when we were not as now,” Satan turns his back on that divinity, blaspheming God not simply by denying his goodness, but by denying the knowledge that emanates visibly from God for all the angels to see. If God is knowledge, Satan has in a single utterance extinguished the divine light within himself.¹¹

Thus Lewis gets it wrong. Satan does not argue that he cannot remember his origin and that therefore he must be self-created, but rather Satan simply posits that his origins are unknowable, and thereby self-creates. In inverting Lewis, Empson too gets it wrong in this sense when he claims that Satan “is in the wrong solely because of an intellectual error” (40), not simply because Satan does not err logically, but because Satan’s intellectual deviation, which Empson understates with the word “solely,” is the most powerful “error” a creature in Milton’s universe can make.¹² For in claiming

⁹ *Lewis and Short*, s.v. *discurro*.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, s.v. *intuitus*.

¹¹ Though he disagrees with Satan’s argument (see n. 2 above), Fish nevertheless also recognizes, both in *Surprised by Sin* and *How Milton Works*, that “[t]here is then a truth to Satan’s claim to have ‘self-begot’” (*Surprised* xxxi): “he is ‘self-rai’d,’ not in the sense of self-formed but in the sense (on which Milton repeatedly plays in the poem) of self-razed or self-erased. . . . [A]nd self-deprived of heavenly support, of the support of one who is ‘preëminent,’ he is without center and without being” (*Milton* 93). Forsyth, whose reading seems heavily influenced by Fish despite their opposing views on Satan, likewise avoids saying that Satan is actually self-begot but instead claims that the “revolt has become Satan’s new definition of himself, and he cannot go back” (*Satanic* 56).

¹² I thus reject the Satanist claim that God is the cause of Satan’s fall because God has “given him a false premise” (Empson 45); Satan self-creates by *rejecting* God’s premise, not by accepting it. Forsyth

that he does not know, Satan denies his origin in God, in pure knowing, and instead refashions his understanding of the world according to a negative image of God, a yawning emptiness that has no agency and holds forth no knowledge. Placed in this void, Satan's intellect finds only itself as a generative force, and consequently brings itself into being according to what it knows, which is that it does not know. What emerges is not a divine being possessed of divine knowledge, but the negation of that divinity, a creature to whom the created world is dark and unknown and who therefore can stand forth to challenge the known, to question it, and to deny it: what emerges from that void is Satan, the Adversary. Thus Satan can presuppose at line 860 that he is "self-begot, self-raised," not because God did not create him, but because he has obliterated that creation by questioning it, by denying the knowledge that would be native to him if he were formed by God, and instead has raised himself, no longer an angel but a demon, out of his own epistemological emptiness.

II. "DARKNESS VISIBLE"

To create after the first creation—after God's creation—is no insignificant feat in a Miltonic universe. If God is, as the narrator proclaims, the "Author of all being" (III. 375), then Satan does not merely rebel when he recreates himself in Book V, but usurps divine authority, the ability to "author" what exists. Thus Bloom can read into Satan's declaration the paraphrase, "What I hear and see come not but from myself," because Satan's moment of self-creation, the moment at which he brings himself into being literally *ex nihilo*, bears with it the promise that Satan can now create the world

offers a more complex version of the "all God's fault" reading when he argues of V.609-615 that "at the moment the Son is said to be begotten in order to make everyone happy forever, God's word also calls Satan into being. ... Like action and reaction God's word creates or begets both Son and Satan at the same moment, as 'two twins cleaving together, leaping forth into the world'" ("Rebellion" 154). While I am intrigued by Forsyth's reading here, I find it significant that the two clauses on which Forsyth focuses, joined in line 611 ("Forever happy: him who disobeys") are in two different moods; the first is imperative ("Under his great viceregent reign abide"), while the second indicative ("him who disobeys / Me disobeys and that day / Cast out from God and blessed vision, falls"). God does not command Satan to become Satan, but instead declares that disobeying means falling; it is still Satan's decision to disobey.

around him, as God once did, out of himself.¹³ But the fact that Satan creates himself negatively, according to what he does *not* know, makes his ability to create—and what he creates—very different from God’s. Whereas God is, according to Adam, “perfect, and in [him] / Is no deficiency found,” and “infinite[] / And through all numbers absolute, though One” (VIII. 415-416; 420-421), a pure being that can neither want nor need, Satan in Book V defines himself precisely by the deficiency which God does not have, a lack which is necessarily not-God, and thereby remakes himself *as deficiency*; he is not simply the negation of God, but negation itself. As a result, since creation happens in the maker’s image, Satan’s creation is also negative.¹⁴

“Negative creation” is a contradictory concept: creation involves something coming into being, not something coming into non-being. Yet *Paradise Lost* consistently presents Satan and his world as a negativity with existence, a tangible nothingness. When Satan remakes himself in Book V in the image of all that is not-God—that is, in the image of the negative—he does not cease to be, but instead becomes a physical and literally spiritual embodiment of that negativity. In Hell, this positively represented nothingness famously manifests itself as the “darkness visible” that can only illuminate “sights of woe, / Regions of sorrow” (I.63-65). If negativity can exist as real and substantial in the poem, the “negative creation” must also actually produce something that exists, rather than simply undoing what is. Thus Raphael tells

¹³ Milton rejected the common doctrine of God’s creation *ex nihilo*, instead claiming in *De Doctrina Christiana* that God created the world out of himself:

That matter should have always existed independently of God is inconceivable. In the first place, it is only a passive principle, dependent upon God and subservient to him; and, in the second place, there is no inherent force or efficacy in time or eternity, any more than there is in the concept of number. But if matter did not exist from eternity, it is not very easy to see where it originally came from. There remains only this solution, especially if we allow ourselves to be guided [116] by scripture, namely, that all things came from God. (*Works* VI, 307)

The rejection of God that makes Satan negative thus forces Satan, when he creates from himself as God did, to create from nothing, opposing him to God.

¹⁴ I mean “negation creation” differently from William Kerrigan, who also argues that “[t]he negative creator of *Paradise Lost* is Satan.” For Kerrigan, this negative creation manifests itself in Satan’s creation of Sin: “Satan,” he argues, “can only create himself” (156). For how Satan creates difference in the world, see Chapter 3.

Adam that God, when he was creating Eden, had sent the angel to guard the gates of Hell, lest Satan, breaking forth, “Destruction with creation might have mixed” (VIII. 236).¹⁵ Here God’s creation is opposed to but in parallel with Satan’s destruction: Satan does not create, but only destroys. But destruction in this passage does not simply cancel creation out, or undo it. Instead, the two can be “mixed,” suggesting that destruction, rather than a force that negates creation, can in fact coexist with creation. In other words, Satan is not playing a zero-sum game; his “destruction,” his negative creation, does not simply strive, as John T. Shawcross argues, to unmake what God has made,¹⁶ but instead must have some positive existence that would allow it to mingle with creation rather than to blot it out.

The question, then, is what the positive aspect of Satan’s negativity might be. Book I, and the second moment which Bloom identifies as the beginning of modern poetry, provides the glimpse of an answer. In response to Beëlzebub’s quite reasonable fear that the fallen may have no purpose left except to serve God’s will, Satan responds not to assuage the fear, but simply with the words, “to be weak is miserable / Doing or suffering” (I.157-8). Once again, Bloom’s paraphrase is instructive. In speculating about what “Satan might have said,” Bloom reads Satan’s claim as, “In doing and in suffering, I shall be happy, for even in suffering I shall be strong,” thus imputing to Satan’s words a positive claim about what the fallen *will* do—they will be happy in the face of adversity (23). Yet what Satan actually says in the poem bears no such positive significance; Satan merely states what is presumably true, that in being weak the fallen will be miserable whether they merely suffer or whether they “do,” whether they are active. What will happen to them if they are

¹⁵ Similarly, see VI.262-269. Michael calls Satan the “Author of Evil” and accuses him of being the creator of Misery, “uncreated till the crime / Of thy rebellion[.]”

¹⁶ Shawcross claims that “Satan, as his interview with Chaos and Old Night in Book II of *Paradise Lost* makes clear, is dedicated not to *non*creation but to *un*creation, the reversal of what is created back to its ‘original’ elements” (34). For Shawcross, Satan is the self-hating male acting out his failure to become the “supine receiver of God’s insemination” through destruction of God’s creation (34).

strong, or even what it means to be strong as opposed to being weak, Satan does not explicitly say.

The only hint we get comes in the following lines:

but of this be sure,
To do aught good never will be our task,
But ever to do ill our sole delight,
As being contrary to his high will
Whom we resist. If then his providence
Out of our evil seek to bring forth good,
Our labour must be to pervert that end,
And out of good still to find means of evil[.] (I.158-165)

Here Satan does seem to make a positive proposal, telling Beëlzebub that they will find their “sole delight” in “being contrary” to God’s will, suggesting that the happiness Bloom alludes to will be found in this resistance; yet the content of this proposal is negative. In line 159, “never” parses ambiguously, either modifying the first half of the line, making it read “Our task will be never to do aught good,” or the second half of the line, yielding, “Our task never will be to do aught good.” In the first case, Satan and his followers do indeed have a task, but it is a course of inaction: our task is to do *not X*. In the second, even a task is denied the fallen: whatever our task is, it *is not* to do X. As in the question, “who saw / When this creation was?”, the ambiguity oscillates between the negation of an idea, and the negation of the possibility of that idea—either the rebel angels have a task that they can define negatively, or they cannot identify a task at all. The fact that “never” occupies the middle two syllables of the pentameter line, together with the fact that it is the only polysyllabic word in the line and that its placement is unmetrical, additionally emphasizes the ambiguity of the negation, as the line refuses to resolve either in its meaning or its meter.¹⁷

¹⁷ I am here using generative metrics, as discussed in Paul Kiparsky’s article, “The rhythmic structure of English verse,” to evaluate this line. The only rule which governs meter in the English language is that the stressed syllables of any polysyllabic word in a line must fall in a stressed position—for an iambic pentameter line, the stressed positions are the even syllables. “Never” in English must carry its stress

But resolution does come in the following lines, where Satan explains that they *will* do everything contrary to God’s will, thus making clear that the “never” parses with “to do” rather than with “is”—that is, line 159 means, “Our task will be never to do aught good,” to which the subsequent lines add, “Our task will instead be to do ill.” Because it dismisses the second possible reading of line 159, which shows Satan unable to identify a positive task for the fallen, this resolution suggests that “never to do aught good,” though only a negative proposal, nevertheless manifests itself positively, an actual “doing” rather than a “not doing.” The pleasure the fallen can take in doing ill, according to Satan, does not grow out of some desire to do bad for its own sake, but is instead the pleasure of “being contrary to his high will / Whom we resist”; doing ill means doing the opposite of what God wants. Satan’s plan is to do what God would not do, to act as not-God. But this is not pure negation.¹⁸ “Never to do aught good” does not simply state what their task is *not*, but it determinately

on the first syllable, but in this line the “ne” falls on the fifth syllable—an odd syllable. As Kiparsky points out, this particular kind of unmetricality, in which no bracketing mismatch occurs (i.e., in which the unmetrical word occupies just one foot, here the third foot of the line, rather than spanning across two feet) is common in Milton (and considerably less so in other English poets) and is even a regular feature of his poetry.

¹⁸ There is, however, a critical tendency to read Satan and his actions as purely negative, without positive content. Victoria Silver, for instance, argues that, “having repudiated deity, Satan conveys a negation only—the absence of that divine inflection whose creaturely aspects include variety and individuality, not to mention orderly, intelligible change” (254); likewise Fish claims that Satan is “without center and without being” (see nt. 8). Identifying this negativity with Augustine’s equation of evil and nothingness, Bryan Adams Hampton argues that, “[n]o longer participants in the Being that gives being, even the contemplation of [the devils’] pain... is a contemplation of nothingness, and this nothingness gives rise to their restlessness” (98). While the Augustinian doctrine of evil’s non-being seems present enough to me in Satan’s revolt into negativity, the notion that anything relating to Satan is “only” negative contradicts both Augustine and the significance of negation in Milton’s universe. As Peter A Fiore points out repeatedly in the first chapter of his *Milton and Augustine*, “if these fallen angels are now evil, they are nonentities and do not exist. To conclude that Satan’s nature is now evil is not only to misinterpret a very important aspect of Milton’s metaphysics but, worse still, to deny the existence of Satan’s angelic nature as a very important entity in *Paradise Lost*” (16). Though evil may be negative, evil and thus negativity are not the pure substance of Milton’s demons. Moreover, as Hegel describes in his *Science of Logic*, pure negativity without content is a contradiction:

the negative is just as much positive, or ... what is self-contradictory does not resolve itself into a nullity, into abstract nothingness, but essentially only into the negation of its *particular* content, in other words, that such a negation is not all and every negation but the negation of a specific matter which resolves itself, and consequently is a specific negation, and therefore the result essentially contains that from which it results. (54)

For evidence that this is indeed how negativity in Milton’s universe works, see Chapter 2.

defines what their task *is*, since doing not-good according to Satan's logic means doing ill. "Evil," which makes its first appearance in the poem in the subsequent line, though negative in itself insofar as Satan understands it as not-good and therefore not-God, is thus *determinately* positive because its definition puts it in a necessary relationship to goodness. Satan cannot define his negativity, his Satan-ness, except through positivity, through Godliness. As a result, evil—Satan's negative creation—always takes the form of positive being. To borrow a metaphor from Donne, evil is the "ordinary nothing," the shadow of positive being whose darkness takes the shape of the thing that it is not.¹⁹

III. "SPACE MAY PRODUCE NEW WORLDS"

With the declaration, "We know no time when we were not as now," Satan recreates himself negatively, in that moment seizing a power that had hitherto been wielded only by God; with the claim, "to be weak is miserable / Doing or suffering" and what follows, Satan realizes what that power means in his hands—he can create, but his creation is negative, invested with existence in the world only through its relation to the very power that it rejects. This is what makes Satan not only a poetic figure, but also a figure for poetry. In his *Aesthetic Theory*, Theodor Adorno argues that all artworks are "enigmas" (*Rätsel*) insofar as their structure promises a meaning, while their content denies it:

Artworks share with enigmas the duality of being determinate and indeterminate. They are question marks, not univocal even through synthesis. Nevertheless their figure is so precise that it determines the point where the work breaks off. As in enigmas, the answer is both hidden and demanded by the structure. This is the function of the work's immanent logic, of the lawfulness that transpires in it, and that is the theodicy of the concept of

¹⁹ "A Nocturnal upon S. Lucy's Day, being the shortest day of the year," ll.35-40:

If I an ordinary nothing were,
As shadow, a light, and body must be here.

From *Complete English Poems* (72-73).

purpose in art. The aim of artworks is the determination of the indeterminate. (124)

A poem does not in fact *say* anything; its “meaning” is always a matter of interpretation, an act that Adorno claims must fall short of the artwork itself, which always “asks for further understanding, as if waiting for the redemptive word that would dissolve its constitutive darkening” (122). What is real in the artwork, the truth of the artwork, according to this theory, cannot reside positively within the work itself, but can only be given in negative, signaled by an absence which is the shadow of an unrepresentable and unthinkable reality. The comparison to Satan here, at least at a cursory level, is obvious. Just as Satan brings himself into being by questioning, by suggesting possibility without the hope of resolution, the artwork—here, the poem—exists *qua* artwork because it turns its back on the suggestion of what might be; and just as Satan’s creative power resides in a formal positivity that gives life to negativity, so “[t]hrough form, artworks gain their resemblance to language, seeming at every point to say just this and only this, and at the same time whatever it is slips away” (120). Satan, like the artwork, is the positive representation of negativity. If we ended here with this comparison, however—Satan looks like Adorno’s definition of the artwork—Satan would be little more than an allegory of a theory that did not yet exist when Milton was writing; but *Paradise Lost* is not an allegorical poem, and Adorno’s aesthetic theory is not an arbitrary framework for understanding Milton’s epic.²⁰ Instead, Satan’s role as the positive representation of negativity in fact constitutes the conditions of possibility of the poem itself.

²⁰ Adorno’s theory of art is frequently understood as a theory specifically of modernist art, but it is not *just* a theory of modernist art. Insofar as Adorno’s emphasis on historicity in understanding art requires an understanding of history generally, and one that understands history as a connected series of events (even if they are only connected in their discontinuity), to understand any theory of Adorno’s as *purely* a product of its age is to fall prey to the nominalism that he critiques in *Aesthetic Theory*. In the second chapter of *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, Adorno makes the claim that the Enlightenment is already implicit in Homer, waiting to unfold historically (35-62); I would argue that something similar is happening here in *Paradise Lost*, where Milton’s epic not only expresses the conditions of art that will lead to modernism, but is also the cause of that condition, or the condition itself, containing within it the enigmaticalness that will unfold in art centuries later.

When Bloom identifies two moments as the beginning of modern poetry, he rightly begins with the moment at which Satan becomes Satan, but significantly this event does not coincide with the opening of *Paradise Lost*; instead the poem begins at Bloom's second moment, with the consequences of negative creation rather than that first re-creation itself. While epic convention calls for this opening *in medias res*, the *res* in the middle of which the poem begins are not part of Adam and Eve's story, but rather part of Satan's. However much it may seem otherwise through the first nine books of the poem, *Paradise Lost* is, of course, about "man's first disobedience," not about Satan's disobedience, and so the choice to begin the epic with a convention that misdirects the reader should raise some questions about the role Satan's narrative plays in the story that Milton's narrator wants to tell. Why do we begin with Satan, instead of Adam and Eve? And why do we begin with Satan in Hell, rather than Satan in Heaven? According to the logic of the poem itself, *Paradise Lost* begins where it does because the narrator very reasonably decides, immediately following the first invocation, that the best place to start in telling this story of man's downfall is at the beginning:

say first what cause
Moved our grand parents in that happy state,
Favored of Heav'n so highly, to fall off
From their Creator, and transgress his will
For one restraint, lords of the world besides?
Who first seduced them to that foul revolt? (I.28-33)

The narrator does not begin *in medias res* at all, but instead asks his muse to tell him about the root of the problem, about the event that led to the story he wants to tell. The obvious answer to both questions here is Satan, and so his presence, even his omnipresence, in the first books of the poem results from the fact that his fall is the necessary condition of the fall of Adam and Eve; if he did not become Satan, he would not have "seduced" them, and presumably there would be no story to tell.

But the first and second questions the narrator asks here are not necessarily the same. While line 33's use of "who" clearly points to a personage, a character, and therefore to Satan, lines 28 and following are looking for a "what," a question that does not limit the field of answers exclusively to characters. And whereas the "who" is nominal in the second sentence, and therefore the agent of the verb "seduce," in the first "what" is a wh-determiner of "cause";²¹ unlike the second question, which searches for the agent of the verb, for the character that seduces, the first thus does not search for the agent of causing, for that which causes, but rather for a cause itself—specifically, the cause that "moved our grand parents." If Satan is the answer to both questions, then only in the second is he relevant *as* Satan, as a character who acts as an agent: in the first, he is significant as a cause.

He is furthermore a cause that stands in a mediated relation to all of the actions we might well think most relevant to the story; he does not cause Adam and Eve "to fall off / From their Creator," or to "transgress his will," but instead he *moved* them to perform these actions. Far from a strange semantic slip whose only relevance is to preserve the meter, this mediation between the cause of man's fall and their actual falling and transgressing precisely describes the mechanism of Satan's seduction. In Book IX, when Satan tempts Eve, his attempts to directly influence her fail miserably. He appeals to her vanity (532-548), but flattery gets him nowhere: "Serpent, thy overpraising leaves in doubt / The virtue of that fruit, in thee first proved" (615-616). Satan then changes tactics and moves to his greatest skill. "Ye shall not die," he tells Eve, and then launches into a series of questions: "How should ye? By the fruit? It gives you life / To knowledge. By the Threat'ner?", leading him to his *tour de force*, the pinnacle of Satanic logic:

God therefore cannot hurt ye, and be just;

²¹ See Adger, 346. "What" essentially functions as an article, such as "the" or "a" in this sentence.

Not just, not God; not feared then, nor obeyed:
Your fear itself of death removes the fear.
Why then was this forbid? (700-703)

This temptation works, but not in the way that Satan seems to intend. For though Eve at this point adopts a Satanic discourse by herself running through a series of questions, turning over her situation again and again in the search for an answer (745-779), she diverges from the content of Satan's argument in that moment at which her logic most resembles his:

What fear I then, rather what know to fear
Under this ignorance of good and evil,
Of God or death, of law or penalty? (773-775)

Whereas Satan's questions suggest that God cannot justly prohibit Adam and Eve from gaining knowledge, and that therefore Eve can eat without fear, Eve here questions whether she can properly fear God *unless* she eats. The difference between these two arguments demonstrates that Satan does not in fact convince Eve of anything, since her reason for eating is not the one he provides her; he does, however, manage to make her ask her own questions, to adopt the Satanic position—which is formal and not contentive—on her own.

Satan achieves this end because his words present to Eve precisely the kind of enigma Adorno talks about in *Aesthetic Theory*. When he tells Eve, "Your fear itself of death removes the fear," he does not make a straightforward statement, but rather presents her with a problem. Because the relationship between "itself" and "of death," and their relation to the rest of the sentence, is ambiguous, the sentence may read many different ways: for example, it could say, "Your fear [itself of death] removes the fear," or "Your [fear of death] itself removes the fear," or "Your [fear itself] removes the [fear of death]." Which way we read, or Eve reads, this sentence determines what each instance of "fear" refers to—i.e., whether the sentence claims that Eve's fear of death removes the fear she has in eating the apple, or that Eve's fear

of eating the apple removes the fear of death (since her fear would prove that God is not just and that therefore, presumably, he is not God, and thus not to be feared).²² This ambiguity denies Adamic language as a purely communicative discourse that brings clear and certain understanding,²³ and instead produces what we might call “aesthetic language,” language which begs to be understood but which will not itself yield up certain understanding. Like Satan’s, and later Eve’s, actual questions, sentences like these open up possibility without presenting any positive content; they are themselves question-marks, uncertainty and doubt embodied in language.²⁴ Confronted with such language, Eve does what any reader of Satan’s words must do: she interprets them, and thereby begins to develop her own questions, her own ambiguities, her own aesthetic language, that lead her to her doom.²⁵

Because the manner of causation is not direct, as it would be, for instance, if Eve responded directly to Satan’s flattery, but rather comes about because the form of Satan’s seduction leads Eve to emulate Satanic thought, the question “what cause?” in Book I begs the answer “Satan” not as the agent of man’s fall, but as something

²² This is not meant to be an exhaustive list of possible interpretations of this line. When a student of *Paradise Lost* asked the John Milton Discussion List (Milton-L@koko.richmond.edu) for an interpretation of this very line, the discussion ran for no fewer than 10 days, and generated no fewer than 63 responses.

²³ Describing his first day of life, Adam tells Raphael, “I named [the animals], as they passed, and understood / Their nature” (VIII.352-353); in the unfallen world, to know something’s name is to know the thing itself, whereas after the fall, when lies and dissimulation abound, the ontological link between language and the world is severed. For more on the relationship between naming and heavenly language, see *Surprised by Sin*, pp. 64-65.

²⁴ John Guillory points to another type of this “Satanic language” in the poem when discussing II.5-10: “Syntactically, Satanic aspiration is the result of the chiasmus which reverses the order of presentation while substituting ‘aspires’ for ‘hope’: ‘high... beyond ... hope; aspires... beyond... high.’ The nominalist in every reader would argue that the words in the second half of the chiasmus lose meaning but they also generate strength, evidently out of nowhere. This generation *ex nihilo* Milton associates with imagination, which enters with Satan into the poem” (108-109).

²⁵ Neil Forsyth makes a similar claim about Satan’s effect on Eve, claiming that “Satan teaches Eve to read,” by which he means that Satan teaches her to interpret (*Satanic* 282). Instead of arguing, as I do, that he teaches her to read *his* words, however, Forsyth claims that Satan prompts Eve to read *God’s* words, and specifically the command not to eat of the tree: “God said, ‘In the day ye eat thereof ye shall surely die,’ and by showing Eve he is not dead himself, though he has supposedly eaten it, Satan has got her to think about that text, to interpret and divide its meanings, to rewrite it” (267). For a similar discussion in my argument, see Chapter 3.

approximating Aristotle's formal cause;²⁶ Satan is the *form* that Eve takes when she transgresses. That he is *also* an active agent, the efficient cause of Eve's fall, is manifest in the narrator's second question, "Who first seduced...?", but he seduces Eve only in the most literal sense—he prompts her *se ducere*, to lead herself, rather than to allow God's sole command to lead her. The link between these two causes is the movement expressed in line 29. Because it is God's creation and perfect, no negative space exists in Eden prior to Satan's arrival, for when God created the world "darkness fled, / Light shone, and order from disorder sprung" (III.712-713). When Satan enters, however, he creates with his questions a space that is necessarily un-Godly, a space which God does not occupy. This presents Eve with a choice that she did not have before: she can do what Raphael admonishes her to do and "stand" (V.522), by trusting in the knowledge that God gave her, or she can "move" into this newly-created negative space simply by engaging with Satan's argument, by allowing his questions to open the door of doubt in her mind—which is as much as to say that she can now choose to fall. Unfortunately for Eve, even recognizing this choice as a choice already implies her fall away from God, since the presence of a second option must force her to question which choice is right; hence she falls away from God the moments she asks, "what forbids he but to know, / Forbids us good, forbids us to be wise?" (IX.758-759). The formal cause thus becomes an efficient cause because the very quality which defines Satan's "form"—positively-represented negativity—by its nature already carries within it a fatal movement: the uncertainty of having to choose.

The narrator begins *Paradise Lost* with Satan not simply because Satan causes Adam and Eve to fall, thus making him the beginning of their story, but also because Satan, as the positive representation of negativity, makes falling away from God

²⁶ See Aristotle, *Physics*, 194b-195a, and *Metaphysics*, 983a. The "formal cause" of an object, according to the *Physics*, is "the form or archetype, i.e. the definition of the essence, and its genera" (332). For a discussion which applies Aristotle's causes to the poem differently, see Steadman, *Paradise*, 56-57.

possible at all: he himself *is* that possibility. This is also the reason that the poem begins *in medias* of Satan's story, with Satan in Hell, rather than with Satan's moment of self-creation in Heaven. When Satan declares, "We know no time when we were not as now," he creates a negative space for himself, but not until he falls from Heaven and lands in Hell can the consequences and the significance of that creation take shape. For while Satan takes his form in Heaven, and thereby creates the possibility of further falls even then, only in Hell does Satan reveal, to the reader if not to himself, that his new-found negativity can only act negatively, can only produce the same tangible nothingness that he himself has become; only in Hell does Satan's form unite with his agency. This happens because Hell is the physical location that Satan and his epistemology represent, created for him and his following, "their fit habitation" (VI.876); it is very literally the negative space, the "darkness visible," that those who fall away from God can and must occupy. In the poem Hell thus provides a concrete rendering of the choice that Satan presents to Adam and Eve—either to dwell with God or to damn themselves to Hell. Since that choice, or rather the recognition of that choice, is itself the blessed pair's damnation, the poem must begin here, with the first moment at which Adam and Eve have the option of "moving" out of Eden.

If Satan's rise off the burning flood constitutes the story *Paradise Lost* tells as both the possibility of and the driving force behind Adam and Eve's fall, it likewise, and for the same reasons, constitutes the poem *qua* poetry. For just as Satan's occupancy of Hell is the first moment at which Adam and Eve can fall, it is also the first moment at which poetry can be written, the first moment that human language can represent. In Book V, Raphael responds to Adam's request to hear about the war in Heaven by asking, "how shall I relate / To human sense th' invisible exploits / Of warring Spirits," which question he answers by deciding that he will "delineate so, / By lik'ning spiritual to corporal forms" (564-566; 572-573); human sense, even before

the fall, is inadequate to the task of perceiving divine actions, and so Raphael has to dumb the story down so that Adam can understand it.²⁷ The reason for this deficiency Raphael makes clear in Book VII, when he tells Adam,

Immediate are the acts of God, more swift
Than time or motion, but to human ears
Cannot without process of speech be told,
So told as earthly notion can receive. (176-179)

The “acts” to which Raphael refers here are divine speech, God’s Word, which brings what is commanded into being simply by uttering the command. As Fish notes, “What this Word utters it effects immediately” (*Milton* 88): God’s speech is the ultimate performative, the complete union of language and being. Unfallen human speech, on the other hand, while immediately joined to *understanding being*, nevertheless is mediated in its relationship to *coming into being*, and thus can only comprehend what is in fact simultaneous as a process, as something that happens over time. Even if Milton’s narrator spoke in a prelapsarian voice, he would thus already be unable to depict heavenly affairs as they are, and could only show them as they are able to appear to human sense.

The fact that he speaks in fallen tones only further divorces his speech from divine knowledge, for once Adam and Eve transgress, their understanding of their world immediately begins to falter. Thus Eve, once she has eaten, can no longer use human language to comprehend God, but instead makes the absurd error of thinking that God might not have seen her eat the fruit because “Heav’n is high” and “other care perhaps / May have diverted from continual watch / Our great Forbidder,” grossly misunderstanding God as subject to the human limitations in which her language frames him (IX.811-815). With human language so degraded, Milton’s narrator can

²⁷ Cf. *De Doctrina Christiana*: “When we talk about knowing God, it must be understood in terms of man’s limited powers of comprehension. God, as he really is, is far beyond man’s imagination, let alone his understanding.... God has revealed only so much of himself as our minds can conceive and the weakness of our nature can bear” (*Works* 133).

hardly hope to do what even Raphael cannot be sure of, and so the War in Heaven comes to us not simply in flashback, a memory of an event that is not represented immediately, but also narrated through another character, and a character whose own words to Adam suggest that the narrator's representation of him as a heavenly being is inadequate and dumbed-down. Heaven as it really is cannot be given in a poem, nor can its representation in "corporeal forms" bring understanding.

Hell, on the other hand, suits fallen language perfectly; it is a space of doubt, of incomprehension, of shadows and ambiguity, where demons argue about what God might do to them because they no longer have access to divine intuition. As the first to fall, Satan and his following are furthermore the inventors of this fallen language, the first speakers of that strange tongue which Adam and Eve will adopt in Books IX and X. Satan's arrival in Hell is thus not only the cause of Adam and Eve's fall, but the cause of the language that the poem itself must use, and is therefore the first moment that the postlapsarian mind can represent. It is also the moment that makes such representations possible in the first place. For Satanic language is more than simply deficient, a degraded form of understanding divorced from the source of all knowledge; it is also, by virtue of its estrangement from the pure positivity of divine language, intensely creative, opening up possibilities of thought within the negative space it generates. "Space may produce new worlds," Satan offers to his following as a shred of hope, and indeed space already has done so, for when Satan re-created himself negatively the universe made a new room for the fallen, expanding God's creation from one "world"—Heaven—to two (I.650). Because the form of Satanic language is both the condition of its possibility and the impetus that spurs others to adopt it, the creation of this first "new world" leads to more such worlds, as Adam and Eve, following Satan, leave their old world in the Garden for the new one created for

their sin, the land outside of Eden where Satan's destruction—his negative creation—mixes with God's creation.

These “new worlds” do not, of course, partake of the pure being of divinity, as Eden and Heaven do, but rather, because they are caused by Satanic negativity, are themselves positively represented negative spaces. Such spaces are, among other things, the sphere that the aesthetic must occupy. In Hell we find the only art described in the poem, first in Pandaemonium, the architectural feat which outstrips all the great buildings of human creation (I.692-730), and then in the fallen angels who “sing / With notes angelical to many a harp / Their own heroic deeds and hapless fall / By doom of battle” (II.547-550). Because of their fall, the narrator notes that their “song was partial” (552), no longer resembling the notes of their unfallen brethren who hymn to God, using their voices solely to praise him. Instead, these infernal singers bear a striking resemblance to the poets from which the narrator wants to distinguish himself in Book IX, who find only “wars” and “feigned battles” to be appropriately “heroic” subjects for poetry (24-41); specifically, Milton's narrator in Book IX takes to task Homer and Vergil, to whose epics Milton's poem frequently alludes.²⁸ That these damned angels in Book II take these same subjects for their song as Milton's predecessors suggests that, however much the narrator tries to invoke a divine muse for inspiration, the poetic tradition out of which *Paradise Lost* comes begins in Hell, rather than in divinity.

The reason for this again comes out of the difference between divine and fallen language. The claim that the demons' “song was partial” marks a difference between the singing of “heroic deeds” and the kind of singing the poem shows in Heaven, where the angels sing “loud hosannas” to God (III.348). The latter, as the word

²⁸ Cf. Dante's *Inferno*, Canto IV, where Dante finds his poetic predecessors—Homer, Horace, Ovid, and Lucan—in the first circle of Hell. Homer is holding a sword, indicating that he sings of war (IV.86).

“hosanna” suggests, sing in order to pray, a kind of language which is again performative, praising God by singing his praises;²⁹ the demons, however, who are cut off from this performative language, sing about themselves and for themselves, making their song autotelic and not aimed at some higher purpose. Their song is “partial” because it does not perform what it sings, but it is this very fact that makes it poetic. Divine language need not be interpreted because its meaning is ontologically connected to its utterance, and so, insofar as they straightforwardly praise God, the hymns of the angels are not poetry in the sense that Milton’s narrator recognizes it in Book IX; fallen language, on the other hand, precisely because it does not bring understanding or communicate anything directly, can be an object of interpretation in the manner that Adorno describes, something whose form begs us to understand it but which cannot actually yield that understanding.

That *Paradise Lost* fits into this category of language can be attested well enough by the number of library shelves dedicated to readings of the poem. It is also a fact which Milton’s narrator grapples with throughout the poem. For the fact that Milton’s narrator can add its story to the multitude of older stories to which the poem constantly alludes owes itself to the same process of Satanic creation which causes the story the poem is telling to exist at all. Despite the fact that the narrator wants to claim for himself a divine muse and an authority that can “correct” the mistakes of previous storytellers whose errors bear the mark of Satanic influence, such as the tale of Mulciber that men “relate, / Erring” (I.746-747), he nevertheless begins by telling us that his “advent’rous song”

with no middle flight intends to soar
Above th’Aonian mount, while it pursues
Things unattempted yet in prose or rhyme. (I.13-16)

²⁹ “Hosanna” literally means “Save, now!” or “Save, pray!” (*OED*, s.v. hosanna).

However old the story may be, and regardless of whether it has been told before in the Christian Bible or elsewhere, the narrator claims, *Paradise Lost* is nevertheless something entirely new. But just as Satan must revolt into negativity to produce his “new worlds,” the narrator of the poem likewise can only establish his own “newness” through a negative formulation; by defining his song as “unattempted,” rather than as, for instance, “new” or “correct” or “better,” the narrator makes clear that his poem is significant precisely because it is *not* other poems, because it has revolted against “th’ Aonian mount.” A trend that continues throughout the epic, the narrator’s constant attempts to distance his work from all the poems which precede it demonstrate that the poem is, like Satan and Eve and Adam, a product of fallenness, a form whose content can only be understood negatively and which therefore does not ever yield up its meaning in its entirety. This fallenness is, according to the logic of the poem, an inherent feature of all poetry; for if poems did not speak in fallen tongues, if their language communicated purely and directly, then all poems would sing the same song, would reveal God’s truth in a simple act of praise, and Milton’s narrator would neither have to “correct” them, nor would he seek to distinguish himself from them. The existence of poetry at all in a Miltonic universe gives evidence of Satan’s influence on the earth.

Paradise Lost begins with Satan because the story of Satan’s fall and its consequences is also the story of how *Paradise Lost* comes to be; Satan is not merely a symbol of the poetic, as Bloom reads him, but the cause of the poem in all of its aspects, from the narrative to the structure of the language to the kinds of interpretations critics can give to it. It is in this sense that modern poetry begins with two declarations of Satan, first his self-creation, then the revelation of the consequences of that self-creation, for out of these moments the possibility, even the necessity, of poetry emerges, opening the way for an infinite process of creation

within the empty spaces of fallen, human thought. Because it takes this process as its subject, *Paradise Lost* is thus not simply a poem about poetry, but it is also a poem about itself, a self-referential construct whose structure encourages a reading that examines not just what the poem means, but what it means *that* it means, and how that meaning can be constructed at all.

Chapter Two

Negative Relation and *Paradise Lost's* Allusions

Bloom identifies in Satan the inception of modern poetry in order to describe how poems within a tradition relate to one another; I would like to argue in the next two chapters that, because Satan is in fact the inception of all poetry, at least according to Milton's poem, his journey through *Paradise Lost* presents us with a way to read not only how poems generally relate to one another, but also how Milton's epic specifically deals with its predecessors. This is a very old topic in Milton criticism. Since Patrick Hume's 1695 *Annotations on Milton's "Paradise Lost"*, and particularly in the twentieth-century the works of Joan Weber, John M. Steadman, Irene Samuel, William Porter, and Richard DuRocher, to name only a few, readers of the poem have been anxious to sort out where *Paradise Lost* stands in—and how it makes sense of—its literary tradition. But far from illuminating *Paradise Lost's* engagement with its predecessors, the profusion of works titled "Milton and—" and "*Paradise Lost* and—" have mainly shown, through the production of multiple, incommensurate readings of the same passages according to various "source" texts, just how sticky the relationship between *Paradise Lost* and its tradition can be, and how inadequate the common assumptions of the source study are for making sense of that relationship.

Because his self-creation makes possible both poetry as such and, more specifically, the poem *Paradise Lost*, Satan's journey through the poem is the story of the genesis of both Milton's epic and of the tradition within which it situates itself; but precisely because that self-creation does not grow out of an absolute negativity but rather out of an absence which shadows a presence and thereby takes the form—but not the content—of that presence, as Chapter 1 argues, we cannot read Satan's significance as the origin of the poem without reading the break between Satan's self-

created subjectivity and the God-created context out of which that subjectivity arises. The necessity of reading Satan in this way, with an eye to how he comes to be out of *his* tradition—i.e., out of the world God has created—can provide insight into how *Paradise Lost* deals with *its* tradition, a reading which can begin to untangle some of the complexity that the accumulated decades of Milton scholarship have revealed. In his interactions with other characters in the epic, Satan creates his own tradition against the authority of God's, a tradition of breaks and discontinuities—the only kind of tradition a character born out of nothingness can create. These interactions, and the breaks they create, develop into the tradition in which *Paradise Lost* itself takes part. In order to understand how Milton's epic situates itself within a literary tradition, we thus begin not, as a source study, with all the texts of *Paradise Lost's* tradition, but again with Satan.

I. "AS A MOUNT RAISED ON A MOUNT"

The moment at which Satan re-creates himself in *Paradise Lost* is at V.859, with his blasphemous abdication of his God-given knowledge: "We know no time when we were not as now." But Satan reaches this self-creation only after he has made his first move to break with God, which happens only slightly earlier in Book V. After he rouses "his next subordinate" (V.671)—probably Beëlzebub—the soon-to-be Satan addresses his following for the first time in the chronology of the poem:

Thrones, Dominations, Princedoms, Virtues, Powers,
If these magnific titles yet remain
Not merely titular, since by decree
Another now hath to himself engrossed
All power, and us eclipsed under the name
Of King anointed, for whom all this haste
Of midnight march, and hurried meeting here,
This only to consult how we may best
With what may be devised of honors new
Receive him coming to receive from us
Knee-tribute yet unpaid, prostration vile,
Too much to one, but double how endured,

To one and to his image now proclaimed? (V.772-784)

In this speech the Satanic question first opens up the possibility of a world not entirely God's; from this initial question—how do we endure this prostration?—which suggests that they can choose *not* to endure it, he moves on to question in the final sentences of the speech God's authority to rule the angels (794-802), opening the door for the angels to think of the possibility of the world other than it is. This doubting of God's authority easily gets him to his doubt about his own origins at line 859. But while Satan is moving towards a break with God, that break relies upon a point of continuity. Satan here is responding to God's speech earlier in the book, in which God announces the Son's ascendancy over the other angels:

Hear all ye angels, progeny of Light,
Thrones, Dominations, Princedoms, Virtues, Powers,
Hear my decree, which unrevoked shall stand.
This day I have begot whom I declare
My only Son, and on this holy hill
Him have anointed, whom ye now behold
At my right hand; your head I him appoint;
And by my Self have sworn to him shall bow
All knees in heav'n, and shall confess him Lord[.] (600-608)

The naming of the orders of angels prefaces both speeches; more importantly, the naming of the orders of angels *in this particular order*—"Thrones, Dominations, Princedoms, Virtues, Powers"—prefaces both speeches. Elsewhere Satan and others call on "Princes, Potentates, / Warriors" (I.315-316), "Powers and Dominions" (II.11), "Thrones and imperial Powers" (II.310), and other variations, but only three times in the course of the poem does the specific string of names that God uses in Book V appear as an address (the third being Satan's final address to his demons in Book X).³⁰ Satan in lines 772ff is thus very specifically invoking not only God's manner of address, but the manner of address that God uses specifically to announce his Son.

³⁰ The line "Thrones, Dominations, Princedoms, Virtues, Powers" makes one other appearance in the poem at V.840; here, Abdiel does not use the line to address his brethren, but rather, like a faithful angel should, uses the words to give witness to God's naming of the angels.

Satan furthermore establishes continuity between his speech and God's by speaking from his "royal seat / High on a hill, far blazing, as a mount / Raised on a mount" (V.756-757), a position evocative of "that high mount of God, whence light and shade / Spring both" (643-644) from which God gives his speech. Raphael, who is relating the story to Adam, notes the similarity between the two mounts and the two speeches, and ventures a theory of the relation between God and Satan: by erecting this mount, which he will call the "Mountain of the Congregation" (766), Satan is "Affecting all equality with God, / In imitation of that mount whereon / Messiah was declared in sight of heav'n" (763-765). To Raphael, and to many readers of the poem,³¹ Satan establishes continuity between himself and God in order to "imitate" God, to reproduce God's image in himself, and thereby to steal for himself some measure of God's authority. But because Raphael's faith will only acknowledge one true *auctor* in the universe, this "imitation" is already, to Raphael's mind, an insurrection and a deception. At lines 770-771, he charges Satan with imitating not only God's mount, but also God's truth, claiming that Satan "with calumnious art / Of counterfeited truth thus held their ears." "Counterfeit" means imitation, or imitation "with intent to deceive," but it comes from the French *contrefaire*, also meaning "imitation" but etymologically suggesting resistance, "to do against" (OED, 1). If Satan's truth is "counterfeited," as Raphael argues, then Satan acts against God in this speech because to imitate God—the unique authority in the universe—is to deceive: Satan cannot be God, nor can he be equal with him, and so his affectations of equality and truth must be lies.

Were Satan imitating God in this passage, Raphael's indictment would mean that Satan does nothing original in his first address to the angels, but rather derives authority from unoriginality, from a perceived identity between creature and creator.

³¹ See, e.g., Steadman (*Epic* 197), Silver (241-242), Guillory (115), Fish (*Milton* 90).

Satan's ability to break with God would thus depend upon a deception, a false identity, and would not in the end give Satan any *auctoritas* of his own. But Raphael, who does not speak in fallen language, is necessarily a bad reader of poetry, and thus a bad reader of Satan, and also a bad reader of this passage; he fails to note that Satan likewise seems to hold imitation in contempt, and that Satan is in fact quite explicitly rebelling against what he perceives to be God's imitation. In his address to his following, Satan does not take issue with the fact that God has given the angels a new order—"for," he says, "orders and decrees / Jar not with liberty, but well consist" (792-793)—but rather with the fact that they have been ordered to serve, to pay "Knee-tribute," a "prostration vile" (782). Presumably, since they are still in heaven at this point, Satan and the rest have served God well enough until now, and so bending his knee to God alone has not been enough to cause insurrection; what has pushed Satan over the edge is the addition of the Son. Satan exclaims that this knee-tribute is "Too much to one, but double how endured, / To one and to his image now proclaimed?" (783-784), indicating that the real problem here is the doubling of God's image. An "image" is both "counterpart" or "copy," and an "artificial imitation or representation of the external form of any object" (OED, 4a, 1). Satan does not simply object to bowing to someone new, but rather he balks at the idea of bowing both to God and to God's imitation; furthermore, since this doubling of heavenly authority is what leads Satan to question whether he can endure continued prostration, it is the very act of imitation that to Satan's mind de-legitimizes both God and the Son.

When Satan speaks to his following in Book V, he thus does so not, as Raphael charges, to imitate God, but with the express purpose of rejecting God's imitation of himself (a rejection he repeats in Book II, when he comes across his own image in Sin and cannot recognize it). And indeed, Raphael's own description of Satan's speech defies Raphael's claim. The first "imitation" which Raphael discerns, the "imitation of

that mount” whence God delivered his pronouncement, is not really an imitation, for Satan does not speak from a mountain like God's, but rather the seat from which he speaks is “as a mount / Raised on a mount”; in a very literal sense, Satan does not merely reproduce God's performance, but builds upon it, revealing his continuity with his antecedent so as not to obscure or supplant the original by deceptive imitation (which would require that he conceal his original that the deception be unseen), but rather to show that he has surpassed the original—God—by going a step higher. This resembles nothing so much as the narrator's promise, in Book I, “to soar / Above th’ Aonian mount” (14-15), an intent that eschews imitation and instead makes the explicit claim that *Paradise Lost* will be something new. Far from counterfeiting God, Satan in this passage attempts, like the narrator in his celestial flight, to set himself apart from what precedes him by rising above the pre-existing structures.

And Satan does set himself apart from God by delivering a very different speech from his high seat than the one God gave before him. In a kind of verbal reconstruction of the mount upon a mount, Satan begins with God's words, the naming of the orders of angels, only to evacuate those words of the significance with which God invested them. God uses “Thrones, Dominations, Princedoms, Virtues, Powers” in apposition to “all ye angels” and “progeny of Light,” asserting both the angels' identity—they are angels—and their origin—they come from him. By contrast, Satan speaks these titles as an expression of doubt; though Satan begins as if he were identifying his following, the second line of his speech qualifies that identity with the condition, “If these magnific titles yet remain / Not merely titular.” The tension created by the line break between the statement “if these magnific titles yet remain,” questioning whether they retain these names at all, and “if these magnific titles remain not merely titular,” questioning only whether the names mean anything any more, suggests that “merely titular” identities are not identities at all, setting the

stage for Satan to wipe the slate of their origins clean later in the book. Though the speeches open similarly with identical addresses, Satan thus does not begin where God begins, using the address to the fallen angels to demonstrate the identity between God's words and his; rather, the words “Thrones, Dominations, Princedoms, Virtues, Powers” mark the great *difference* between Satan's speech and God's, between doubting and pronouncing, between thinking and knowing. Satan begins his speech with the words of God, but those words mean something very different in Satan's mouth.

This initial departure from the context of God's speech grows into a much more extensive break as Satan's speech continues. Rather than using the conditional clause at lines 773-774 as a rhetorical gesture, designed to convince his followers that they must act if they are to retain their ordained powers (something like, “Thrones, Dominations, etc., if these magnificent titles are to remain not merely titular, you must fight with me!”), Satan instead goes on to follow the stream of his own consciousness through a series of thoughts that follow each from the previous but which together do not add up to a cohesive whole. The train of thought shifts tracks at least five times over the course of the first sentence: from doubting the significance of the angels' titles at 773-774, to the reason for that doubt—the Son's power-grab—in lines 774-777, to the claim at 777-781 that the Son is the reason for their congregation, that they might “consult how we may best/ ... / Receive him,” to the consideration at lines 781-782 of what the Son expects to receive *from* him, “Knee-tribute yet unpaid,” to the injustice of this “prostration vile / Too much to [be paid to] one” at 782-783, and finally to the Satanic question at 783-784, “but double how endured, / To one and to his image now proclaimed?”³² This is no imitation of God's speech. Whereas God gives a

³² There are other ways to break up this sentence; in particular, the last three lines can also be divided into “Knee-tribute yet unpaid, prostration vile” and “Too much to one, but double how endured, / To one and to his image now proclaimed,” with the shift coming at the break between lines 782 and 783, as Teskey's newly-punctuated edition of the poem suggests. I read as I do because the “but” in the middle

straightforward command to his angels at the outset of his address (“Hear my decree, which unrevoked shall stand”), Satan here forms neither a command, nor a declaration, nor even a complete sentence: in thirteen lines of subordinate clauses and appositive phrases, no main clause emerges to indicate what specifically Satan is trying to communicate to his following. Instead, he creates a long anacoluthon that changes structures in the middle of every couple of lines, a series of logically connected half-sentences that refuse the strictures of either syntax or end-stopped lineation.

Raphael calls Satan's speech a “bold discourse without control” (803), meaning that Satan's words reach their audience unrestrained by God or by some faithful angel, but Raphael here also points out that Satan here is literally out of control: his mind is wandering unchecked through its own ideas and impressions, convincing itself as it goes along. This movement of thought in which each utterance leads Satan in a new direction governs Satan's thinking in his first speeches in the first and fourth books, as the previous chapter discussed (and in particular resembles the anacoluthon Roy Flannagan observes at I.84-87).³³ But in these earlier episodes Satan is speaking either to a close comrade or to himself; he is thinking, not addressing or pronouncing, as he does later in Book I and in Book II. That his first address to the angels should thus take this contemplative rather than assertive form—he makes only a single pronouncement, “Ye will not [bend],” in the entire twenty-three lines, and even this he

of line 783 indicates to me a shift from the expression of the indignity of paying tribute in the previous lines to Satan's doubt over whether this indignity can be endured any longer.

³³ *The Riverside Milton*, p. 357, n. 41. Flannagan notes the lack of a main clause in these lines, and claims that the incomplete structure “may indicate [Satan's] moral confusion.” Gordon Teskey, in his edition of the poem, likewise notes the “obscure” syntax of the first speech, and states that it shows Satan's “passion dominating over reason” (*Paradise Lost*, p. 6, n. 84-94.). While these broken syntactic structures may well reveal Satan's affect, they also reveal Satan's thought—or rather, Satan's thinking unfolds in these structures. Far from being mindlessly emotional, either in Book I or in Book V, Satan is thinking through his situation, and not simply reflecting it; this seemingly frenzied movement from idea to idea, as I argue in Chapter 1, actually gets him somewhere—as Neil Forsyth argues, “He is awakening here, beginning to reconstitute himself. And that process is dramatized by the uncertainty of his speech, its broken grammar” (80-81).

immediately calls into question—marks the creation of a new kind of language in heaven. By using God's words, and by setting his own mount atop a mount that recalls God's, Satan makes his address to the fallen angels recognizable as a specific form of speech—an address—that God uses to decree his law; but Satan invokes this form only to break and fragment it, to tear from it its performative force, to deny it even the ability to develop a single, complete idea. Satan severs the link between pronunciation and pronouncement, between utterance and assertion. The language that he develops in this passage thus does away with the simultaneity of God's address—to decree the law is to make it so—and instead, by divorcing the words from the effect, forms a temporal process, one that thinks as it goes along, in which the distance from the beginning to the end of the thought can be measured by the breaks in the structure in between.

These breaks also measure the distance between Satan's speech and God's, as well as the distance between the imitation that Satan perceives in the Son and Satan's own distinctly non-imitative attempt to assert his authority against God's. Whereas God produces sameness, recreating his own image in his Son and then again in Adam and Eve, Satan wants to affirm difference, rejecting God's offer to “abide / United as one individual soul” and instead developing a principle of relation that is discontinuous, that reveals his soul as something different from the Son's (V.609-610). He does this by turning the self-same—the mount upon a mount and the address to the order of angels—into the non-identical. For what Raphael mistakes as Satan's imitation, those moments which seemingly establish continuity between Satan's speech and God's, are instead markers of difference, traces of the absence of continuity: we know just how far away Satan has gone from God because his references to God give us a point of comparison, telling us to read Satan's speech alongside God's and to note the differences. More precisely, these references *are* the

gap between the two speeches. Insofar as Satan's call to "Thrones, Dominations, Princedoms, Virtues, Powers" points back to God's text, it does so to resist identification with God's text, because the meaning of the line in God's speech and the meaning of the line in Satan's cannot be reconciled. The line thus becomes for Satan a sign that signifies a difference between meanings—it is the positive expression of a negative relationship.³⁴ That negative relationship allows Satan to differentiate himself from God not as another God, but as something that is precisely not-God, as his own being and not simply a copy.

But because he can only differentiate himself by speaking God's words differently, Satan's own references to God and to the heaven whence he was cast out become a boundary to his understanding beyond which he cannot pass. For if Satan must make a different meaning out of God's creation in order to remain Satan (and after he has been cast out, he has no choice in the matter, as he himself recognizes in Book IV), then he can never have the same perception of that creation as God or those who remain with God. Nowhere is this more clear than in his claim, in Book I, that during the war in heaven his "Innumerable force of Spirits" "shook [God's] throne" (101, 105). Though he is wrong, Satan is not exactly lying here; the event to which he

³⁴ This notion of words signifying difference relies on something like Derrida's concept of "iterability," as laid out in "Signature Event Context" (307-330). For Derrida, the precondition of all writing is that it "must be able to function in the radical absence of every empirically determined addressee in general. And this absence is not a continuous modification of presence; it is a break in presence, 'death,' or the possibility of the 'death' of the addressee, inscribed in the structure of the mark" (315-316). In other words, writing, which presupposes legibility as such—i.e. the ability to be read without the necessity of a reader—has as its precondition the possibility that it may be cut off, orphaned from its original context; this possibility necessitates that the context of anything written be changeable, that language remain language, something legible, even in radically different contexts. As a result, he argues, "Every sign... can be *cited*, put between quotation marks; thereby it can break with every given context, and engender infinitely new contexts in an absolutely nonsaturable fashion" (320). Satan in his fall makes such iterability possible by doing it—he takes God's words and makes them mean something other than what they meant in God's context, signaling a world in which words are no longer directly connected to things, in which the words and the meanings are no longer necessarily bound up with one another. In order to make the difference between Satan's use and God's meaningful, however, the dialectic that Derrida denies (317) must be set back in motion. See Chapter 3.

refers is attested elsewhere in the poem, if with a rather different spin. The narrator in Book III, in a long apostrophe to the Son, claims,

thou that day
Thy Father's dreadful thunder didst not spare,
Nor stop thy flaming chariot wheels, *that shook*
Heav'n's everlasting frame, while o'er the necks
Thou drov'st of warring angels disarrayed. (392-396; my emph.)

In Book IV, Raphael corroborates the narrator's account, but elaborates a bit:

He [the Son] on his impious foes right onward drove,
Gloomy as night; under his burning wheels
The steadfast empyrean shook throughout,
All but the throne itself of God. (831-834; my emph.)

Satan, it seems, is right about the shaking, but he gets the cause and the object wrong. In fact, Satan's version of events is the negative image of what really happened; whereas Satan claims that God's throne shook and he and his army were the cause, Raphael and the narrator tell us that *everything but* God's throne shook, and the Son, in the process of vanquishing Satan and his army, was the cause.

The greatest of the devil's advocates, William Empson, argued that Satan's claim to have shaken God's throne grows logically out of his assumption that God is not omnipotent—an assumption, Empson claims, God misled him to believe by letting the war drag on for three days—and this is almost certainly true, given the consistency with which Satan in the first book claims that he can outwit God (36-44). But the ground of this assumption rests more in the structural constraints Satan has placed upon his understanding by starting the war than in any deceptive intent God may have had in continuing it. If God is omnipotent, and if Satan has recreated his understanding not only negatively but also in a negative relationship to God, then Satan cannot believe that God is omnipotent; thus Satan can easily believe that he has the power to shake God's throne. But believing that he *can* shake God's throne and believing that he *did* shake God's throne are two different things, and Empson does not

account for why Satan would witness the Son shaking everything but the throne of God and conclude from this that he himself shook God's throne. It is again his negative relation to God that gets Satan to this conclusion. Just as God's words must mean something very different in Satan's mouth if Satan is to break with God, so too must the events in heaven mean something very different to Satan's mind—they become precisely *not* themselves: if the Son, God's image, shook the heavens, then Satan must remember that it was not-God—he himself—who did the shaking; and if everything but God's throne shook, then Satan can only believe that the throne was shaken. But what might be understood as a willful perversion of God's words in Book V (since Satan is explicitly rebelling against God at that moment), in Book I appears to be an involuntary constraint on Satan's understanding, limiting Satan's ability to comprehend his situation. Satan in Book I faces the consequences of the fact that, once he has turned his back on God, he can no longer see God; having lost his “blessed vision” (V.611), Satan's re-created mind necessarily occupies only the spaces God doesn't, making him blind to heavenly affairs once he has landed in hell.³⁵ And if Satan can only speak God's words differently, he can never understand what God's words mean.³⁶

II. “THINGS UNATTEMPTED YET IN PROSE OR RHYME”

The previous chapter demonstrated how Satan's creative power rests on his ability to engender negative space in the world, to create difference and therefore to create possibility without positive terms; this analysis of Satan's break with God suggests that this creativity relies upon and is bounded by relationships that are

³⁵ C.f. Lewis' claim that, by Book I, he is “no longer certain” that Satan believes his own “lies” (97). See also Fish's discussion of Satan's inability to understand in the first chapter of *How Milton Works*.

³⁶ Silver makes a similar argument differently. For her, Satan is likewise unable to understand God, but because he has fundamentally misunderstood the relation between creator and creature that makes God mean differently than those beings he has created; as a result of this misunderstanding, he sets himself against God. This misreading is for Silver in evidence when Satan first reacts to the Son in Book V, and is thus in her argument a cause of the fall rather than a product of it (208-282).

likewise positive representations of negative space, of the distance between the two related subjects. Satan can only create by first rejecting what already exists. But in order to make that rejection creative, to avoid becoming merely the “childish inverter” of convention that Bloom accuses him of being in Book IV (22), Satan cannot make a purely negative gesture—“I am not God”—but must stake out some positive position for himself that at the same time negates his relationship with God. Satan sets himself in contradistinction to God with the words “Thrones, Dominations, Princedoms, Virtues, Powers,” but the distance between God's meaning and his own appears only because Satan does in fact make his own meaning with God's words—he expresses doubt (itself negative in content but positive in form). This expression makes Satan's words in this speech in fact Satan's words, and not simply the rejection of God's, and thus allows him to move forward to create a new kind of speech that is uniquely his own.

All of this brings us back to the narrator's echo of Satan's mount raised on a mount in Book I. Here is again a concrete connection between Satan's development in the poem and the development of the poem itself, for Milton's poem begins its self-creation the same way Satan begins his; immediately after the mount image, the narrator, like Satan, goes on to announce its own uniqueness by using the words of a predecessor—that is, the narrator goes on to make an allusion. Milton's “advent'rous song,” the narrator tells us,

with no middle flight intends to soar
Above th' Aonian mount, while it pursues
Things unattempted yet in prose or rhyme. (I.13-16)

The joke here, of course, is that the narrator expresses the pursuit of things unattempted yet with words that have in fact been attempted before—by Ludovico Ariosto. Commentators on *Paradise Lost* who bother to note the allusion at all are usually content to pass over this line with a quick reference to Ariosto and an

occasional nod to the “irony” of the line, and studies of Milton's allusions do not generally linger over this moment. Yet what looks like a somewhat light-hearted jab at the epic tradition and the propensity of the poems within it for declaring themselves the best and most original epics ever written in fact forms the first break of many on which the originality of *Paradise Lost* depends. Milton's poem begins in conventional epic style: the narrator invokes the Muse, and identifies what the Muse should be singing. While he chooses a different Muse than do his classical predecessors, invoking the inspiration of Moses rather than of Homer and Vergil, Milton's opening is still easily in line with Renaissance epic, and particularly resembles Tasso's invocation to *Gerusalemme Liberata*.³⁷ Simply telling his audience that his poem will be doing something new would not be particularly convincing at this point; only through a reference to another text can the narrator make the necessary break.

In the opening to *Orlando Furioso*, Ariosto's narrator states, “Dirò d'Orlando in un medesimo tratto / cosa non detta in prosa mai, né in rima” (I.2; “I shall tell of Orlando, too, setting down a thing never said in prose, nor in rhyme”).³⁸ As in Milton's poem, the narrator claims that his poem is doing something new, that his epic is different from other epics. But the context of this claim is very different in Ariosto's poem. In the first stanza of the poem, immediately preceding the statement of

³⁷“O Muse, who does not string a garland of
The fading laurel fronds of Helicon,
but far in heaven among the blessed choirs
wreath deathless stars into a golden crown,
breathe into my heart the fire of heavenly love,
illuminate my song, and if I have sewn
embroideries of the truth in any place,
I ask forgiveness for their lesser grace.” (Tasso, I.2)

Also, see Steadman's *Milton's Biblical and Classical Imagery* for a genealogy of “heavenly Muses” in Renaissance poetry (73-87).

³⁸ Translation by Guido Waldman, modified slightly to keep the more literal sense and thereby to demonstrate the similarity between Ariosto's and Milton's lines. All other translations from Ariosto's Italian are Waldman's. The Italian is from the Debenedetti edition.

originality, the narrator of the epic situates the poem within the context of other poems surrounding the Charlemagne legend:

Le donne, i cavillier, l'arme, gli amori,
le cortesie, l'audaci imprese io canto,
che furo al tempo che passaro i Mori
d'Africa il mare, e in Francia nocquer tanto,
sequendo l'ire e i giovenil furori
d'Agramante lor re, che si diè vanto
di vendicar la morte di Troiano
sopra re Carlo imperator romano.
(I sing of knights and ladies, of love and arms, of courtly
chivalry, of courageous deeds—all from the time when the
Moors crossed the sea from Africa and wrought havoc in
France. I shall tell of the anger, the fiery rage of young
Agramant their king, whose boast it was that he would avenge
himself on Charles, Emperor of Rome, for King Trojan's death.)

All these matters about which the narrator will sing have been sung before in other romances. But when the narrator gets to Orlando, he claims that he will also be singing something new, or rather a *single* thing, “cosa,” that is new—the story “of Orlando, driven raving mad by love” (I.2). Picking up where Boiardo's *Orlando Inamorato* left off—with Orlando's love for Angelica—Ariosto's narrator claims that, among all of the tales well-known to lovers of chivalric romance, he has a new item to add to the legend, a story that Boiardo never got to. Far from a sweeping claim about the utter originality of this new epic, the narrator's promise to sing of “a thing never said in prose, nor in rhyme” in *Orlando Furioso* simply asserts that the story itself, the events that will be told, are new to the audience's ears.

In stark contrast, the claim in Milton's poem cannot be understood as a statement of the story's originality: the tale the narrator will tell has been told before in that most authoritative of authorities, the Bible. But if the poem cannot distinguish itself by its plot, then the question becomes what exactly Milton's poem is pursuing that is yet unattempted. The immediate context of the claim suggests that the “things” to be pursued stand apart not for their newness, but for their loftiness; eschewing a

“middle flight,” the poem will “soar / Above th' Aonian mount,” a task that does not require originality but does require a unique ability to fly. Yet the narrator here also desires to fly higher than his predecessors because of what he hopes to find in thinner, clearer air; he asks his Muse,

what in me is dark,
Illumine, *what is low raise and support;*
That to the highth of this great argument
I may assert Eternal Providence,
And justify the ways of God to men. (I.22-26; my emph.)

Above the Aonian mount lies not a story but an argument that is “unattempted yet in prose or rhyme” that is loftier—and therefore presumably better—than the arguments found in other poems, and it is this argument that Milton's poem now pursues.

“Argument” means here the “subject-matter” of the poem—“man's first disobedience,” etc.—but also, because this argument is supposed to have a specific effect—to “justify the ways of God to men”—the “great argument” of the poem is also, in the more common sense, an argumentation (OED, 6).³⁹ In *Paradise Lost*, the narrator's translation of Ariosto thus refers not to a series of events, but to the arrangement given to those events, and to the purpose in their telling. But the difference between Ariosto's “cosa” and Milton's “things” also suggests that there is more going on here; *Paradise Lost* will pursue more than one thing yet unattempted, and so this line would seem to point beyond the immediate context of the first verse paragraph and the argument that will justify the ways of God. Unlike Ariosto's claim, which indicates only that the story is new, the claim *Paradise Lost* makes in this line promises a wider scope of originality, a poem that does not simply tell one new thing, but which constructs itself out of many new things.

³⁹ This second sense of the word “argument” as argumentation seems to be what Abdiel means when, immediately following Satan's first speech to his following in Book V, he accuses Satan of making an “argument blasphemous, false and proud!” (809); the scene in Book V parallels the poem's first invocation very closely indeed.

Like Satan, then, Milton's poem takes the words of a predecessor and uses them to mean something very different, thereby fulfilling the explicit promise to be distinguishable from those predecessors. For in using the line "Things unattempted yet in prose or rhyme" differently from Ariosto's poem, *Paradise Lost* has already accomplished the goal it claims to pursue; it has used the words of Ariosto in a manner no previous work has attempted. The difference between the two lines marks the difference between *Paradise Lost* and *Orlando Furioso*, the latter concerned with its story, the former with what its story proves, and thus serves to make a break between Milton's poem and Ariosto's by making reconciliation between the two epics impossible—whatever other similarities they may have, they will always mean something different when they tell of things never told before. Out of this break, *Paradise Lost* emerges as something distinct, something that is not *Orlando Furioso* but which, because the allusion establishes a negative relationship between the two texts, delineates its own outline against the shape of Ariosto's epic. This is the foundational moment for Milton's poem: by revolting against another's poetry, *Paradise Lost* creates its own out of the space that other poems do not occupy.

III. "SIGHING THROUGH ALL HER WORKS"

To interpret the allusion at I.16, we thus look at how Ariosto's line differs from Milton's, and then use that difference to illuminate Milton's text. Because the words refer to the argument of the poem and precisely *not* to the story itself, the line reminds us that the story we are about to read is not original, thus indirectly pointing us to Genesis as the authority behind the tale itself; at the same time, because the line claims that the poem is doing something new, it points us to the end of the verse paragraph—the promise that the poem will justify the ways of God to men—and situates that promise at the foundation of the text, making it not only the goal of the poem, but the very thing which makes it worthy—even worthiest—as an epic poem. The poem does

not stop at this promise, however, but instead, by using the plural “things” instead of the singular “cosa,” reaches out beyond its argument to point at other similarly original moments in the poem. This is how we can read all of the allusions in the poem. Because *Paradise Lost* brings itself into being by establishing a negative relationship with the vast tradition of which it is a part, Milton's poem must, just as Satan must, maintain this negative relationship; having brought itself to life as its own entity, the poem can never use another poem's text to mean the same thing because *Paradise Lost* does not mean the same thing. Thus, once it has made the claim that it is its own work because it is precisely *not* other works, *Paradise Lost* must keep on being not other works, or it will lose its distinct outline and sink into the non-differentiated space of The Tradition.⁴⁰

To an extent, this reading of allusion is in line with the general turn away from the idea that allusions simply appropriate their source texts to create a more or less continuous tradition, a turn inaugurated by the publication of *Anxiety of Influence*. As Richard DuRocher has noted, source studies after *Anxiety* moved away from “the comfortable notion that influence consists of a more or less direct 'borrowing' of a previous poet's work,” a notion that suggests “neighborly benignity and faithful continuity,” as a result of Bloom's study (30). In turning from this notion of “neighborly benignity,” studies of Milton's allusions since 1973 have been much more keen on noticing not just similarities between texts but also the differences between the poems that such similarities might illuminate.⁴¹ But in adopting Bloomian notions

⁴⁰ For the inapplicability of such a tradition, see Chapter 3.

⁴¹ Thus E. R. Gregory begins his inquiry into Milton's ideas about the tradition by citing T. S. Eliot's claim about difference within a tradition and the “distinguished medieval historian Karl F. Morrison,” who “has pointed to ‘the duality of conservatism and change’ as constituting ‘the fundamental character of tradition’” (121). The practice of this attention to difference is evidenced throughout more recent discussions of allusion in *Paradise Lost*; e.g., Porter's claim that “if the author is to avoid appearing purely imitative, [his allusion] must contain an element of contrast as well as comparison” (33); Forsyth's assertion that “the Vergilian allusion [starting at l.84] both establishes a parallel between the heroes of the two epics and invites us to consider the differences,” which is “what all thorough allusions do for the knowledgeable and sensitive reader” (80); Francis C. Blessington's argument in the first

of influence, criticism in the past three decades has also tended to understand the tradition linearly, as a genealogy in which influence passes from father-poet to his literary son.⁴² In this genealogical tradition, allusions can have only a single “parent,” leading to a certain amount of critical blindness and one-sided reading. When, for instance, Hunter and Davies discuss the invocation to the muse in Book I, they brilliantly trace the biblical allusions in order to demonstrate that the epic begins by (but does not end at) invoking God himself; but they make no mention of the allusion to Hesiod in the same lines (31-34). Porter, on the other hand, though he does notice the allusion to the Exodus in I.8, uses the first invocation to show Hesiod’s influence on *Paradise Lost*, which he goes on to discuss at length without attention to the significance of the biblical allusion.

Of course, Porter’s aim is not to discuss *Paradise Lost* and the Bible but *Paradise Lost* and classical literature, but this is precisely the problem: discussions of *Paradise Lost* with titles like *Reading the Classics and 'Paradise Lost,' Milton and Ovid, Dante and Milton, 'Paradise Lost' and the Classical Epic*, etc., pick either a single text or a single group of texts and make the argument that most of *Paradise Lost*’s allusions come from that source. The result is that studies that work on

chapter of *'Paradise Lost' and the Classical Epic*, which claims that Milton’s poem invokes classical epic “in order to show that Satan fails to be an epic hero even by the criteria of Homer and Virgil” (1); etc. But it’s worth noting that all of these studies nevertheless still rely heavily on the parallels between *Paradise Lost* and the texts to which it refers, trying to make the connection between the text more than just formally positive by allowing *Paradise Lost* to appropriate or import the context of its “source texts” directly into its own lines. Thus Forsyth, immediately after he makes the claim that all allusions “invite us to consider the differences” between two texts, goes on to read the Biblical allusion to Isaiah 14.12 only for the parallels without considering any differences at all (80), and Blessington abandons his differential reading of Milton’s allusions all together in the second chapter of his book, in which he argues that “the inhabitants of heaven mingle with the inhabitants of the heroic world [i.e., of classical epic], and the two worlds thereby merge rather than conflict” (19). Even Porter, whose theory of allusion comes closest to the one outlined in this chapter, tends to read some allusive moments in the poem as direct imports from the classical tradition, retreating behind his taxonomy of textual reference that allows some references to be “borrowings” (23-32).

⁴² In his recent study of allusion, Ricks revisits this notion of influence and reformulates the genealogy in stronger terms, taking Bloom to task for not being linear enough: “But Bloom’s literary history too much plays at—and not just notices—leapfrog. He keeps saying ‘post-Enlightenment English poetry,’ where ‘post-’ has the effect of a grand eliding; he says nothing about Dryden and Pope, but vaults from Milton to the Romantics, hovering only briefly over Gray” (*Allusion* 14).

Paradise Lost's allusions tend to think about them with blinders on, allowing them to see a passage's resonance with one text but not with others. Where more than one influence is noted, too often the tendency is to claim that one poem comes "through" another; thus Porter, in an attempt to make Vergil *Paradise Lost*'s primary source, tries to eliminate Homer's relation to *Paradise Lost* by claiming that "Milton almost always sees Homer *through* Vergil" (94), while DuRocher claims that Vergil in particular but also Homer go through Ovid to get to *Paradise Lost*.⁴³ There is also much intentionalism, often overt and unabashed, underwriting such studies. In a gesture quite common to Milton studies, Louis Martz justifies his turn to Ovid by citing John Ward's report that "Isaiah, Homer, and Ovid's metamorphoses" were the books most often read by Milton's daughters to the poet in his blindness, asserting that, "during the years when Milton was composing his epic, Ovid's *Metamorphoses* was still one of his best loved books" (203), just as Blessington claims that classical texts permeate *Paradise Lost* because "Milton intended his poem to be read as a gloss upon these predecessors" (1), and John Leonard, in attempting to determine the "accuracy" of one of Milton's allusions, reads Milton "project[ing] some of his own personality onto Eurybates" (110). In adopting a genealogical model of influence that focuses on the psychology of the poet, critics have gained new justification for turning to the poets, and not the poems themselves, to ground their readings.

None of this is to say that such readings are wrong or bad: all of the studies mentioned above are insightful and illuminate new ways of reading the text. But the

⁴³ For DuRocher's account, see particularly pp. 192-203, in which he argues that Milton relied "on Virgil for structural components" and "on Ovid for dynamic transvaluation of these structures" (201). This maneuver is not itself necessarily a result of critical use of Bloom's influence model. Irene Samuel's *Dante and Milton*, published seven years before *Anxiety of Influence*, argues similarly when she claims that that everything classical in Milton's epic comes through Dante. (See, e.g., pp. 111-112, and pp. 81ff., in which she argues that Dante's Capaneus served as a model for Satan seemingly without noticing that Dante's Capaneus is himself an allusion to Statius' *Thebaid*, a notable omission given that Statius' Capaneus in many ways resembles Milton's Satan much more closely than Dante's does.) But the need to establish parent-child relationships between poets and their predecessors encourages this type of reduction.

constraints that limit these studies, the reliance on single texts or on what an author may or may not have read, need not exist. For if an allusion makes meaning negatively, importing none of the earlier text but instead resisting identification with that text, then any number of other epics might be juxtaposed with *Paradise Lost* without conflict: *Paradise Lost* will resist each of them, establishing itself in negative relationship to all of them (even ones the poet hasn't read) rather than reading some "through" others or privileging one over another. No moment in the poem better proves this claim than the passages in which Eve and Adam eat of the tree. The poem tells us that

her rash hand in evil hour
Forth reaching to the fruit, she plucked, she ate:
Earth felt the wound, and nature from her seat
Sighing through all her works gave signs of woe,
That all was lost. (IX.780-4)

Likewise, when Adam commits the fatal sin,

Earth trembled from her entrails, as again
In pangs, and nature gave a second groan;
Sky loured, and muttering thunder, some sad drops
Wept at completing of the mortal sin
Original[.] (IX.1000-4)

There may be a pun on the "works" through which the earth's sigh runs when Eve first plucks the tree: they are both the "works" of God's creation and the "works" of the epic tradition that the earth's sighs and groans invoke, conjuring behind Milton's tree the entire grove of injured epic trees, bushes, and shrubs. In these passages that present the first moment at which poetry and with it a poetic tradition are possible for humankind, *Paradise Lost* establishes a negative relationship to nearly every major epic in its tradition (and some of the minor ones, too), developing the significance of the weightiest moment in the poem out of the differences between 1600 years of conflicting texts.

In their own context, these two passages give evidence for the immediately negative consequences of the fall. Whereas Eve understands her transgression initially as a decision to partake of “the cure of all” (IX.776), the earth’s reaction reveals the violence of the act, as Eve’s “plucking” gives the earth a “wound,” and causes her first to “sigh” and later, when Adam eats, to “groan” and to “weep.” The effect of this violence is to divide what was formerly unified. Because Eve and Adam have transgressed, suddenly the harmony of Eden becomes cacophony, and Earth for the first time in the poem is personified as her own entity, something which can react to and lament its inhabitants’ actions, rather than the tranquil setting of unfallen existence. This division of things from themselves which gives Earth her own sad voice furthermore hints at the rise of the pagan religions that will come once Satan and his followers swarm the earth, and Eve’s reverences to the tree would seem to be the first instance of pagan nature-worship on earth. At the same time, however, Earth’s laments give the lie to Eve’s “low reverence done” (IX.835), making clear that Eve’s praises do not celebrate nature at all but instead cause it to suffer.

As Hughes’ note on the text suggests, *Aeneid* III provides one antagonist for Eve’s encounter with the forbidden tree when Aeneas, attempting to found a colony in Thrace where he and his fellow Trojans might find a more peaceful existence in the wake of Troy’s fall, tries to get material for a sacrifice from the tree growing atop a small hillock. Aeneas tells Dido that he approached the tree and tried “viridemque ab humo convellere silvam” (“to rip up from the earth the green foliage” [III.24]).⁴⁴ At his first attempt, Aeneas is horrified to see that the tree drips dark blood from its torn roots (“ruptis radicibus,” 27-29); when he tries again, he is met with the same monstrous sight. After supplicating the gods to remove this ill omen, Aeneas, caught

⁴⁴ All Latin quotations are from the Oxford editions. All translations from Latin are mine unless otherwise specified.

in a nightmarish repetition, attempts to rip up the tree a final time, whereupon “gemitus lacrimabilis imo / Auditur tumulo, et vox reddita fertur ad auris” (“a woeful groan was heard from within the mound, and a voice was carried to our ears”). The voice belongs to Polydorus, a son of Priam sent during the Trojan war to Thrace to ask the king to send help to the besieged city; the king betrayed Polydorus, and had him killed on the spot where the tree now grows, leaving him without burial.

As Wolfgang E. H. Rudat points out, the formal affinities between this scene and the passages in *Paradise Lost* are striking.⁴⁵ Just as Eve wounds the Earth by “plucking” the tree, so Aeneas wounds Polydorus, who speaks out of the earth which now covers him; and just as Eve’s violence causes nature to sigh, and Adam’s causes it to groan, Aeneas’s causes Polydorus to groan (and it is worth noting here that “gemitus” can mean both sigh and groan). What these formal affinities stress, however, is the wide gap between Vergil’s use of the tree and Milton’s. Aeneas’ encounter with Polydorus graphically demonstrates the injustice of Aeneas’ world and the suffering that results from that injustice. By tearing at Polydorus’ tree repeatedly, Aeneas acts out in advance the suffering that he will continue to endure over the remainder of the epic, and in particular prophesies his continued failure to find a new home for his people.⁴⁶ The necessity of Aeneas’ violence (since he must make a sacrifice), which causes both Aeneas and Polydorus to suffer, furthermore implicates Aeneas within that structure of injustice: he does a wrong to Polydorus by tearing at

⁴⁵ Rudat, in his 1988 article, “Adam’s and Eve’s Oneness: *Paradise Lost* and Virgilian Allusion,” is similarly concerned with exploring the differences between the moment in the *Aeneid* and the moment in *Paradise Lost*, though he places more emphasis on the similarities than I do here, and through a different reading of the Polydorus scene in the *Aeneid* he comes to different conclusions from mine, emphasizing the “oneness” of Adam and Eve throughout the scene rather than the promise of redemption.

⁴⁶ That Aeneas tries three times to pull up the plant is particularly prophetic. Aeneas attempts three times before the end of Book III to start a colony, meets with some prodigy—once in Thrace, once in Delos, and once in Crete—and is turned back out to the sea; three times he actually succeeds in founding a colony—in Pergamum, in Sicily, and in Latium—but can find no rest for himself; three great cities are involved in his journey tale—Troy, Carthage, and Rome—one which falls, one whose fall is foretold, and one whose inception results in the bleak war that ends the epic.

him, but both the iniquity of Thrace's king and of the gods who do not heed Aeneas' prayers make that wrong unavoidable. The situation here is similar to Aeneas' encounter with Dido, suggesting that the signs of future evil which attend their "wedding," a second point of convergence between the two poems which Porter and Rudat, among others, recognize, are the inescapable conclusion of a doomed existence.⁴⁷ But in *Paradise Lost* no injustice exists in Eden which might compel Adam and Eve to their acts of violence. Instead, their violence is itself the cause of future injustices and future violence—it is the moment which, if it is left unchecked by God's grace, will lead to the world Vergil depicts. Insofar as this moment in *Paradise Lost* alludes to *Aeneid* III, the disparity between these similar passages on the one hand supports *Paradise Lost*'s claim to priority, its insistence that its story comes before all other epics, and on the other hand shows the *Aeneid* testifying to the lack of the divine justice Milton's poem so aggressively tries to justify.

Once we have connected the moments of transgression in *Paradise Lost* to Aeneas's encounter with Polydorus, the entire history of bleeding, speaking, groaning, and otherwise unhappy trees in the epic tradition comes flooding in to the reading. Ovid has more than one such scene in his *Metamorphoses*, among which the story of Erysichthon provides the most striking contrast, both to the *Aeneid* and to *Paradise Lost*. Dining with his guest Theseus, the river-god Achelous in Book VIII tells the story of Erysichthon, who blasphemously cut down an oak sacred to Ceres. When he could not convince his men to fell the tree, he himself took up the ax:

et obliquos dum telum librat in ictus,
contremuit gemitumque dedit Deoia quercus,

⁴⁷ Porter reads these lines as part of a series of resonances tying the fall of Adam and Eve to Dido's tragedy (112-114). Rudat in his reading responds to David P. Harding's claim that the affinity between Vergil's cave scene and this moment in *Paradise Lost* is a sign of Eve's responsibility for the sin of all who come after her, including Dido; Rudat argues that, because the allusion to the *Aeneid* isn't complete until the consummation of the sin in Adam and Eve's fallen sex, Adam is equally implicated in the original sin and thus in the suffering that comes to humankind (122).

et pariter frondes, pariter pallescere glandes
 coepere ac longi pallorem ducere rami.
 cuius ut in trunco fecit manus impia vulnus,
 haud aliter fluxit discusso cortice sanguis
 quam solet, ante aras ingens ubi victima taurus
 concidit, abrupta cruor e cervice profundi. (757-64)
 (and even as he poised the ax for slanting blows, Ceres' oak
 trembled and gave forth a groan, and at the same time the leaves
 and the acorns began to blanch and its long branches began to
 turn pale. When this man's impious hand wounded the trunk,
 not otherwise [i.e. through that wound] did blood flow from the
 shattered bark than, when a bull, the sacrificial victim, falls
 before the altar, blood pours from the severed neck.)

Ovid here uses many of Vergil's words to describe his scene, but, aside from the image of a groaning, bleeding tree, the Ovidian moment is quite different from its predecessor. Instead of a pious man unknowingly doing harm to a wronged friend, here Erysichthon, with his "manus impia," purposely blasphemes the gods by cutting down Ceres' tree.⁴⁸ That the tree groans *before* it is cut, contrary to both Vergil's and Milton's injured arbors, proves Erysichthon's guilt and malice. Still an emblem for injustice and impiety in the world, Ovid's scene differentiates itself from Vergil's by making the act itself the only iniquity, rather than a symptom of greater injustice, in some sense putting the *Metamorphoses'* treatment of the image closer to Milton's; the key difference between Milton and Ovid here, however, is that Erysichthon's sin creates the occasion for a vengeful, retributive justice, while Adam and Eve's sin brings about divine justice tempered with mercy. Because of its relationship with this scene in *Metamorphoses*, Milton's epic can thus contrast God's temperate and loving rebuke of Adam and Eve with the rigid, wrathful justice that Satan predicts but which does not itself appear in these later books of *Paradise Lost*.⁴⁹

⁴⁸ Cf. Polydorus begging Aeneas, "Parce pias scelerare manus" ("Spare your pious hands from sin", IV.42), and the reference DuRocher points to in *Metamorphoses* I, in which Caesar's death, which causes the world to shudder, is said to be caused by a "manus impia" (200).

⁴⁹ In the interest of space, I am omitting here Lucan, who plays on the image in Ovid of the felling of a sacred grove (*Pharsalia* III.399ff.). Just as Erysichthon's men fear to cut the holy trees, so do Caesar's balk at the task; and just as Erysichthon undertakes to do the task himself, so does Caesar; but unlike Ceres' grove, which has nymphs to protest the outrage done, the sacred grove outside Massilia

In Canto XIII of *Inferno*, Dante provides another point of contrast in his bleeding tree, delle Vigne. Walking through an infernal wood in which “from every side wailings poured forth,” Virgil tells Dante, whom Virgil believes to be confused about the wails, to “break off any little branch from one of these trees” (XIII.22, 28-9). Always obedient, Dante does as he is told:

Allor porsi la mano un poco avante,
 e colsi un ramciel da un gran pruno;
 e 'l tronco suo gridò: ‘Perchè mi schiante?’
 Da che fatto fu poi di sangue bruno,
 ricominciò a dir: ‘Perchè mi scerpi?
 non hai tu spirto di pietà alcuno?’
 Uomini fummo, e or siam fatti sterpi:
 ben dovebb’esser la tua man più pia,
 se state fossimo anime di scerpi.’
 Come d’un stizzo verde ch’arso sia
 dall’un de’ capi, che dall’altro geme
 e cigola per vento che va via,
 sì della scheggia rotta usciva insieme
 parole e sangue; ond’ io lasciai la cima
 cadere, e stetti come l’uom che teme. (XIII.31-39)

(Then I put out my hand a little and plucked a twig from a great thorn, and its trunk cried: ‘Why dost thou tear me?’ And when it had turned dark with blood it began again: ‘Why manglest thou me? Hast thou no spirit of pity? We were men and now are turned to stocks; thy hand might well have been more pitiful had we been souls of serpents.’ As a green brand that is burning at one end drips from the other and hisses with the escaping wind, so from the broken splinter came forth words and blood together; at which I let fall the tip and stood as one afraid.)⁵⁰

Dante here is explicitly invoking the *Aeneid*, both by using Virgil to set up the scene (who himself tells Dante that he is about to see something out of Virgil’s own poetry), and by the repetition of “pity” (in Italian, *pietà*), which recalls Vergil’s *pious Aeneas*. But delle Vigne’s accusation against Dante, that he has no *pietà* (an accusation which must redound on Virgil’s head, since Dante plucked the tree at Virgil’s command),

possesses no gods to protect it or to avenge its wrongs. Lucan’s variation on the bleeding tree is simply the tree which neither bleeds nor groans but only falls.

⁵⁰ For Dante, I am using Sinclair’s edition and translation.

indicates that Dante's scene is radically different. As in the *Aeneid*, the blood which runs from the tree is the blood of a dead but suffering man; but as opposed to Polydorus' suffering, delle Vigne's is divinely ordained, the pain of a man who sinned and now is punished justly for his iniquity. The severity of that punishment resembles Erysichthon's fate, but Canto XIII inverts the terms, where instead of an innocent tree and a wicked, disobedient perpetrator, Dante gives us a wicked tree and a relatively innocent—or at least obedient—perpetrator, demonstrating, in conjunction with the scene's contrast to the *Aeneid*, that in Dante's vision distributive justice reigns: the good go unscathed, while the wicked are continuously punished (and in this case punished by the just). Thus Dante the pilgrim, rather than experiencing the nightmare repetition of Aeneas' journey or the punishment of Erysichthon, may view this scene and simply move on through the underworld, having learned from delle Vigne how to avoid becoming delle Vigne.

For *Paradise Lost*, which like the *Inferno* differs from Vergil's poem by presenting a divinely ordered universe, delle Vigne presents a particularly important instance of the bleeding-tree trope. Both Eve and Dante "pluck" the tree (the Italian is *colsi*), a fairly gentle action compared to Aeneas' ripping (*convellere*) and Erysichthon's attack with an axe; but whereas the moderation of Dante's action grows out of his own guiltlessness (insofar as he is obeying his master's command), the very act of plucking renders Eve guilty of being disobedient, and brings such evil into the world that, in contrast to the relative innocence of the verb, Eve's injury to the tree far surpasses Aeneas' and Erysichthon's in violence. In plucking from the tree Eve furthermore harms an innocent, Earth, rather than contributing to the just punishment of a damned sinner. But this injury is more abstract than the one Dante does to delle Vigne, for whereas in the *Inferno* delle Vigne *is* the tree (as opposed to Polydorus, who speaks from below the tree, and Ceres' dryads who live in and around the tree but

are not the tree itself), the Earth which groans at Eve's violence inhabits a space somewhere outside the tree, and in fact becomes abstracted from the tree itself in the moment that Eve eats. Herein lies one of the most significant differences between Dante's world of divine punishment and Milton's fallen world: while in the *Inferno*, divine punishment is linked ontologically to the sinner's existence—i.e., the sinner suffers bodily his own sin, and his sin becomes his only existence—Milton's post-lapsarian world is marked by the severing of ontological connections, by the dividing of things against themselves. Thus, where Dante (like Aeneas) reacts with utter horror when the injured tree begins to groan, Adam and Eve neither react nor, it seems, notice at all that the Earth is "in pangs." The act of sinning abstracts them from that sin, initially blinding them to what they have done. This blindness, the disconnection of Adam and Eve from their paradise, itself serves as punishment, insofar as it casts the blissful pair into a state of ignorance, unable to know the world as itself.

The two major epics which follow the *Commedia* quite explicitly and specifically invoke the three previous instances of bleeding trees in the epic tradition. In *Orlando Furioso*, Ariosto gives us Astolfo, who was transformed into a tree when he foolishly followed his lustful desire for the enchantress Alcina, only to have Alcina change him into a myrtle when she grew tired of him. Calling on Vergil, Ariosto tells us that Ruggiero's hippogriff "so tore apart the myrtle to which he was tethered that he became ensnared in the branches strewn underfoot" (6.26); here the tree and the verb, "to rip," are the same as in the *Aeneid*, but instead of a man wreaking violence, here it is a flying horse. Ariosto also invokes Dante's metaphor of the hissing and spurting of a burning stick to describe Astolfo's speech (6.27-8). But rather than creating a world governed by punishment, as do Dante and Ovid, *Orlando* instead creates a world of arbitrary suffering by investing the power to inflict torment not in God or a god, but in Alcina, an enchantress.

Against the backdrop of the *Commedia*, Ariosto makes clear by his allusion to Dante that justice is not a question in his world at all; Astolfo suffers because he is foolish, but Alcina does not inflict suffering on Astolfo because she wants to punish him for some sin, but rather simply because she is done with him. In contrast to the *Aeneid*, however, this arbitrary infliction of pain does not reflect the perpetual suffering of an unjust world, but instead depicts a world in which suffering, precisely because it is arbitrary, is always also transient: Astolfo is freed the moment Ruggiero outwits Alcina. In this landscape where so much happens by accident, it thus makes perfect sense that Ruggiero would discover Astolfo purely out of chance, because his hippogriff happened to bear him to Alcina, and because it happened to dislike being tied to the myrtle. For *Paradise Lost*, the construction of this world is anathema, but the contrast particularly between Ruggiero's horse, who bears no moral relation to Astolfo and is not culpable for causing him pain, and Eve makes clearer the extent to which Eve *is* culpable, not only for wounding Earth, but for all pain and suffering. Eve is not a dumb beast; unlike the hippogriff, she knows better than to pluck the fruit and eat, but does so because her reason, which distinguishes her from all animals, usurps her faith. Her violence toward the tree is no accident, as in *Orlando*, and so the consequences of her actions must redound upon her own head.

With similar perversity but a loftier tone, Tasso's bleeding tree scene points to Ovid's only to reverse the terms in order to create an image which is, at least on the surface, the inverse of Ceres' oak in *Metamorphoses*. Canto XIII of *Gerusalemme Liberata* gives us another grove inhabited by spirits, and another man willing to fell that grove when his compatriots' courage fails them; but this time the trees are infernal rather than divine, and the knight Tancred's eagerness to cut them down displays not his haughty disregard for the gods, but his devotion to the Christian cause. Possessed by spirits from hell whom the Muslim enchanter Ismen has conjured into the grove,

these woods cause the French army, which needs material for siege engines, to flee in terror. Tancred undertakes the charge to cut down the trees only after Alcasto, whose scorn at his fellow soldier's fear and overweening confidence echoes Erysichthon's (XIII.25), fails, marking the difference between proper Christian bravery and empty vainglory. But while Tancred gets further in his attempt than Alcasto, he nevertheless also falls short, for when he strikes the first tree, the wound oozes blood and then cries out, "I was Clorinda" (XIII.43), Tancred's love whom he had accidentally killed just a short time before. Unlike Erysichthon, who is unmoved by the groans of Ceres' tree, Tancred ends his attempt to cut down the cypress, unwilling to wound Clorinda a second time.

But because Tasso's tree scene inverts so much in Ovid's, Tancred nevertheless ends up resembling Erysichthon in his neglect of the divine. While in comparison to his Ovidian antecedent Tancred's unwillingness to cut the tree would indicate a greater piety and respect for living things, the fact that he fails in his duty by succumbing to the lies of devils reveals his shortcomings as a Christian; Tancred, by doing what Erysichthon does not, like Erysichthon sins against the heavens. This similarity reveals the crucial difference between Ovid's tree and Tasso's. Just as in *Inferno*, violence done against this tree does not oppose what is right, as it does in the *Metamorphoses*, the *Aeneid*, or *Paradise Lost*; instead, it serves God's will. But whereas in the *Commedia* Virgil commands Dante to injure the tree simply in order to educate Dante, Godfrey, when he asks Tancred to cut the trees, in effect charges his knight with a much greater task: ridding the world of evil. Because Tasso's trees harbor not suffering souls but the cause of all souls' suffering, *Gerusalemme* invests its mortal, Christian soldiers with the ability not just to eschew evil but to attack it actively, to send it from the earth. Tancred's sin is thus negative: he does not bring evil into the world, but fails to chase evil from it. This sin of inaction contrasts with

Adam and Eve's sin of action, of plucking from the tree when they should not. But against the backdrop of Tancred's transgression, the violence to the tree in Eden also reveals itself as negative, for while Adam and Eve pluck and eat, a positive action, their sin consists not in that action itself, but in the transgression of God's positive command: obey.

Spenser, when he adopts this image, retains the amorous element which Ariosto and Tasso employ, but refigures this love through allegory into Christian duty. The scene in *The Faerie Queene* most resembles Ariosto's and Vergil's: St. George, having been tricked by Archimago into leaving Una, dallies with the enchantress Duessa, who is disguised as Fidessa. Deciding to make a garland for her, the knight plucks a branch, whereupon (of course) the wound bleeds. The injured tree, named Fradubio, begins to speak in Polydorus' words, crying, "O spare with guilty hands to teare / My tender sides in this rough rynd embard" (I.ii.31.2-3); this mutation of "Parce pias scelerare manus" (see note 13 above) suggests that, since Fradubio asks St. George to spare *the tree* from the knight's guilty hands, rather than to spare St. George's hands themselves from the guilt, St. George wandered into sin before he encountered Fradubio. Astolfo-like, this tree then goes on to warn St. George of Duessa, who disguised as a fair woman enticed Fradubio from his own lady and eventually transformed him. St. George, however, whose wits are not as sharp as his sword, does not recognize in Fradubio's story his own encounter with Fidessa, for unlike Ruggiero, who comes to Astolfo and Alcina's isle an innocent, St. George has already stained himself with sin, as the difference from Vergil's text suggests, by leaving Una and then allowing himself to be deceived by a false love. Like Tancred, this knight thus falls short in his duty to Una, to God's truth, because he cannot discern the truth behind evil's deception.

The fact that St. George's sin precedes his encounter with the bleeding tree, however, makes the tree itself only the evidence of the knight's erring, rather than the site of that error, as it is in Tasso. Because it functions neither as a proper warning, since St. George never understands it, nor as a moment of transgression, this tree stands out against all the other trees in the tradition, including Eden's forbidden tree, as having no immediate impact on the narrative of the epic itself. Only once the tree is abstracted from its physical presence and read allegorically does its significance come into focus: Fradubio, "Brother Doubt," does not cause or prevent St. George's sin, but rather *is* St. George's sin—the Knight of the Red Crosse sins when he doubts Una, the truth. The embodiment of transgression itself within the intensely corporeal image of a bleeding tree contrasts strongly with Vergil's use of the image to entomb an already bloody outrage, indicating that in Spenser's epic concepts themselves are quite as violent as deeds. Sin in *The Faerie Queene* exists as much in the world as it does in the mind.

Against this image, the groaning of the earth in *Paradise Lost* reveals a different conception of the violence of transgression, where instead of embodying abstractions, the poem abstracts the suffering body. For Milton's tree does not bleed, nor does it give any evidence of suffering; rather, the Earth to which it and all other things are connected suffers, her "wound" transforming groans into tremors and tears into rain. The suffering that is the wages of sin will not, in Milton's poem, deign to be represented allegorically, but can realize itself only in the unfolding of time, in mankind's—not plant-kind's—existence. Through the disparity of the images, *Paradise Lost* thus forcefully asserts that it is not and cannot be what *The Faerie Queene* is: an allegory.

By reading all of these images against each other, we can piece together a fuller context behind Milton's moment of transgression, rather than limiting that

context by reading the fall through only a single text. The sin of Adam and Eve, the eating of the apple from the tree against God's command, does not arise out of appetite, some animal impulse, as does the hippogriff's injury to Astolfo, but rather out of their reasoned decision, a choice of their own free will. But because their choice, in contrast to Tancred's decision to cut down his tree, does not lead them to some positive action, but rather to negate God's command, the result cannot be, as Eve had hoped, greater knowledge of God and their world; instead, by negating God they turn away from truth, and cast themselves into ignorance. This rejection of God, as comparison to Dante's *delle Vigne* shows, abstracts Adam and Eve both from their own sins and from knowledge of things in themselves, rendering the post-lapsarian world unknowable through allegory in the Spenserian style. As a result of this division of the world and the negation of God's command which distances Eden from heavenly light, the world of the *Aeneid*, where injustice reigns, can come to be. At the same time, however, this punishment for sin which Adam and Eve inflict on the world nevertheless presents the promise of a more merciful justice in heaven, and, in contrast to the world of Erysichthon and the *Metamorphoses*, saves this world from the cruel intervention of vengeful justice. And there is of course room here for more texts. We could, for instance, bring in Lucan's grove of sacred trees that meet violence at the hands of Caesar,⁵¹ or the other bleeding trees in *Metamorphoses*, or any other passage from any other text that seems to resonate with this moment in *Paradise Lost*, and we would not destabilize this reading, but only strengthen it, define it more sharply by completing the negative outline of its significance.

This complex allusion is one of the unattempted "things" the poem promises us at I.16, and emphatically so: the tree in *Paradise Lost* is original enough to resist identification not just with a single text, but with all of the major epics in the tradition

⁵¹ See note 49 above.

of which *Paradise Lost* is a part. That the poem alludes so widely to fulfill the promise in its first six lines to sing “of man's first disobedience” indicates the extent to which *Paradise Lost* constructs itself out of these negative relationships, creating everything that the poem identifies as original and unique out of the space which other poems do not occupy. Because Milton's allusions speak others' words differently, because their meaning necessarily unfolds in the gap between texts rather than in their continuity, *Paradise Lost* writes itself into existence not by appropriating the texts in its tradition, but by developing in opposition to those texts, by finding its significance in what earlier texts *do not* say. Thus the source study's greatest misstep was to assume that *Paradise Lost* has sources at all: it only has constellations of difference out of which and in relation to which the poem creates itself. To understand *Paradise Lost's* relation to its tradition, or even to understand that tradition at all, we thus cannot read Milton's allusions as appropriations, or as corrections, critiques, modifications, transvaluations, transumptions, or even as conversations, but instead we must watch carefully for those moments when *Paradise Lost* raises the spectre of older texts, phantoms to which Milton's poem cannot speak and which themselves can only mutely resist identification with Milton's text. It is the silence between them that speaks, and that we must read, to bear witness to the difference between them and thereby give meaning to both.

Chapter Three

The Particular, the New, and the Tradition

When Satan sets in motion Eve's and then Adam's self-creation by presenting them with a negative possibility—the potential to choose difference instead of God's sameness—he creates a world in which poetry is possible;⁵² when he establishes that negative possibility in relation to what already exists—that is, when he revolts into negativity by rejecting God—he creates a principle of relation between what is and what comes to be that at once allows new poetry to arise while at the same time binding the new to the old in a negative relationship. By in this way making the emergence of a new poem always dependent upon that poem's rejection of what came before, this second movement of Satan's (actually the first in the chronology of the poem) turns the possibility of poetry into the necessity of something we might call a “literary tradition,” in which the present is always predicated upon the past. But the kind of tradition Milton's Satan projects and initiates, and the kind of tradition that *Paradise Lost* itself constructs and participates in, cannot easily be assimilated to what is usually meant by the word “tradition.” In particular, Satan's self-creation through negative relationships must defy any attempt to subsume the individual, self-created work into a larger category that unifies many such individuals. Because Satanic self-creation chooses difference over sameness, and because that difference, as Satan's fall shows, is always a difference *from* something, the interrelation between individuals as *Paradise Lost* conceives it cannot make sense as some monolithic whole—we cannot point to a single object or concept and say, “*this* is tradition”—but instead can only be intelligible as the manifestation of difference. To show what such a tradition would be, and how it works, will be the purpose of this chapter.

⁵² See Chapter 1, section 3.

I. "ONE INDIVIDUAL SOUL"

The word "tradition" has always been an odd fit with what we generally call "the literary tradition." From the Latin *trado* (*trans* + *do*), etymologically meaning "to give across" or "to give over" but more conventionally used to mean "to give up" (in the sense both of surrender and of delivery), "tradition" in English generally refers to that "which is thus handed down; a statement, belief, or practice transmitted (esp. orally) from generation to generation" (*OED*, 5a). Thus we may have traditions like going to mass on Sundays, solemnizing marriage with a wedding, or eating turkey on Thanksgiving. But in cases like these, the point of tradition is sameness: a ritual or a belief is "handed down," almost like a family heirloom or keepsake, to be preserved. In a tradition, we are connected to our pasts, and our pasts become recognizable specifically as *our* pasts, because we do and think the same things that were done and thought by those before us. Applying this idea to literary works, many of which explicitly claim to be doing or saying "things unattempted yet," is thus a cumbersome task, insofar as individual poems are not simply repetitions of each other that can be passed from generation to generation. I may read Dickens' *A Christmas Carol* every Christmas Eve and call it a tradition, but I do not mean it in the same way as when I say that Wordsworth's *Prelude* and *A Christmas Carol* are part of the same tradition.

The *OED* clarifies the definition of "tradition" with respect to literature somewhat by calling it "the body (or any one) of the experiences and usages of any branch or school of art or literature, handed down by predecessors and generally followed" (5b); this is the usage J.A. Cuddon seems to have been thinking of when he wrote in his *Dictionary of Literary Terms and Literary Theory* that the term "denotes the inherited past which is available for the writer to study and learn from. Thus, the writer's native language, literary forms, codes, devices, conventions..., and various cultures from the past" (982). So, in Cuddon's terms, a writer setting out to compose a

sonnet would presumably use one of the “traditional” forms of the sonnet available to him or her (e.g., Petrarchan), and would likely choose a conventional topic (e.g., love) and would make use of the devices frequently used in sonnets (e.g., *blazon*). Of course, the obvious problem is that if the sonnet is *too* traditional—if it draws on too many of the “literary forms, codes, devices, conventions” of its tradition—it will be derivative and uninteresting, something Cuddon knew well enough to cause him to reflect in his entry that “[t]hough some poems by Keats might have been written by Milton, and some by Dylan Thomas are almost indistinguishable from work by Gerard Manley Hopkins, there are differences.” What those differences are, he does not elaborate, just as he does not elaborate how exactly he is able to place Shakespeare in a tradition with Browning but not with Milton, but these omissions may in part explain why the *OED*'s definition of “tradition” in the artistic sense is qualified with the words “More vaguely.” The problem is not Cuddon's, but the concept's: if a tradition is a repetition of the same, then how can a poem at once take part in a tradition and be unique enough that it stands out in that tradition?

This was precisely the problem T.S. Eliot took up in his essay “Tradition and the Individual Talent,” the work that first made “tradition” a topic of inquiry in modern criticism. Noting “our tendency to insist, when we praise a poet, upon those aspects of his work in which he least resembles any one else,” Eliot nevertheless makes the bold assertion that “if we approach a poet without this prejudice we shall often find that not only the best, but the most individual parts of [the poet's] work may be those in which the dead poets, his ancestors, assert their immortality most vigorously” (3-4). Rather than an impediment to individuality, then, tradition becomes a potential for individuality, a way of expressing the uniqueness of a work. Eliot's rationale for this claim seems to grow out of a negative model of textual interrelation similar to the one described in the previous chapter; he writes, “No poet,

no artist of any art, has his complete meaning alone. ... You cannot value him alone; you must set him, *for contrast and comparison*, among the dead” (4, my emph.). In order for this “contrast and comparison” to produce meaning, Eliot argues that the new work cannot “conform merely” (i.e., merely conform) to its tradition, or “it would not be new, and would therefore not be a work of art” (5), suggesting that in the end the “contrast” is more important than the “comparison” in determining the significance of a poem. We must be able to compare the new text with its tradition, but only so that we can see what is different about the new, which presumably allows us to understand its “complete meaning.” Since Eliot claims that the most individual parts of a poem may also be the most steeped in the tradition, both the contrast and the comparison he envisions would seem to take place simultaneously in a text, making an individual text most different from its tradition precisely in those moments at which the text most resembles that tradition.

Eliot does not go into detail in this essay about how a text might at once compare and contrast with its tradition, but one obvious way to make sense of his claim is through allusion, and specifically the kind of allusion Milton's epic engages in. When *Paradise Lost* alludes to the trope of the bleeding tree, it sets itself “among the dead” by inviting comparison with the epic tradition and the other bleeding trees in that tradition, but it only does so that it might contrast itself with those other trees in order to demonstrate how different this particular bleeding tree is from all others, and thereby how different this particular epic is from all the epics in its tradition. This negative relationship between past and present that *Paradise Lost* establishes and that Eliot's theory suggests does not eliminate the tension between the tradition and the individual, but instead it makes that tension productive; tradition's opposition to the individual transforms from a prohibitive boundary into a constitutive element of individuality. Rather than arising despite tradition and its demand for sameness, the

individual here emerges *through* that tradition, through a negative relationship with other texts that distinguishes and defines the individual precisely as something individual, something particular, something that is not-another. The tradition thus becomes, both for Eliot and for *Paradise Lost*, a necessary part of a poem's individual character, insofar as it serves as the outside against which the individual poem can define its inside.

But this only solves half the problem. The individual thus conceived emerges dialectically out of its relationship with the tradition, and, as the student of an Oxford Hegelian, Eliot knew well enough that, having accounted for the emergence of the individual out of its tradition, he must also account for the emergence of the tradition out of this newly-born individual in order that the dialectic be complete; otherwise, the tradition could not survive the individual's appearance. Thus he continues in “Tradition”:

The necessity that [the poet, here standing for the poem] shall conform, that he shall cohere, is not one sided; what happens when a new work of art is created is something that happens simultaneously to all the works of art which preceded it. The existing monuments form an ideal order among themselves, which is modified by the introduction of the new (the really new) work of art among them. The existing order is complete before the new work arrives; for order to persist after the supervention of novelty, the *whole* existing order must be, if ever so slightly, altered; and so the relations, proportions, values of each work of art toward the whole are readjusted; and this is conformity between the old and the new. (5)

The conformity that Eliot discusses here is not the poem's mimicry of its tradition—to mimic would be to “conform merely” and therefore would strip the poem of its status as art—but rather it is the ability of a poem to be contrasted and compared to its tradition and *vice versa*, the marks of resemblance that tie the new work to the old and that therefore allow us to read them side by side. By making this conformity mutual, Eliot rescues tradition after the appearance of the individual by endowing the tradition

with the ability to change, to shift to accommodate new works and thereby to absorb them again into itself. But here Eliot's theory encounters a problem. If the individual comprehends the tradition as that which is precisely *not* the individual, as something outside of the individual, then that individual can never be inside the tradition without losing the very relationship that distinguished the individual *as an individual* in the first place. While Eliot's theory of the poem's individuality denies any one-sided assimilation of the individual to the tradition, in the end the tradition, endowed with the ability to persist despite its mutability, nevertheless subsumes the individual into an "ideal order"; this "order," though it is made up of individuals—"each work of art" within it—nevertheless occludes the individual in favor of a "whole" to which the individuals relate. In the reconstruction of the tradition, what thus becomes significant about a work is *not* its individual character—which is just to say its resistance to its tradition—but rather its "relation... toward the whole," its participation in a totality, a unity that joins together works that would otherwise refuse to be joined.

This completion of the dialectical tension between the tradition and the individual is thoroughly Hegelian in its emphasis on the whole and on the part's reliance upon and subsumption into that whole; as such, Eliot's theory in the end sacrifices the individual as individual in order to build the tradition up into a more complete totality. The negativity embodied in the individual work gets swallowed back into the positivity of the "ideal order" so that the tradition may persist, making the individual merely a moment in the tradition's self-unfolding, rather than something significant on its own terms.⁵³ In this crucial respect, Eliot closely resembles the

⁵³ In fairness to both Hegel and to Eliot, neither of these thinkers is entirely comfortable with giving over the individual to the whole; thus Hegel writes in *Phenomenology* that "the single shapes of Spirit do not persist any more than determinate thoughts do, but they are as much positive and necessary moments, as they are negative and evanescent. In the *whole* of movement, seen as a state of repose, what distinguishes itself therein, and gives itself particular existence, is preserved as something that *recollects* itself, whose existence is self-knowledge, and whose self-knowledge is just as immediately existence" (27-28), while Eliot's "ideal order" is made up of "each work of art." Nevertheless, for both the *telos* is the whole, not the preservation of the individual as individual.

twentieth century's other great theorist of tradition, Hans-Georg Gadamer, a similarity that reveals what is at stake—and how much is lost—in Eliot's construction of the dialectic. Reconceiving the encounter between a poet and his tradition as the encounter between a text and its reader (who for Gadamer would be the bearer of tradition), Gadamer explains in *Truth and Method* that we all come to a text “prejudiced”—that is, our understanding is conditioned by our tradition, historical and literary, which gives us our “horizon” of understanding. A text also has a “horizon,” a historical situatedness different from our own. When the properly conditioned hermeneutic consciousness encounters a text, it transposes itself into the situation of the text; but just as for Eliot neither the text nor the tradition can completely assimilate itself to the other, consciousness for Gadamer cannot simply assimilate itself to the text’s horizon:

For what do we mean by “transposing ourselves”? Certainly not just disregarding ourselves. This is necessary, of course, insofar as we must imagine the other situation. But into this other situation we must bring, precisely, ourselves. Only this is the full meaning of “transposing ourselves.” If we put ourselves in someone else’s shoes, for example, then we will understand him—i.e., become aware of the otherness, the indissoluble individuality of the other person—by putting *ourselves* in his position. (305)

To understand the text means to understand it in its alterity, and thus we recognize a certain discontinuity between our own horizon and that of the text. But rather than resulting in a permanent aporia, the recognition of the incommensurability of two different horizons, consciousness is raised in this encounter “to a higher understanding that overcomes not only our own particularity but also that of the other”; our horizon, which is bigger than ourselves, expands by fusing with this new horizon (305-306). As a result this text, which occupied a different historical position from our own and which was other than our horizon, becomes part of our horizon and our understanding

of the tradition: “as the historical horizon is projected, it is simultaneously superseded” in a sublation of difference whereby the outside becomes the inside (307).

Thus for Gadamer, just as for Eliot, what is at stake in the encounter between the text and its tradition is the preservation of the “ideal order”; the new text presents itself to the tradition as something different from that tradition, and so the tradition must move to accommodate it by “superseding” that difference to create unity within the tradition once more. Thus transformed, tradition persists. But again what is lost in this transformation, which subordinates the individual to the larger category, is the individual character of the text, which was originally recognizable precisely because of its individual character—that is, because it appeared as something different from the tradition. For Gadamer, this is precisely the point: “*Aesthetics*,” he claims, “*has to be absorbed into hermeneutics*” (164), an assertion that already assumes that art must be subordinated to some higher universal (in this case, the unifying force of “understanding”). This is Gadamer's reformulation of Hegel's end of art thesis. Hegel writes:

The development of reflection in our life today has made it a need of ours, in relation both to our will and judgment, to cling to general considerations and to regulate the particular by them, with the result that universal forms, laws, duties, rights, maxims, prevail as determining reasons and are the chief regulator. But for artistic interest and production we demand in general rather a quality of life in which the universal is not present in the form of law and maxim, but which gives the impression of being one with the senses and the feelings, just as the universal and the rational is contained in the imagination by being brought into unity with a concrete sensuous appearance. Consequently the conditions of our present time are not favourable to art. (*Lectures* 10)

For Hegel, just as for Aristotle, art exists in the unity of the universal and the particular, in the sense that the universal is “one with the sense and the feelings”;⁵⁴ if movement toward the universal is the goal, as it is for Hegel, then once “universal

⁵⁴ See Aristotle's *Poetics*, 1451b.

forms” *govern* the particular, art will have “lost for us genuine truth and life,” and so art will yield to philosophy (11). Likewise Gadamer, who raises hermeneutics to the level of Hegel's philosophy (*Truth* 168), claims that hermeneutical consciousness' task in understanding art is “to undertake a critique of both aesthetic and historical consciousness, inasmuch as we are inquiring into the *truth* that manifests itself in art and history,” locating “truth” not in the artwork itself but in the philosophy that comes out of it (169); this ultimately “gives hermeneutical consciousness a comprehensiveness that surpasses even that of aesthetic consciousness” (164), making the study of art subordinate to the more “comprehensive” —that is, more universal—work of hermeneutics. Subsuming art into the universality of philosophy/hermeneutics in effect destroys the artwork by denying it the particularity that both Hegel and Gadamer recognize as part of art's very definition, but this fact disturbs neither Gadamer nor Hegel: art's destruction is simply necessary for philosophy/hermeneutics to advance.

Whether the loss of art *should* disturb Gadamer or Hegel, or Eliot or anyone else for that matter, is another question, and one to which *Paradise Lost* suggests an answer. Understandings of Milton's tradition as a whole or unity, though rarely as philosophically grounded as Eliot's theory, dominate Milton studies.⁵⁵ And the “ideal order” that Eliot presents, and the sublated tradition of Gadamer, does indeed find a home in Milton's epic—in heaven. It is the kind of order God offers to the angels when he exalts the Son in Book V, and the order that Satan rejects when he rebels. The Son arrives on the scene as a new situation whom God has “This day... begot” and

⁵⁵ See, for instance, Steadman's model of tradition as a project of “synthesis,” in which the task of each succeeding generation of poets is to fuse new motifs with old ones—pagan with Christian, classical with romance, etc. (*Epic* 13-18). Eliot's concept of the “ideal order” resonates in Steadman's later claim that Milton's “achieve not only the revival and restoration of the classical poetic genres but also a significant revaluation and reorientation” (*Paradoxes* 173). C.f. also Joan Webber's claim that “despite [the epic tradition's] typical rejection of its predecessors' assumptions, every one of these poems is organically related organically to every other member of its tribe (6).

declared his “only Son” (603-604), and his anointment changes the existing order: if the Son ascends, then all the other angels have to take one step down, a step that puts them farther from God. “[F]or order to persist after the supervention of novelty,” as Eliot describes the problem generally, a sublation must occur, and this is precisely what God commands:

your head I [the Son] appoint;
And by my Self have sworn to him shall bow
All knees in heav’n, and shall confess him Lord:
Under his great viceregent reign abide
United as one individual soul
Forever happy[.] (606-611)

Through their subservience to the Son—that is, through their acquiescence to a new order—the angels and all of heaven will overcome the disruption of their current order to achieve wholeness once again, reuniting after the supervention of something new (the doubling of God) to become “one individual soul.” In contrast to Eliot’s “individual,” the particular that asserts itself against other individuals, this “individual soul” in heaven is, quite literally, an “undivided” soul, or even an “indivisible” soul, a soul that is “united” and therefore whole and undifferentiated; God’s heaven thus dissolves the distinctions between individuals (in Eliot’s sense) and thereby the individuals themselves. That this sublation into the whole should happen in heaven, and that it should lead everyone to be “forever happy,” indicates that, at least as far as *Paradise Lost* is concerned, a Hegelian tradition is the right kind of tradition, the tradition of the Good and the divine: unity and the happiness that comes with it, rather than the striving of individuals against each other, is here the proper resolution to the intervention of difference.

But *Paradise Lost* makes very clear that the world we live in, and the world out of which the poem arises, is not part of this heavenly tradition, that the tradition whence *Paradise Lost* and we its readers spring is instead Satanic; thus the narrator

opens the second half of the epic telling us, “More safe I sing with mortal voice, unchanged / To hoarse or mute, though fall'n on evil days, / On evil days though fall'n” (VII.24-26), reminding us twice of the fall of man that preceded the telling of his story and that made human sense and language unable to compass heaven.⁵⁶ This Satanic tradition, a fallen tradition, begins by cutting itself off from God's sublated tradition. When Satan refuses to “Abide / United as one universal soul,” he “breaks union,” in God's words (V.612), shattering the unity God offers him by making a return to that unity impossible—as long as Satan holds out, there will be at least *two* “individual souls,” and divine sublation, the return to blissful unity, cannot happen.⁵⁷ Insofar as this Satanic tradition is bound up with the conditions of possibility of poetry, as the first chapter demonstrated, art cannot in such a tradition be simply subsumed into something greater than itself: it always insists on its status as art, as individual and particular. To posit a tradition in which the individual is sublated, a heavenly tradition, would furthermore be to misunderstand the world that creates art, and the world in which we encounter that art—it would be to claim that the world as it is is heavenly, united with God, which is tantamount to affirming the world as it is. *Paradise Lost* insists that this is not the case, that the world that produced the poem is fallen and that the poem itself is the expression of that fallenness.

If art is, as Adorno claims, the language of suffering, that which “enunciates the disaster by identifying with it” (*A.T.* 19),⁵⁸ then the human race would hardly protest the age in which art will have “lost for us genuine truth and life,” as Hegel

⁵⁶ See Chapter 1, section 3.

⁵⁷ Silver makes a similar claim when she argues that the “dissociating force of Satan’s reinterpretation of the creature” leaves the “whole heavenly word, once eloquent of a relationship with God, ... fragmented by Satan into objects or particles of singular, autonomous, self-evident meaning and agency like himself” (234).

⁵⁸ Art is the language of suffering for Adorno because it is non-discursive: “Suffering remains foreign to knowledge; though knowledge can subordinate it conceptually and provide means for its amelioration, knowledge can scarcely express it through its own means of experience without itself becoming irrational” (18). Only art, which is an enigma that precisely refuses to be discursive, can give voice to that which is outside knowledge, which the rational mind cannot comprehend.

believed had already happened, and in which art could therefore simply be sublated into something larger: suffering would then be at an end. But for this very reason, to give up on art as art in the present, to subordinate it to philosophy, would be premature and false because the world still suffers.⁵⁹ This is the position *Paradise Lost* assumes when it makes Satan the cause of suffering and poetry at once, and thereby the origin of all our suffering and all our art. For this reason, while *Paradise Lost* must be born out of a tradition against which the poem asserts its individuality in the manner which Eliot describes, both the poem's construction of its own relations to other texts and its construction of poetry as such refuses tradition the status Eliot affords it, denying it the ability to reabsorb the poem; instead, *Paradise Lost* demands a different understanding of the second half of the dialectical movement between the poem and its predecessors, one which does not impose a false unity onto a fallen world but which instead comprehends "tradition" in its individual moments, as many and not as one, as the expression of that first breaking of the "one individual soul."

II. "NEW MINDS MAY RAISE"

In rejecting this heavenly order in order to achieve his own self-creation, Satan at the same time creates the possibility of a different kind of tradition, one that is not based on the "giving over" or "handing down" of sameness, as when God gives his image to the angels, but which instead preserves difference and particularity. When Satan refuses God's offer to "abide / United as one individual soul," he does not merely reject the return to unity, but instead he "breaks union" and divides that soul and prevents it from returning to wholeness. But this break means that, though Satan rebels against God because God demands unity, Satan nevertheless cannot understand God himself, the source of the demand, as universal or as the unity of all things, but

⁵⁹ Thus Adorno writes: "Hegel's thesis that art is consciousness of plight has been confirmed beyond anything he could have envisioned. Thus his thesis [that art had ceased to be the expression of truth in the world] was transformed into a protest against his own verdict on art." (*A.T.* 18-19).

instead, because his own refusal means that he can differentiate God and God's heaven from himself, Satan can only recognize God and his commands as particular and individual. Thus he says to Beëlzebub after he has heard God's decree,

New laws thou seest imposed;
New laws from him who reigns, new minds may raise
In us who serve, new counsels, to debate
What doubtful may ensue[.] (V.679-682)

Though the Son is God's image and therefore not himself new, the raising of the Son to this status “now proclaimed” (784) *is* new to Satan; rather than simply understanding God's decree as an instance of the universal law—“God's law” as such—Satan thus here recognizes the laws exalting the Son as different from God's previous laws, as a change from what was, and therefore as *particular* laws. It is this particularity, and not God's universality, that Satan then posits as the origin of other “new” things: new laws, new minds, new counsels.

On the one hand, Satan seems to be suggesting here a creation of the particular that is very different from Eliot's model; instead of inverting Eliot's dialectic between the whole and the individual (individual-whole-individual rather than Eliot's whole-individual-whole), Satan omits mediation through the universal entirely, claiming that the particular instead arises directly out of other particulars. On the other hand, however, the indeterminacy of Satan's syntax in these lines refuses to yield any single description of the relationship between these newnesses, revealing the difficulties inherent in such a construction of tradition. Satan's sentence appears to be a series of four parallel constructions, the beginning of each signaled by a “new”+[plural noun] phrase, all related paratactically. Particularly in the case of the first two, “New laws thou seest imposed” and “New laws from him who reigns,” the repetition without subordination seems to suggest that the second phrase is in apposition to the first: which new laws do you see imposed? —those new laws from God. “New minds” and

“new counsels” likewise appear to be in apposition to each other insofar as neither phrase appears subordinated to the other and the commas which set off “new counsels” isolate the phrase from the rest of its clause. Given this pattern, it is easy to read the second “new laws” also in apposition to “new minds,” as if God's new laws were the same thing as the new mind Satan will raise when he claims, “We know no time when we were not as now.” In this construction, Satan suggests that the creation of something new—in God's case, laws—entails other new things that are not subordinated to or predicated upon the new laws, but that instead exist alongside the new laws.

A problem arises, however, in the word “raise.” If we read these phrases as paratactic, we end up with the clause, “new minds may raise in us who serve,” where “raise” functions like the intransitive unaccusative verb “rise” or “raise up.”⁶⁰ In unaccusative verbs, no agent causes the action, as in phrases like *he arrived* and *it happened*; if “raise” is unaccusative, no external agent would have caused “new minds” to “raise,” making these new minds in some sense without a cause and thus upholding the parataxis that refuses to make one new thing the cause of the other. But “raise” in normal usage is a transitive verb, and as such requires both a subject that is an agent *and* an object; since no object appears if we are reading the sentence as a series of paratactic phrases, we must therefore read against the rhetorical and poetical structure of the sentence if we understand “raise” as a transitive verb. Teskey's new punctuation of the poem suggests at least one way of doing so:

New laws thou seest imposed,
New laws from Him who reigns new minds may raise
In us who serve, new counsels, to debate
What doubtful may ensue.

⁶⁰ See Adger's *Core Syntax: A Minimalist Approach*, pp. 223ff.

The omission of the comma between “reigns” and “new minds” suggests that we can read the second line as a complete clause; since subject-object-verb is a more natural construction in English than object-subject-verb,⁶¹ the most obvious way to read this line is, “New laws from him who reigns may raise new minds in us who serve” (and this is indeed how Teskey glosses the line). Instead of a coordinated relationship between the new laws and the new minds, here we have a causal relationship: new laws bring about new minds. But there is nothing to stop us from reversing the subject and object here. Elsewhere the poem contains object-subject-verb constructions (as when God says, “him who disobeys / Me disobeys” [V.611-612]), and if we want to maintain the parallelism between both instances of “new laws,” we might very well read the “new laws” in the second phrase as the object of “raise,” just as in the first phrase it is the object of “seest”: thus we can read, “new minds in us who serve may raise new laws from him who reigns.” Furthermore, if we agree with Teskey’s argument that the “punctuation of the two editions of *Paradise Lost* to appear in Milton’s lifetime has... no authority” (xii), as I am inclined to, then there is no reason why we have to read an inversion in line 680 at all; if we take the commas out from around “new counsels,” we can read the clause as “new minds may raise in us who serve new counsels to debate what doubtful may ensue.” That “new minds” raise “new counsels to debate” corresponds with what will happen, as Satan’s thoughts of disobedience here lead to the debate between Abdiel and Satan at the end of Book V. If we read this way, we again find “new laws” in a paratactic relationship with “new minds,” where the first half of line 680 is simply in apposition to line 679: “New laws

⁶¹ It is hypothesized in minimalist theory that syntax, like all cognitive functions, is governed by a principle of economy: linguistic functions do not do more work than they have to. In English, whose normal construction is subject-verb-object, the construction subject-object-verb would be more natural than object-subject-verb because the object would have less far to travel in the former than in the latter. For a more detailed discussion of word order and movement, see Adger, pp. 235ff.

thou seest imposed, new laws from him who reigns; new minds in us who serve may raise new counsels to debate what doubtful may ensue.”

The ambiguity of “raise” as either intransitive or transitive thus gives way, if we call it transitive, to the ambiguity of the verb's subject and object. But because reading the verb as transitive results in two conflicting readings—the laws raise the minds or the minds raise the laws—and in a third reading that establishes a causal relationship only between the minds and the counsels while maintaining the paratactic, coordinated relationship between the new laws and the new minds, the original problem raised by the ambiguous status of “raise” remains: what causes these “new minds” to appear? Is it God's “new laws,” something else, or nothing at all? Satan's poetic and rhetorical structures prevent the syntax of his words from establishing any single link between the “new laws” and the “new minds,” and so the two can only stare at each other across a gap neither can negotiate. The problem Satan faces here arises out of his rejection of the whole in favor of the particular, and is the central difficulty to be overcome in constructing a tradition that preserves particularity without sublation into unity: without recourse to some mediation by the universal, how does one particular, which closes itself against the rest of the world by defining itself as not-another, create another particular?

When Satan tells Abdiel that he is “self-begot, *self-raised*” (V.860, my emph.), he echoes the problem that he encountered when he was speaking earlier to Beelzebub, suggesting that his moment of his self-creation is the solution to the problem. The ambiguity of the verb's transitivity is here overcome by the shift to a reflexive verb—to “self raise”—in which the verb takes an object that is always the same as the subject, closing the circle of agency and making the subject something that acts upon itself. God's “new laws” do not “raise” Satan: Satan raises himself. In moving creation and causation inward, however, Satan does not answer the riddle his

earlier words posed, but rather he occludes that riddle by eliminating one of its terms—namely, the “new laws.” Whereas earlier in the book Satan recognizes some relationship between the emergence of newness in heaven and his own emergence as a new and particular being, here, at the actual moment of his self-creation, he sees only himself as agent and object of that emergence, that “raising,” and thus he side-steps the difficult relationship between particulars that allows one to arise in relationship to another. But that relationship still exists in Satan's reply to Abdiel, even if Satan cannot see it. For Satan recreates himself directly in response to Abdiel's claim that God created Satan, an argument Satan himself calls “strange point and new” (855), indicating that Satan's first prediction was right, that the intervention of the new somehow spawns more newness. Satan's response to the invention of the new is to reject that newness—Abdiel says that God created Satan, and so Satan must deny that claim. But rather than *only* rejecting this “new” point and thereby becoming here the “childish inverter” Bloom accuses him of becoming in Book IV, he instead puts forth a positive alternative to Abdiel's account—the claim that he created himself. The move to the reflexive verb effects the rejection of Abdiel's “new” point by denying God's agency in Satan's creation, but at the same time it gives Satan's “new mind” its own positive existence by constructing a self-sufficient causality, one which denies God simply because there is syntactically no place for him and semantically no need for him. Satan's “new mind” stands on its own, separate and distinguishable from either God's or Abdiel's “new” point.

The tension between transitivity and intransitivity and between subject and object in lines 679-682 thus in some sense articulates rather than obscures the creation of the particular out of the particular. God's new laws “raise” Satan's new mind, but this “raising” resists transitivity—that is, it resists any “going across” (*transeo*) from subject to verb to object. Instead of one particular creating or “raising” another

directly, the intervention of the new generates more newness by inspiring a reaction against it that causes the new particular, in this case Satan's "new mind," to turn inward, away from other particulars, and thereby to raise itself. Satan after his self-creation thus does not exist as the object of the new laws' raising, but rather as a self-sufficient subject capable of its own raising. The result is a mode of creation whereby particularity gives rise to more particularity not by mediation through the universal nor by direct causation, but by a dialectical mediation through an opposed particularity: Satan recognizes a particularity outside himself—the new laws—and this allows him to create his own particularity.⁶² This kind of self-creation does away with the loss of the individual that troubled Eliot's theory when he had to complete the dialectical movement from whole to individual back to the whole, because it eliminates the whole entirely, allowing a dialectical process to occur between two texts without recourse to an "ideal order" that mediates the relationship between those texts; without this "ideal order," the individual does not need to lose its individuality in order to allow new texts to arise.

III. "SUCH WONDER CLAIMS ATTENTION DUE"

Because he is the first particular in God's universe, however, Satan gets to gloss over one of the trickier steps in this dialectic of particulars: the movement from the recognition of the particular to the reaction against it. *That* Satan reacts against the particularity he recognizes in God is clear enough, but the reason *why* he does so, or *how* God's particularity might demand such a reaction, is in this case simply *ad hoc*. By deciding to reject God, Satan decides to understand God as particular rather than universal, setting in motion the process by which he will self-create. Because the

⁶² Guillory makes a similar claim for Satan's creative abilities: "What Satan can claim as his ultimate achievement is the making of discontinuity, points in time where something completely new can be born of itself, without cause, without dependent relation to any past. This is the *creatio ex nihilo* to which Milton objected so deeply in *De Doctrina*, preferring instead the assurance of continuity in the idea of *creatio ex se*" (119). Given the fact that Satan is, in my reading, himself a negativity, *creatio ex nihilo* and *creatio ex se* are for Satan the same thing.

reaction against God that Satan's encounter with the particular inspires is thus already determined in advance, a reaction that has already happened before Satan achieves his self-creation, Satan is in some sense self-causing from the very beginning, even before the intervention of the particular. The short answer to the question why Satan reacts against God's particularity is thus simply, "Because he wanted to." In order that Satan really be that "cause" that "Moved our grand parents... / ... to fall off / From their Creator" (I.28-31), however, subsequent self-creations cannot be so self-contained or self-motivated, or we could not say that Satan is a "cause" in any sense; particularity, if it is to perpetuate itself, must have some generative force beyond its own narrow confines.

In the first chapter, we already looked briefly at the seduction of Eve that prompts her to recreate herself against Satan's language rather than in accordance with it; she adopts Satan's form of language—the question—but because that questioning is rooted in the negative, her use of Satanic language necessarily produces something different from Satan's.⁶³ The most direct cause of her self-creation is, as that chapter discussed, the serpent's enigmatic claim, "Your fear of death itself removes the fear," the ambiguity of which requires that Eve interpret Satan's words and therefore that Eve consider the possibility of doing what she shouldn't. But the call to question and to interpret Satan's presence in the garden more generally comes about much earlier in the encounter, when first Eve responds to the serpent's words:

What may this mean? Language of man pronounced
By tongue of brute, and human sense expressed?
The first at least of these I thought denied
To beasts, whom God on their creation-day
Created mute to all articulate sound;
The latter I demur, for in their looks
Much reason, and in their actions oft appears.
Thee, serpent, subtlest beast of all the field

⁶³ See Chapter 1, section 3.

I knew, but not with human voice endued;
Redouble then this miracle, and say,
How cam'st thou speakable of mute, and how
To me so friendly grown above the rest
Of brutal kind, that daily are in sight?
Say, for such wonder claims attention due. (IX. 553-562, 566)

From the very first moment she speaks to Satan, Eve is already in trouble. The claims, “The first of these I thought denied / To beasts,” and “Thee, serpent... / I knew, but not with human voice endued” are at once positive statements of Eve's former knowledge—she knew the nature of the serpent and of all beasts, “whom God on their creation-day / Created mute”—and at the same time the negative expressions of her lack of knowledge in the present, in her encounter with Satan; she knew *then*, but she cannot say that she knows *now*. This not-knowing puts her in a Satanic position before Satan has even begun to persuade her, leading her away from her knowledge of God—that he created the animals in the garden mute—into the space of her own non-knowledge, where she cannot say what she knows, but can only question “What may this mean?”

What draws her into the Satanic position of not knowing in the first place, and what thereby pushes Eve down the path to her fall, is, as it was for Satan, the recognition of something new, something particular. As part of the heavenly tradition, Eve expects sameness and uniformity from the serpent. When God brought the animals on the earth before Adam, God instructed him, “each bird and beast behold / *After their kinds*” (VIII.342-343, my emph.). Adam thus does not name each animal as an individual creature—Bob the duck and Sally the goat—but rather he calls them “Duck” and “Goat,” naming them according to “kind,” or category; thus Eve addresses Satan only as “serpent,” not by any proper name. Since Adam (and presumably Eve) “understood / Their nature” by naming these animals, the understanding the heavenly pair gains is of “their kinds,” of the universal categories like “goat” and “duck,” rather than of particular goats and ducks; in other words, they

encounter each animal not as a particular animal, but as identical to others of its kind, as a mere instance of a universal concept. But when Eve encounters the serpent, she cannot assimilate him to the categories she recognizes. When she says, “Thee, serpent, subtlest beast of all the field / I knew, but not with human voice endued,” she elides Satan, the serpent whom she addresses and whom she only just met, with the more general category “serpent, subtlest beast of all the field” (and it is hard not to hear this line also as “*The* serpent, subtlest beast of all the field”); in doing so, she implies that this serpent, or any serpent, is merely an instance of the category, since she can claim to have had knowledge of this serpent without having encountered him before. But because this knowledge is in the past tense—she *knew* the serpent—Satan's arrival stands out as something different; she has not known a *talking* serpent, making this serpent an exception in her knowledge, a particular serpent that stands out “above the rest / Of brutal kind.”

The recognition of particularity is thus for Eve, just as it was for Satan, the beginning of her fall, the moment that initiates her self-creation; but whereas for Satan that particularity was his own creation, putting him in control of his subsequent self-creation, for Eve the particular is entirely external, an entity that presents itself to her as something that is *not* hers, as something beyond her control. It is precisely this externality that forces the dialectic into motion, that “causes” her fall. Eve's first reaction upon meeting this serpent is astonishment: she is “much marveling” and “Not unamazed” (551-552), and calls the serpent a “miracle” and a “wonder.” This reaction, as well as the danger it puts Eve in, grows out of the fact that the particular is not merely something new, but also something that denies the world as she knows it. Because Eve knows—or rather knew—that God created the animals in the garden “mute to all articulate sound,” the serpent's ability to speak (the quality that makes him particular) contradicts her knowledge of the world. This contradiction between God's

laws that govern all creation and this creature that appears as an exception to those laws, which is also a contradiction between the knowledge God gave her and the knowledge her experience now imparts, amazes Eve because it leaves her facing down a conflict she cannot resolve herself. Because her knowledge cannot account for the serpent before her—indeed, because her knowledge dictates that this talking serpent should not exist—then either what she knows about God's creation is wrong (hence she only *knew* but does not know), or she is unaware of some piece of information, some event that somehow allowed this particular to come into being. Either way, this particularity that denies what is—that is, that denies God's creation—forces Eve to confront the inadequacy of her knowledge in this situation, to recognize that she does not know.

The question this causes her to ask, “What may this mean?”, of course demands an answer, but since the cause of the question is outside Eve's knowing, the answer must also be sought in a source outside herself; this is what leads Eve astray. When Eve has had questions in the past, she has gone to Adam for the answer; thus in Book IV when she wants to know why the stars keep shining after she and Adam have gone to sleep, she approaches Adam with the words,

My author and disposer, what thou bidd'st
Unargued I obey; so God ordains,
God is thy law, thou mine: to know no more
Is woman's happiest knowledge and her praise. (635-638)

Because God “ordains” him her “law,” Eve can rest assured that Adam will not lead her astray, that any answer that she receives from him will be in accordance with God's law because it will come out of that law. Thus Adam, her “author,” is the proper authority to which she might direct such questions. More importantly, he is the *only* authority to which Eve should direct such questions; Eve's “happiest knowledge” is to “know no more” than Adam can tell her, and so Adam becomes both the source

and the limit of Eve's knowing. But when Eve encounters Satan and starts to question, she does not go to Adam to find the answer. Instead, she turns to the serpent and demands of him, “say, / How cam'st thou speakable of mute,... / ... / Say, for such wonder claims attention due,” in effect asking the serpent to explain itself, to answer the question with which she began. If Eve's “happiest knowledge” is that Adam is her authority, the keeper of God's law, then by turning to the serpent for answers she in effect turns away from both God's law and her own knowledge, making the object of her not-knowing the source of new knowledge. At the same time, because the serpent before her contradicts God's creation of the beasts, Eve in effect also gives the exception to the law authority over the law—the particular will be the source of knowledge for her now, not the universal.⁶⁴

The reason for this reversal of the proper order that Eve provides, the reason she is willing to let the particular speak for itself rather than to ask the universal to explain it, is that “such wonder claims attention due.” The “wonder” to which Eve refers would seem to be the serpent, since he is the object of her attention over the next hundred lines or so, but it is specifically in his capacity as a “wonder” that he can claim Eve's attention; and what makes him a wonder, an object “that causes astonishment” and disrupts Eve's knowing (OED), is the fact that he appears as a particular, as a contradiction of the world as it is, created by God. This particularity does not become Eve's authority simply because she chooses it to be so, nor does it simply deserve attention or request it politely, but instead, according to her, it “claims” attention, literally cries out for it, shouts for it, proclaims it (*clamo*). Just as a loud

⁶⁴ C.f. Fish's claim that Eve “substitute[s] the observation of physical process (in this case, illusory) for the first principles she is pledged to maintain” (*Milton* 77). Earlier in the chapter, Fish argues that in Milton's poetry (specifically in *Paradise Lost*, *Comus*, and *Samson Agonistes*), the “temptation” is “to think that particulars have an existence in themselves” (33). For Fish this means becoming an “empiricist,” investing the physical world with independent being, but I'd like to extend his claim to argue that the temptation is to divorce individual instantiations (i.e., particulars) from what governs them—the law of God.

noise in a quiet room will call the attention of anyone present to hear it, the particularity of the serpent, its contradictory nature that shouts out against the world, forces its witnesses to see it and, more importantly, to hear it. To Eve, the demand that she let this wonder explain itself thus comes from the wonder, not from her own desire, making the particular's authority in some sense the product of that particularity; *because* the serpent is a wonder, he claims Eve's attention. The structure of particularity as Eve here presents it thus resembles closely the structure of Satanic language as discussed in the first chapter. A sentence like "Your fear itself of death removes the fear" demands that it be understood by its auditors, but at the same time its enigmatic syntax resists any single understanding of the line, forcing Eve to confront it, to grapple with it, to pay attention to it; in the same way, because the particular denies what is and therefore refuses to be assimilated to the world that exists, it also becomes an enigma that demands that Eve engage with it in order to understand it, that she focus on it and try to uncover its mysteries. Particularity of the kind Satan constructs, the individuality that rejects the world as it is, thus gains creative force in the garden because it demands that the contradiction it presents be dealt with, that those who witness it examine it, consider it, and, most dangerously, that they think about it.⁶⁵

For Eve, to think about the serpent and the "wonder" he provokes means to reconsider God's command that she and Adam "shun to taste" of the tree of knowledge (VIII.327). Because the serpent is the cause of her inquiry, she begins thinking about the problem with him and the exceptional situation he presents; thus when Eve begins the speech that ends with her decision to eat, she makes no mention at first of God's

⁶⁵ Fish claims that "Eve is correct when she declares that the talking serpent's voice 'claims attention due' (566), but attention *due* should not mean *complete* attention" (*Surprised* 13). The problem for Fish is that Eve "surrenders her mind," making her too susceptible to the serpent's deception; "The danger" of such a surrender, Fish points out earlier, "is not so much that Satan's argument will persuade (one does not accord the father of lies an impartial hearing), but that its intricacy will engage the reader's attention and lead him into an error of omission" (10).

command, but instead follows the serpent's example and praises the fruit “Whose taste... at first assay / Gave elocution to the mute” (IX.747-748). Only afterwards, and only to support the serpent's claims about the fruit's virtues, does she make mention—indirectly—of God's prohibition, asserting that God also “praises” the fruit by forbidding it (750-755). This inversion of the proper order, beginning with the exception rather than the rule, is Eve's downfall. Because she allows the serpent to speak for himself, focusing her attention on the unfolding of his tale rather than on the law Satan's story contradicts, Satan's testimony about the fruit becomes the framework from which Eve reasons about her options, usurping God's law as the knowledge that guides her thoughts: Eve believes the serpent, rather than God's knowledge within her. Unsurprisingly, this reasoning from the particular rather than the universal leads her through the same set of questions Satan has already posed to her:

For good unknown, sure is not had, or had
 And yet unknown, is as not had at all.
 In plain then, what forbids he but to know,
 Forbids us good, forbids us to be wise?
 Such prohibitions bind not. But if death
 Bind us with after-bands, what profits then
 Our inward freedom? In the day we eat
 Of this fair fruit, our doom is, we shall die.
 How dies the Serpent? He hath eat'n and lives,
 And knows, and speaks, and reasons, and discerns,
 Irrational till then. For us alone
 Was death invented? Or to us denied
 This intellectual food, for beasts reserved? (756-768)

Eve's argument in lines 756-760, that God cannot prohibit Adam and Eve from knowing, answers Satan's argument at 725-728: “And wherein lies / Th' offense, that man should thus attain to know? / What can your knowledge hurt him, or this tree / Impart against his will if all be his?” Likewise, when she reminds herself of the consequences of eating but holds the serpent up as evidence to the contrary in lines 760-768, she repeats Satan's question at 691-692, “Shall that be shut to man, which to

the beast / Is open?" In both cases, a question posed by her knowledge of the universal—that the fruit is forbidden and that the consequence of eating is death—is answered by her experience of the particular—Satan's suggestion that gaining knowledge cannot be an offense to God, and his claim that he has eaten and not died.

Significantly, however, Eve's reliance on Satan as the basis of her knowledge does not merely make her into a copy of Satan. Though she begins by following Satan's line of argumentation, she differentiates herself from Satan by arriving at different conclusions:

For beasts it seems: yet that one beast which first
Hath tasted, envies not, but brings with joy
The good befall'n him, author unsuspect,
Friendly to man, far from deceit or guile.
What fear I then, rather what know to fear
Under this ignorance of good and evil,
Of God or death, of law or penalty?
Here grows the cure of all, this fruit divine,
Fair to the eye, inviting to the taste,
Of virtue to make wise: what hinders then
To reach, and feed at once both body and mind? (769-779)

This passage begins with the echo of Satan's question, "Shall that be shut to man, which to the beast / Is open?", and progresses, like Satan's argument, to the problem of whether Eve should fear God. But when Eve gets to her response to this problem, she finds herself in a very different position than Satan. She begins by responding to the ambiguity of his words; the object of "fear" in either instance is unclear in Satan's argument,⁶⁶ and so Eve very reasonably asks, "What fear I then?" Significantly, however, she immediately dismisses her response to Satan's words in favor of another question, one Satan does not prompt—"rather what know to fear?" No longer a question of what Eve should be fearing, now the problem at issue is whether Eve can actually fear at all, whether her present knowledge offers her anything that could serve

⁶⁶ See Chapter 1, section 3, for some possible ways of parsing Satan's words.

as the object of her fear, and this, Eve tells us, is the better question. To end up in the Satanic position of not-knowing, of recognizing her ignorance and therefore her distance from God, Eve thus finds herself rejecting Satan's reasons for transgressing in favor of her own, distancing her also from Satan.

When Eve asks, “what hinders then / To reach, and feed both body and mind?”, she again uses Satan's words (“reach then, and freely taste” [732]), but the motivation prompting this question is not the one that leads Satan to his command; Satan tells Eve to eat because it will make her godlike in her knowledge (708-709), whereas Eve questions why she should not eat because she does not have any knowledge that would prevent her from doing so. Satan's words mean something different in Eve's mouth. But the break with Satan that gets Eve to this point, that moves her from repeating Satan's argument to making up her own, occurs a few lines before this revision of the serpent's claims. After going from asking whether the fruit could be accessible only to beasts to asking whether God could rightly punish Eve for eating, Eve deviates a bit from Satan's argument, which moves immediately from this question to another question about God's motives in denying them the fruit, by providing an answer to the first question: “For beasts it seems” (769). Seemingly having found a way to reconcile God's law with the serpent's contradiction, for a brief moment Eve achieves a kind of Gadamerian sublation, recognizing the “otherness” of the serpent's situation and altering her horizon somewhat so that it can accommodate this new experience—the tree is forbidden still, but only to Adam and Eve, not to beasts. That she can provide an answer that Satan does not demonstrates that, while she is reasoning from Satan's experience and from the arguments with which he has presented her, the mind thinking through the problem now is not Satan's but her own: Eve is putting the information together herself.

Rather than leading her back toward God, this reconciliation of the particular back into the universal that Eve creates, because it is indeed her creation and not the product of God's laws or Satan's testimony, instead points her back at particularity—*her own* particularity. Just as quickly as she arrives at the universal, she rejects it by appealing at lines 769-772 to the serpent once again, reflecting the pattern she establishes in the first half of her monologue; this time, however, the return to the particular means something different. Whereas previously Eve has countered the law of God with pieces of the serpent's argument that directly contradict the universal—God's prohibitions cannot bind them, and the fruit has not caused the serpent to die—here, because she goes beyond Satan's argument by answering the question he asks, Eve cannot simply rehearse the serpent's arguments in order to reject the conclusion at which she arrives. Instead, Eve comes up with a jarring and rather incongruous reflection on the serpent's motives, on his honesty and friendliness. Her claim that the serpent “envies not” but is “friendly to man” has little bearing on the question of whether the fruit is meant for beasts only, just as her belief that he is an “author unsuspect” means little in this particular context, since he is neither an authority on whether the fruit is meant for beasts (he only questions this idea), nor does he “author” the reason for eating that Eve invents immediately afterwards. Lacking any obvious connection to the problem Eve faces, this return to the serpent is simply arbitrary and disruptive, an interruption of the particular unmotivated by the logic of the argument. Eve's sudden rejection of the universal in this respect echoes Satan's first appearance to Eve as the serpent, when the unexpected arrival of a creature outside the framework of her knowledge interrupts her work—God's work—and turns her thoughts toward the “wonder” before her. But whereas then the serpent interrupts Eve, *here Eve interrupts herself*, her focus on Satan is at this moment entirely hers, required neither by an external force nor by the internal development of her own argument. What had

been an external condition imposed upon Eve's consciousness, the particular that "claims" her attention whether she is willing or not, at this moment emerges as Eve's choice, her conscious and apparently unmotivated decision to think of the particular—and to reason based on that particular—rather than to govern her action according to a universal law that she fully recognizes.

The effect of the particular on Eve is thus to cause her to internalize the movement of thought created by the particular's intervention, to bring the outside inside, and thereby to internalize particularity itself. Because her encounter with the serpent forces her to try to understand the contradiction of the universal he presents, Eve ends up questioning God's law, attempting to reconcile the particular with the rule that denies its existence; but while Eve's reason is guided by two conflicting "authors," Satan and God, eventually her own mind emerges as more than just the battlefield on which the war between Satan and God is waged—it is also the engine driving the argument, shaping it, and is therefore capable of its own ideas. Eve creates just such an idea when she assimilates the particular experience of the serpent to the law God has prescribed, and so her Gadamerian reconciliation of the universal with the particular, her return to an "ideal order," in effect becomes the rejection of that order because it reveals to her that neither the universal nor this particular she has encountered is able to achieve this reconciliation by itself: the process requires *her* mind, which must be distinguishable from both the universal and this particular by virtue of its ability to achieve a reconciliation of the two. At this moment Eve turns inward, away from both Satan and God, rejecting on the one hand the universal law she has just repaired and on the other the specific arguments that Satan puts forward to seduce her to eat, recreating herself according to her own ideas, her own arguments, her own choice. This choice is ultimately to choose herself, her own particularity that distinguishes her from the rest of creation; thus she proclaims, "Experience, next to

thee [the tree] I owe, / Best guide,” vowing to follow the knowledge that is particular only to her (807-808). Eve realizes, or thinks she realizes, that “wisdom's way” cannot be accessed through adherence to external authorities, but only through herself.⁶⁷ Like Satan before her, she is, she claims, self-sufficient.

IV. “SING, HEAVENLY MUSE”

The very quality that makes the individual resist sublation or unification into a whole—its rejection of the world outside it—is thus the quality that demands that new particulars arise; because its stubborn refusal to conform to the rest of the world presents a problem for the observer, it “claims attention” and forces the observer to contend with it and thereby to recognize that *she* is the one doing the contending.⁶⁸ Thus Adam also falls when he encounters the new, particular Eve, without ever having to come into contact with Satan. Just as Eve is “much marveling” and “not unamazed” at the serpent, Adam experiences the same disruption when he sees her, becoming “amazed” and “Astonied” (889-890), leading him to reason from her situation—thus the Son's question in Book X, “Was she thy God...?” (145)—and subsequently to fall, because in recognizing the difference in Eve he comes to recognize his own situation in the threat her difference poses: “to lose thee were to lose myself” (IX.959).⁶⁹ It is in this sense that God's assertion in Book III that “the first sort [Satan and his followers] by their own suggestion fell, / Self-tempted, self-

⁶⁷ Eve's decision to know only from experience in some sense puts her in line with Kant's phenomenon/noumenon distinction (354-365). When she turns inward and closes herself off against the world, she in effect denies herself access to the world in itself (the noumenal world), to the universal law external to her perceptions, and instead resolves that she can know only the world as it is presented to her senses through experience (the phenomenal world).

⁶⁸ C.f. Ricks' claim that Milton “is concerned mainly to lead us back, not to blaze new trails” (*Style* 58); on the contrary, I am trying to show here that Milton' poem shows us a world in which we can never go back, in which we can only blaze new trails.

⁶⁹ There are, of course, crucial differences between Eve's self-creation and Adam's, particularly the fact that Adam's is much more self-conscious, much more aware that his self-creation is a fall, but to go through Adam's self-creation in detail here would be an unnecessary digression from the point at hand. I hope in a future project, however, to consider more closely the relationship between Adam and Eve in books IX and X in light of the construction of fallenness developed in this dissertation.

depraved: man falls deceived / By the other first” (129-132) can be consistent with the circumstances around Adam's fall, for though he is “not deceived” when he eats because he knows that he should not (IX.998), he has nevertheless like Eve been captured or ensnared (*decipio*) by the particular's claim on his mind, and has not, like Satan, “by his own suggestion” simply invented the particular for this purpose.⁷⁰ Once a single individual exists to declare its defiance of the world, that world must change, and both Adam and Eve change with it.

Because particularity thus exceeds itself, because it affects that which is other despite its insistence that it is not other, something we might call a “tradition,” an interconnectedness between individuals that allows us to talk about these individuals together and not just separately, arises out of this process. In particular, Eve's development into a self-affirming individual, though again a rejection of the Hegelian theories of tradition of Eliot and Gadamer, nevertheless proceeds according to Hegel's master-slave (lord-bondsman) dialectic, a theory that constructs the individual as both a negation of other consciousnesses and as reliant upon them.⁷¹ For Hegel, self-consciousness must interact with another consciousness outside itself that forces it to labor so that “[t]hrough work” self-consciousness “becomes conscious of what he truly is,” an *independent* consciousness (118); thus Eve recognizes in the experience of doing “work” for the serpent, in the form of trying to reconcile him with the world governed by God's laws, that she is independent of Satan's consciousness, that is it

⁷⁰ Fish similarly argues that Adam makes the same mistake as Eve: “he detaches a piece of nature from its sustaining source and then imagines for himself the choice (and the dilemma) of opting for one or the other”; in other words, he faces an opposition between the particular and the universal that should govern it. For Fish, however, Adam is wrong—he has forgotten “that there is no ‘her’—at least as a positive value—if the link between her and the Divine has been broken” (35). Here I disagree with Fish, insofar as fallenness does not result in purely negative beings, as Fish seems to suggest, but rather in a state of being that is very real and existing in the world. When Satan “breaks union,” the particularity exists in the world, and when Eve falls, she becomes one of those particulars. Adam's dilemma in choosing between the universal and the particular is thus very real.

⁷¹ See *Phenomenology of Spirit*, Part B, sec. IV.a (pp. 111-119), for the dialectic of lordship and bondage (master-slave).

she, and not he, who is thinking about the problem he poses. What holds these consciousnesses together, however, what ties the new, independent consciousness to the one it rejects, is the fact that the self-consciousness' recognition of its independence requires that self-consciousness first give up his independence to the other consciousness, requires that it abdicate all autonomy and become “the dependent consciousness whose essential nature is simply to live or to be for another,” thus becoming the bondsman or slave (*Phenomenology* 115). This abdication is necessary to press self-consciousness to labor in the first place, and specifically to labor on something that is outside itself, external to it, allowing the bondsman eventually to recognize its autonomy, its “thingness,” in the reflection of that labor—through abdication he becomes, like Satan, self-raised, the object of his own agency. Thus the individual comes to recognize itself through a subjugation that ties it at its origin to the external consciousness: the subject for Hegel will always become intersubjective.

This emergence of the individual out of the surrender to another makes these individuals more than simply autonomous, holding them together even as they reject each other. Eve surrenders her autonomy when, upon recognizing the serpent as a particularity, she subordinates her consciousness to Satan's, recognizing that his particularity “claims” her attention, while also noting that this is “attention due”—Eve believes that she owes the serpent her attention, her consciousness.⁷² Only because she abdicates all authority to Satan, giving her “attention” to this external object, does she engage in the process of reasoning by which she comes to recognize the power of

⁷² In some sense, Eve has always been the slave, having given away her independence to Adam (IV.635-638). But for Hegel, the lord-bondsman dialectic requires that the bondsman confront the fear of death, confront the possibility of his own not-being, of absolute negativity, in order that the bondsman by the end of the dialectic be forced to overcome that negativity (e.g., “And it is only through staking one's life that freedom is won” [114]). Adam presents Eve with no such struggle, but Satan, whose is already a construction of the negative, very explicitly does, insofar as his seduction forces Eve in that final monologue to consider the possibility that she might die and to overcome that fear—which she does right before she eats. Satan, as the only representative of the negative in the garden, is the only subject in the Hegelian sense that could thus force Eve to move through the dialectic.

her own mind; she must think thoughts other than her own, the thoughts Satan has given her, in order to see herself from the outside, as an object, and thereby to perceive her autonomy as a subject. As a result of this surrender, her self-creation manifests the fact of her encounter with Satan; thus when she falls, she expresses her turn into herself by using Satan's words. Though the words mean something different because Eve rejects Satan, that she uses those words at all is evidence of Eve's abdication to Satan; the words are the residue of Eve's surrender, the evidence that her own subjectivity comes through Satan's, and the expression of a relationship between them—a negative relationship, but a relationship nevertheless.⁷³

This intersubjectivity also explains why Adam, never having encountered Satan, can still allude to Satan's words, as when Adam, regarding the changed Eve, cries out, “How art thou lost, how on a sudden lost, / Defaced, deflower'd, and now to death devote?” (IX.900-901), echoing Satan's first words to Beëlzebub at the beginning of the poem (“If thou beest he; but O how fall'n! how changed / From him...”).⁷⁴ Though he surrenders himself to Eve rather than to Satan, and thus finds his

⁷³ Hye-Joon Yoon traces a similar movement in Satan through the master-slave dialectic, pointing to the moment when God exalts the Son: “we could say that God has entered and initiated the dialectic of self-consciousness in begetting and promoting his ‘only Son’ as his ‘Vice-gerent’: God has divided himself in his Son. Satan, on his own part, becomes self-conscious of himself, or in simpler terms becomes proud and ambitious against the self-consciousness of God, the birth of the Son. He becomes thus the other or the double of God’s self-consciousness and completes the dialectic in rising against the absolute positivity, or the absolute dictatorship, of God” (“Satan’s Gift” 12). She claims that the dialectic later breaks down as Satan “initiates the demonic destiny of unmediated negativity” (12). But to my mind the problem is not the fact that Satan’s negativity is “unmediated” (for Hegel, unmediated positivity and unmediated negativity immediately collapse into each other in the mediation he calls “becoming” [Science of Logic, 82-83]), but that labor is missing from Yoon’s analogy between Hegel and *Paradise Lost*: Satan doesn’t find himself laboring to think God the way Eve finds herself laboring to think the serpent. I agree with Yoon that there is something Hegelian in Satan’s recognition of his own particularity at the moment of the Son’s ascension, but at Satan’s purely willed self-recognition, the mistake he makes in seeing God’s edict as something “new,” is an undialectical moment the produces dialectic in the created universe.

⁷⁴ Adam begins with these words only to reject them in the following lines: “Rather how hast thou yielded to transgress / The strict forbiddance, how to violate / The sacred fruit forbidd'n!” (902-904). Adam turns from understanding Eve's fall as agentless—she is lost, but by whom or because of what he does not say, just as Beëlzebub is fallen and changed but not for any reason Satan gives—to recognizing that she has actively sinned, that she has “yielded” and thereby transgressed and violated. Pity for Adam turns to blame and accusation. [make note of the several other instances where Adam alludes to Satan]

subjectivity through her, the fact that *she* has surrendered herself to Satan means that Adam is bound to Satan through Eve. But the relationship is not simply linear, Satan to Eve to Adam; it makes no sense to say that we have to read Adam's allusions to Satan “through” Eve. Because his surrender becomes his rejection of Eve, Adam at the same time rejects the residue of her encounter with Satan, the negative image of the rejected other; while the shadow of Satan that remained in Eve now exists in Adam, the specific relation Eve had to Satan has been denied, overturned, and Adam is free to reject Satan's particularity in his own way, according to his own particularity.⁷⁵ Satan, Eve, and Adam are thus bound together by their self-creations, their particularity, but not by any hierarchical order of succession; mediation through a third term (through Eve, in this case) is obliterated in the process of rejection, in the inward turn, making each new subject equally individual, equally self-sufficient, and therefore equally able to relate to another individual without the help of a third.⁷⁶

Satan's self-creation thus creates a tradition of relationships between individuals that demonstrate the particularity of each, relationships which are themselves the evidence of the individuals' interdependence, their intersubjectivity. But Adam and Eve are not the only figures in this tradition; the poem itself likewise undergoes its own self-creation following Adam and Eve, moving from abdication to rejection in a way that ties the poem fundamentally to everything it rejects. Just as Eve tells the serpent, “say, / How cam'st thou speakable of mute,... / ... / Say, for such

⁷⁵ I would thus contest Christopher Rick's claim, which he takes to be self-evident, that a poet “cannot call into play [i.e. allude to] something of which [he has] never heard” (*Allusion* 3). As always, conflating poets and their experiences with their poems is dangerous business. Insofar as tradition behaves the way it does in *Paradise Lost*—and I would argue that it frequently does so—a poem can allude to anything within that tradition without the poet ever having heard of it simply because images and turns of phrase are not necessarily unique to any single text, and may emerge in a variety of places in a variety of forms, not all of which are easy to recognize or track down. Thus whether Milton read, for instance, *Piers Plowman* or not, we can still read the bleeding tree scene in *Paradise Lost* alongside Langland's corresponding moment and arrive at a perfectly useful, interesting reading.

⁷⁶ Thus Satan's new form of creation does not simply reproduce the divine hierarchy; there is no “she for Satan only; he for Satan in her.” [talk about the natural anarchism of the fallen world in *Paradise Lost*, and about Milton's arguments against the artificial, merely human hierarchy of the monarchy]

wonder claims attention due,” surrendering her attention to Satan, so too does the narrator begin the epic by addressing his muse: “Say first, for heav'n hides nothing from thy view / Nor the deep tract of hell, say first what cause / Moved our grand parents...” (1.27-29). *Paradise Lost* claims, as do almost all epic poems, that its authority does not come from itself but instead from something outside it. Thus the narrator does not begin, “Of man's first disobedience *I* sing,” but rather, “Of man's first disobedience... / ... / Sing Heav'nly Muse” (1, 6), indicating here that the tale that will follow is the muse's tale, not his own, just as lines 27-29 indicate that the story of Satan in the first two books of the poem, the “cause” that moves Adam and Eve to transgress, the muse and not the narrator is doing the saying. The effect of this invocation is the poem's total abdication to another source, its surrender to an external voice that will be the true author of the poem, while the narrator, who asks, “what in me is dark / Illumine, what is low raise and support” in order that he be up to the task of relating what the muse sings, is only the vessel (22-23). The reason for this abdication, according to the poem, is that the narrator recognizes, just as Eve did, his ignorance in the face of the situation before him; thus he tells the muse, “Instruct me, for thou know'st; thou from the first / Wast present” (19-20). The Muse's knowing, which here takes no grammatical object and therefore suggests an absolute knowing, presumably contrasts with the narrator's not-knowing, since he needs her to instruct him, and so the narrator gives his agency over to her because, just as Eve at first cannot herself resolve the problem the serpent poses, the narrator realizes that he cannot himself accomplish “this great argument” (24).

In becoming Hegel's “dependent consciousness,” however, the poem discovers that, despite its dependence on the muse for knowledge, the poem being created is its own, the product of its own work. The cracks appear from the very beginning, as when the narrator, only seven lines after invoking the muse to sing the poem ahead,

refers to “*my* advent'rous song,” recognizing for a brief moment his own agency in the epic (13). At the end of his final invocation, however, after the narrator has for the last time called the muse to his aid, he notes,

Me of these [i.e., other epics]
Nor skilled nor studious, higher argument
Remains, sufficient of itself to raise
That name, unless an age too late, or cold
Climate, or years damp my intended wing
Depressed, and much they may, if all be mine,
Not hers who brings it nightly to my ear. (IX.41-47)

The obvious reading here would be that the poem's argument is good enough on its own to elevate epic, but given the way “raise” is used earlier in the poem, particularly in Book V, the meaning would seem also to be that the argument is in itself sufficient to create or to establish epic. In particular, the line break after “sufficient of itself to raise” again suggests reading “raise” intransitively, as an unaccusative verb, and so the transitive usage, “sufficient of itself to raise that name,” comes into tension with the intransitive, “sufficient of itself to raise (i.e., rise)” (and the proximity of the “itself” also echoes the reflexive “self-raised”). But since what is being raised is “that name”—i.e., epic—and since epic is the form this argument takes, these lines seem to suggest that the argument is sufficient of itself to raise the poem itself, along with all other poems like it; in other words, the poem is self-sufficient, insofar as what it says is capable of “raising” or creating what the poem is—an epic. At this moment the poem recognizes that it is its own agent and object, that it is the speaking voice, the singer of the poem.

The logical extension of this claim is that the muse is *not* the one singing, not the authority behind the poem, and indeed, the following lines suggest that this may very well be the case. As Kerrigan observes, “In a single conditional clause, the poet experiences a moment of absolute mistrust” (138). Though the narrator once again reminds us of the muse at the end of the passage, after setting forth the conditions that

would prevent the argument from being self-sufficient, this reminder is nevertheless uncertain, tentative, a question rather than an assertion. Instead of using a past subjunctive to say “and well they *might*, if all *were* mine / Not hers who brings it nightly to my ear,” indicating a contrary-to-fact position—all *is not* mine—the narrator is speaking in the present tense, as if the question of whether all is his (i.e., the poem's) or the muse's has yet to be decided—if it all turns out to be mine, the narrator says, then the age, the climate, and my old age may well damp my intended wing. The self-consciousness of the poem itself, rather than its consciousness of the muse, is breaking through here, casting doubt on all the assertions of the previous invocations, and suggesting for the first time the possibility that all *is* in fact the poem's, all the work of the argument itself. In response to this possibility, the final line of the verse paragraph, “Not hers who brings it nightly to my ear,” rejects the muse's agency, suggesting that, even though she brings the song to the poem, it may nevertheless be “not hers.”

This hinted rejection is made real in the poem's unfolding, in *Paradise Lost's* incessant refusal to be bound by the authority it invokes. The muse to which the poem surrenders initially is a very specific, particular authority. Instead of just invoking “the Muse,” or even just “the Heavenly Muse,” the poem in its opening lines calls on the “Heav'nly Muse, that on the secret top / Of Oreb, or of Sinai didst inspire / That shepherd, who first taught the chosen seed” (6-8), determining her identity with not just one but two relative clauses—she is specifically the Muse that inspired a specific shepherd—making sure that we know precisely that this muse is Moses' muse. Later, in case we didn't get the picture, the narrator again specifies that she is not “of the muses nine, nor on the top / Of old Olympus” does she dwell, but that she is instead Wisdom's sister who did “play / In the presence of th'Almighty Father” (VII.6-11), this time defining her both in positive terms—she played before God—and negatively, as

the not-classical muse: *Paradise Lost*'s authority is, it claims, Genesis, and specifically not those ancient, pagan epics above which *Paradise Lost* intends to soar.⁷⁷ By thus surrendering to this very specific muse, however, by giving authority to the Old Testament over classical epic, Milton's poem clearly delineates its difference from that authority. That the narrative of *Paradise Lost* far exceeds the narrative of the fall is evident in every book; perhaps more importantly, however, the fact that Milton's poem even defies the biblical narrative, putting Adam in a different part of the garden when Eve chooses to eat while Genesis 3:6 states that Adam was with Eve when she ate, demonstrates the poem's rejection of its muse and her authority, showing quite clearly that *Paradise Lost* is its own tale, independent of the authority of the books of Moses.⁷⁸

By defying his muse's authority that is by definition the authority of Moses and not of the ancient epics, *Paradise Lost* rejects both Moses' muse and the exclusion of the ancient epics, which is why a poem that claims to take the bible and only the bible as its authority seems to be so heavily invested in the ancient epics it wants to exclude. In creating itself, in self-raising out of its surrender to what already exists, *Paradise Lost* thus at the same time creates a tradition. But this is not a tradition of sameness, one in which anything is "handed down" to it from its predecessors; rather, this is a tradition of difference and of the communion of difference, a tradition in which texts are bound together not by any uniformity, not by Cuddon's "literary forms, codes, devices, conventions" or even by Eliot's "relation to the whole," but by their specific relationships with each other, relationships always of difference and individual

⁷⁷ This muse is also, by virtue of the particular definition *Paradise Lost* gives it, the muse of *Gerusalemme Liberata*, who is also specifically not a classical muse but an authority out of God's heaven: see chapter 2, n. 8. For more on the relationship between Tasso and Milton, see chapter 4, section 2.

⁷⁸ The KJV reads, "she took of the fruit thereof, and did eat, and gave also unto her husband with her; and he did eat." The New Oxford Annotated Bible revises to make Adam's presence more clear: "she took of its fruit and ate; and she also gave some to her husband, who was with her, and he ate."

expression. In the words of Gian Biagio Conte, “literary history has nothing to show but epic texts, individual works that constitute single acts of poetic utterance” (143). For this reason, when we read Milton's wounded tree scene in Book IX, we do not read it against wounded trees in general, but against specific trees from specific poems, reading for the differences that mark each poem's individuality, each poem's particularity. Such moments like these exist in the poem because the rejection of those texts that allows the poem to create itself requires that the poem must first come into contact with them; thus it must first surrender itself to their service, seeming to carry out the work of another poem by using its words, its authority. These traces of the poem's surrender, the marks of its encounter with the outside world, are a tradition in the sense that they are a society of individuals that bear the scars of their subjection and their rejection, the evidence of their struggle to self-create. *Paradise Lost* shows the marks of the works of Homer and of Vergil, of Dante, Ariosto, and Tasso, of Spenser, and of many others not discussed here: these are the particular consciousnesses in the outside world that *Paradise Lost* rejects to become what it is. Only when the poem's specific relationships to each are read, when we recognize the differences that make each work individual and self-sufficient, does the significance of those relationships, of the tradition, become meaningful.⁷⁹

⁷⁹ It should be noted that this tradition is *not* an intertextual one. Jonathan Culler in his essay “Presupposition and Intertextuality” defines intertextuality as “less a name for a work's relation to particular prior texts than a designation of its participation in the discursive space of a culture: the relationship between a text and the various languages or signifying practices of a culture and its relation to those texts which articulate for it the possibilities of that culture” (103). While this gesture is aimed at freeing literary study from the strictures of canonicity, this very fact renders intertextuality a difficult theory to use in actually interpreting specific texts. Pointing to Kristeva's desire to find a source for Lautréamont, Culler observes that “the concept of intertextuality leads the critic who wishes to work with it to concentrate on cases that put in question the general theory” (107). As a foil for this problem, Culler turns to Bloom, who both seems to present an intertextual theory and, with his genealogical model, to return to the canon that intertextuality was supposed to destroy. Culler observes, “If Bloom's 'antithetical criticism' is ultimately a genetic theory rather than a theory of the conditions of signification, it nevertheless illustrates the dangers that beset the notion of intertextuality: it is a difficult concept to use because of the vast and undefined discursive space it designates, but when one narrows it so as to make it more usable one either falls into source study of a traditional and positivistic kind (which is what the concept was designed to transcend) or else ends by naming particular texts as the pre-texts on grounds of interpretive convenience” (109). The theory of tradition I am deriving in this

There was nothing “ideal” or even anything particularly ordered about Milton's society, nor about our own today; to pretend that the literature of that society, which grows out of that lack of order, out of the struggle that arises between individuals who can only think but cannot know, could itself constitute such an “ideal order” is thus to betray and to silence both the suffering of this divided world and the voice poetry gives to that suffering. Construing tradition as a thing, as a positive object or concept, always falls prey to this false wholeness because it treats individual texts as reducible to their broad similarities, disregarding the fact that these apparent similarities, whenever they are examined closely and carefully, are actually differences, the evidence of the text's particularity and its refusal to be thus reduced. To avoid this false wholeness, tradition must also, like the individual, be particular and specific, must bear witness to the brokenness that divides individuals from each other precisely by making them individuals, separate consciousnesses unable to rejoin the “individual soul.” Tradition is thus not a thing, but a relationship, and always a *specific* relationship between *particular* individuals; it is thus different for every text, particular to each individual work.⁸⁰ But by virtue of the fact that it *is* a relationship, each text's tradition implicates others. That one individual self-creates only through another, through a tradition, means that the individual, while unable to break out of its particularity, nevertheless always points beyond itself, to the possibility of another self-creation out of and against its own particularity. This is the creative power of

chapter navigates between the Scylla of “source study of a traditional and positivistic kind” and the Charybdis of a theory difficult to use because of its “vast and undefined discursive space.” Though I have not opened up the “tradition” beyond the literary, texts in this theory need not have single fathers but can have origins in a kind of literary milieu comprised of many texts, many interlocking “traditions” that are not bound by questions of canonicity or even of temporality. As the previous chapter showed, this kind of tradition does not prevent reading or require us to narrow our focus to read texts “intertextually,” but rather it opens up possibilities of reading by expanding a poem’s “participation in the discursive space” of literary history.

⁸⁰ This may well be in line with the kind of reading of tradition Milton himself preferred. See E. R. Gregory’s article, “Milton and the Tradition,” which demonstrates that, for Milton, the only way to read a tradition is to consider each text individually (121-141).

tradition as *Paradise Lost* constructs it, and the salvific possibility it offers: tradition is the process of revolution, the constant demand that something new come to be, something unique and different, something that rejects the world as it is and establishes a new reality. It is the manifestation of the fallen world that always points to something beyond itself, to more individuals and to more traditions, to the wholeness it cannot itself achieve.

Chapter Four

Justifying the Ways of God to Men

“Neither shall they say, Lo here! or, lo there! for, behold, the kingdom of God is within you” (Luke 17:21)

The previous chapters have demonstrated the intimate link between Satan's development in the poem and *Paradise Lost's* self-conscious construction as a poem, both in its own right and as a work necessarily situated within a tradition. As the first to fall, Satan creates a world in which self-generation is possible, in which agents other than God can create, and in which every created thing is necessarily new and particular, standing against the world as it is to posit a new possibility. Because *Paradise Lost* understands this world as part of its own history, indeed as the first moment in its history, Satan's fall—its causes, its methods, and its consequences—constitutes the framework within which *Paradise Lost* must exist as a poem, as a thing created. Thus everything to this point has attempted to demonstrate how the poem constructs its own genesis, how it comprehends itself both as something that comes to be and, more importantly, as something that *is able* to come into being in the first place; *Paradise Lost* explains to us how it is possible that it can soar above the Aonian mount, and reveals the conditions that allow it to sing things unattempted yet. But if we now know how *Paradise Lost* is able to come to be as something new, as a self-sufficient, immanently legible work of art, the question left to explore here must be how Milton's epic is actually new. What is so different about *Paradise Lost* compared to the works that it identifies as its tradition, and what unattempted yet is attempted here?

The second chapter of this dissertation demonstrated how *Paradise Lost* differs from other texts at localized moments, such as the poem's allusion to *Orlando Furioso*

at I.16 and its wounded tree imagery in Book IX, and we will look at other such moments in this chapter; but saying that *Paradise Lost* at specific moments separates itself from other texts in its tradition is not the same as claiming that the poem is itself a unique poem, and so my purpose here in part is to show how the first claim leads to the second, how *Paradise Lost* itself becomes something new and self-standing out of its many points of differentiation. More importantly, while the fact that Milton's epic is indeed a unique poem is on some level self-evident—no other poem exists that is *Paradise Lost*—I want in this chapter to give some account of *Paradise Lost*'s truly revolutionary turn, of its individuality not just as a poem among many poems, but as an epic that goes beyond what any other epic before it had accomplished, and as a text that opens up possibilities that had not existed hitherto (which is what any text in a tradition like the one *Paradise Lost* projects will do). Insofar as the fall creates an intersubjectivity that links subjects by cutting them off from each other, rendering them distinct and to some extent opaque, the concept of the individual underwriting *Paradise Lost*'s construction of its characters and of itself is something very new in the realm of epic poetry; and insofar as this intersubjectivity governs how the poem understands its tradition and itself with that tradition, *Paradise Lost* offers a very new way of thinking about poetic creation—and particularly epic poetic creation—within a tradition.

I. “ARGUMENT NOT LESS BUT MORE HEROIC”

Paradise Lost explains at the outset that it will do something new when it claims to be pursuing “Things unattempted yet in prose or rhyme” (I.16). One of these “things,” as the second chapter described, must be the poem's “argument,” which in the modern sense of the word (i.e., argumentation) indicates the narrator's attempt to “assert Eternal Providence, / And justify the ways of God to men” (I.25-26)—the significance of which claim has met with many and varied interpretations, and whose

import I will return to later in this chapter. But the narrator in line 16 claims that the poem pursues *things* unattempted yet, a plural made conspicuous by its contrast with Ariosto's singular "*cosa non detta*," to which Milton's line alludes;⁸¹ there is something else going on, the narrator tells us, beyond just its stated purpose. That *Paradise Lost's* innovation exceeds its attempts to justify the ways of God to men (and to exceed this goal is a feat indeed) is attested to by the poem's recurrent assertions that it will "soar / Above th'Aonian mount" (I.14-15) and "above th' Olympian hill" (VII.3), and that the narrator sings with "notes other than to th' Orphéan lyre" (III.17). By insistently repeating its claim that it is "above" or otherwise "other" than its classical predecessors, the poem points to its difference from its tradition but without revealing the content of that difference, rendering the claim at I.16 increasingly mysterious and vague. Though the poem can tell us *that* it is different, it seems unable to articulate exactly *how* it is different.⁸²

Not until the fourth invocation in the poem, at the beginning of Book IX, does *Paradise Lost* finally give some content to its claims to be "above" its predecessor epics. The narrator begins by returning to his "argument," which is

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[.] (14-19)

⁸¹ For discussion of the allusion in this line, see Chapter 2, section 2.

⁸² Steadman, in the third chapter of *The Wall of Paradise* (49-68) enumerates multiple ways in which *Paradise Lost's* argument is "higher" than previous epics by showing how that argument is *bigger*: e.g., "Homer's heroes conquer a single city; Virgil's hero overcomes a few Italian tribes; Milton's counter-hero conquers a whole world. Where other heroic poems had celebrated battles on land and sea, Milton's describes aerial engagements and warfare in heaven itself. Other heroes had, at most, brought destruction or deliverance to a single nation of a limited society. Satan, however, destroys the whole race of mankind, and Christ delivers 'a whole Race lost.' Where other poets had celebrated the construction of a city, Milton describes the creation of the universe itself" (52-53). While his examples certainly make a case for the ways in which *Paradise Lost* soars above classical epic, I am here looking for a more qualitative difference between Milton's poem and its past.

Here the narrator seems to be talking about his argument in the more epical sense of the word—that is, he is explaining how his *subject matter*, rather than the argumentative purpose of the poem, differs from those ancient texts the first three invocations so explicitly rejected. The argument, he claims, is “above” specifically the *Iliad*, *Odyssey*, and *Aeneid* because it is “not less but more heroic,” explaining the positive content of its difference, greater heroism, through the rejection of the alternative. What specifically makes the argument “more heroic” the narrator describes in the following lines:

If answerable style I can obtain
Of my celestial patroness, who deigns
Her nightly visitation unimplored,
And dictates to me slumb'ring, or inspires
Easy my unpremeditated verse:
Since first this subject for heroic song
Pleased me long choosing, and beginning late;
Not sedulous by nature to indite
Wars, hitherto the only argument
Heroic deemed, chief mastery to dissect
With long and tedious havoc fabled knights
In battles feigned; the better fortitude
Of patience and heroic martyrdom
Unsung; or to describe races and games,
Or tilting furniture, emblazoned shields,
Impresses quaint, caparisons and steeds;
Bases and tinsel trappings, gorgeous knights
At joust and tournament; then marshaled feast
Served up in hall with sewers, and seneschals;
The skill of artifice or office mean,
Not that which justly gives heroic name
To person or to poem. (20-41)

As has been the mode in this poem that finds its origin in Satan's negative language, here again the narrator delineates his own work by rejecting other works, claiming in the first passage to be “more heroic” than classical epic, and in this passage dismissing the tradition of romance epic, which includes the works of Ariosto, Tasso, and Spenser, as “Not that which justly gives heroic name / To person or to poem.” For the

first time in the invocations, however, these claims of what Milton's poem is give rise to a statement of what his poem *is*. Buried within this list of everything that is wrong with romance, the narrator mentions in an aside “the better fortitude / Of patience and heroic martyrdom / Unsung,” an argument contrasted to “fabled knights / In battles feigned,” which subject *is* sung by those romances *Paradise Lost* here rejects. That the martyrdom in these lines is “heroic” (and presumably “justly” so), and that this patience and martyrdom constitute “better fortitude,” indicate that this is the “not less but more heroic” argument that the poem has been promising us since Book I.

But relieved as we may be finally to know what it means to “soar / Above th' Aonian mount,” the problems this statement of the poem's argument present are hard to ignore. First, the representations the narrator provides of the poems from which *Paradise Lost* differentiates itself are in places either gross oversimplifications or, in the worst case, simply misleading. As William M. Porter notes of the invocation, “a reader who does not object... is not paying attention”:

It becomes clear here [lines 27-33] that Milton acknowledges and takes to task only a single strain of classical heroism whose character he finds exemplified in the *Iliad* preeminently. But he does this by misrepresenting the plots and themes of the classical epics so egregiously that he can hardly have intended to fool anyone.... Milton's lens expands here to take in his more recent predecessors as well as the ancients, but the classical works to which he had referred just a few lines earlier are by no means exemplars of marital heroism exclusively, line 28-29 to the contrary notwithstanding. Battle occupies a very small part of the *Odyssey*. The *Aeneid* has its battles ('dicam horrida bella,' announces Vergil at 7.41), but they occupy only a third of the poem, and Vergil's own critique of the waste and futility of war is one of the most profound aspects of his poetic vision. (89)

Porter makes clear the problems with the invocation's representation of classical epic;⁸³ in addition, as Porter's first sentence here suggests, the same rejection of

⁸³ Porter is not the only one to notice distortion in this invocation's representation of classical epic. Fowler, for instance, in his edition of the poem, footnotes line 17 with “Amplifying Turnus' claim to Lavinia, to discredit Virgil's hero.”

martial themes that skews the narrator's descriptions of the arguments of the *Odyssey* and *Aeneid* also colors the poem's description of romance epic. For while *Orlando Furioso* might rightly be said to take “fabled knight / In battles feigned,” “tilting furniture, emblazoned shields, / Impresses quaint” and the rest of it for its argument, the same cannot be said of *Gerusalemme Liberata* or *The Faerie Queene*, both poems in which the battles serve an allegorical function (if only partly so in Tasso's poem) that points in the former to the triumph of the one true God and to the education of the virtuous man in the latter. In addition to the invocation's mischaracterization of most of epic history, Porter also takes issue with the notion that “patience and heroic martyrdom” could be unique to *Paradise Lost*, arguing that “‘patience,’ in its Latin sense ‘endurance,’ is certainly characteristic of Aeneas and Odysseus both” (we could add Spenser's Arthur to Porter's list) and that “‘heroic martyrdom’ applies at least as well to Aeneas as to Adam,” whom Porter assumes to be the hero of Milton's epic (89). The problem with Milton's invocation is thus twofold: it both misrepresents its literary history and, by doing so, presents as unique an argument that has at least one and perhaps several similar antecedents.

To make matters worse, the implication that *Paradise Lost* is about “patience and heroic martyrdom” seems also to misrepresent the poem itself. By the beginning of Book IX, when the poem finally announces explicitly what its argument will be and why it is better than those that precede it, we have seen nothing that could be characterized by “patience and heroic martyrdom.” Satan certainly does not count as “patient,” and, though he may to himself be a martyr, it seems unlikely the poem's narrator would be willing to call him “heroic”; Adam and Eve cannot yet be “patient,” in the etymological sense of suffering (*patiens*) because they are as yet unfallen, and the same can be said of the third possible “hero” of the poem, the Son. If “patience

and heroic martyrdom” is to be found in the poem at all, it must therefore be found in the final books, and the poem it seems has taken quite some time to get to the point.

The invocation itself suggests that this is the case, announcing that only “now must [it] change / Those notes to tragic; foul distrust, and breach / Disloyal on the part of man, revolt / And disobedience” (5-8). “Disobedience” is, of course, the subject matter announced in the first line of the poem, and its reemergence here, eight books later and with two-thirds of the poem complete, signals the distance between the initial assertion of the poem's subject matter and the event itself. But even as a description of the final four books of *Paradise Lost*, “patience and heroic martyrdom” are an odd fit. Patience does indeed become Adam and Eve's lot, though they do not begin to adopt this virtue until Book XI, when Michael tells them to “patiently resign / What justly thou hast lost” (287-288) and “to learn / True patience” (360-361), and Adam eventually replies that he will “patiently attend / [His] dissolution” (551-552). But martyrdom is clearly beyond the scope of *Paradise Lost*'s narrative. Adam and Eve are not made martyrs when they are expelled from the garden, since they are not persecuted for “witnessing” (*μάρτυς* or *μάρτυρ*) their faith, but just the opposite—they are judged for neglecting their faith—while the Son, the most obvious candidate for “heroic martyrdom,” will not even begin the path of the martyr until *Paradise Regain'd*. If “heroic martyrdom” is “unsung” in earlier epics, it is equally so in *Paradise Lost*.

How we are to read this final invocation and its claims about the poem's uniqueness among epic, given the problems it presents, is thus by no means obvious or transparent. But the placement of this particularly difficult set of claims suggests that their import is bound up with the poem's emergence as a participant in the fallen world. As the previous chapter discussed, this invocation shows the poem breaking with its muse by recognizing its argument as “sufficient of itself to raise” the epic

genre and, consequently, sufficient to raise itself (43), just as Satan has already done and as Eve is about to do later in this same book.⁸⁴ That the poem, following the path of its fallen characters, would be wrong at this moment in describing its predecessors is thus not so surprising; just as Satan's rejection of God makes him blind to all things divine (as the second chapter described),⁸⁵ so too does *Paradise Lost's* rejection of its predecessors make it unable to “see” them properly.⁸⁶ But that *Paradise Lost* should be wrong in describing itself seems strange. Even if we were to take the poem's blindness to its predecessors as the mark of its distance from them and so try to understand how Milton's poem is presenting “patience and heroic martyrdom” differently from a poem like the *Aeneid*, we would still be forced to grapple with the fact that this “argument not less but more heroic” never fulfills itself in the course of the poem. We cannot contrast Adam's or the Son's martyrdom with Aeneas' because we never actually see Adam or the Son martyred. Unlike the poem's first assertion of its uniqueness at I.16, which established the newness of Milton's poem in clear relation to its tradition, this final assertion, the claim that at long last tells us what *Paradise Lost* is rather than what it is not, seems to defy the negative relationships of the tradition, refusing to allow itself to be contrasted with anything outside itself and refusing thereby to be read at all. To understand this sudden movement away from the relationships of the tradition (which is at the same time a movement away from legibility) requires that we return to the break that begins Book IX and examine how

⁸⁴ See Chapter 3, section 4.

⁸⁵ See Chapter 2, section 1.

⁸⁶ We might read this blindness as something like Bloom's “misprision,” in which the new poet must misunderstand the old in order to create. But whereas for Bloom misprision is the first act that must happen in order for the strong poet to invent a new space in which to create, here blindness to the past is the by-product and the evidence of the new work's rejection that was itself the creative act. Misunderstanding or misrepresenting the past is thus, in my reading of *Paradise Lost*, never fundamental to the act of poetic genesis, as misprision is for Bloom, but rather just the opposite—we have to understand *Paradise Lost* as rejecting its actual predecessors, not their misrepresentations, in order to read the negative outline that rejection provides.

this invocation might be read in the context of the poem's previous, clearly traditional, invocations.

II. "SAY FIRST WHAT CAUSE"

The third chapter of this dissertation detailed the sudden shift in Book IX away from the poem's surrender to the authority of the muse and toward the narrator's recognition that authority emanates from the poem or "argument" itself, and I want to argue that this shift in itself sets *Paradise Lost* apart in its tradition. But the movement between divine inspiration and the authority of the subject (who is for Milton always the *fallen* subject) has a long and complex history, played out in the widely varying relationships between epic narrators and their muses, that reveals the significance of this shift. The surrender to a higher authority, whether to a muse or another text, has been a common feature of Western epic poetry since Homer, but this surrender did not always, as it does for *Paradise Lost*, create conflict between that muse and the poem's speaker. The *Iliad* begins very simply, with the words, "μῆνιν ἄειδε, θεά" ("Sing wrath, goddess"), as does the *Odyssey*, which opens with, "ἄνδρα μοι ἔννεπε μούσα" ("Tell me of a man, Muse"), in both cases handing over authority for the tale to a divine source.⁸⁷ But in neither poem does the invocation go beyond this: the poem enjoins the muse to sing, and so she does, giving us the poems that we now attribute to Homer. As Stella P. Revard notes, "Homer speaks little about himself in either the *Iliad* or the *Odyssey*" (125), and so, beyond these two brief invocations and a third in the second book of the *Iliad*, "Homer's epics say almost nothing about the relationship of poet and muse" (139, n. 4), since there really is no "poet" or narrator in the poem with which the muse might have a relationship. In the absence of a second voice to collide with the muse's, the poem presents no conflict between

⁸⁷ All Greek text is from the Loeb editions. Translations for Homer from the Loeb's, translations for Hesiod from M.L. West.

authorities. But even in Hesiod's *Theogony* (whose significance for *Paradise Lost* both Revard and Porter discuss), in which the narrator makes himself a presence in the text by explaining at length how the muses came to him and bade him sing, the narrator's abdication is unvexed. “Μουσάων Ἑλικωνιάδων ἀρχώμεθ' αἰδεῖν,” Hesiod begins (“From the Muses of Helicon, let us begin our singing”), before proceeding to narrate for 115 lines how the muses taught him to sing and how “ἐνέπνευσαν δέ μοι αὐδὴν / θέσπιν” (“they breathed into me wondrous voice,” 30-31); though it is Hesiod who sings, that singing is quite literally “from the muses,” insofar as his voice is itself the breath of those goddesses. Hesiod may thus be present in the text, a voice with a relationship with the muses, but in that relationship he is merely a vessel, a vector through which the muses tell the story. Once he has explained that this is the case, no more mention of their relationship is made, and the rest of the tale is told without the need to differentiate between the source and the agent.⁸⁸

Once the invocation to a muse becomes something more than just a prayer to the divine, however, once it becomes also an allusion to the poems of Homer and of Hesiod and of Pindar and the rest⁸⁹ and, to use C.S. Lewis' term, “secondary” epic emerges, the relationship begins to grow more complicated. When Vergil begins the *Aeneid*, the narrator does not first ask the muse to sing, nor does he claim to be singing, as Hesiod, “from the muses.” Instead, the *Aeneid* begins, “Arma uirumque cano” (“I sing of arms and a man”), the first-person singular indicative “cano” asserting without equivocation that the voice of the poem is “I,” the narrator, and not a

⁸⁸ The one exception comes at ll.965-968, where Hesiod, having finished the tale of the gods, invokes the muses a second time to “sing of the company of the goddesses, all those who were bedded with mortal men, immortal themselves, and bore children resembling the gods.”

⁸⁹ I mention Pindar here only because Revard finds his invocations a compelling precedent for Milton's. For the purposes of this dissertation, however, I am for the most part leaving out any discussion of the tradition of lyric invocations, in part because delving into the lyric tradition would make this chapter too long and too complicated, and in part because lyric is not my area of expertise.

voice from elsewhere. When the muse does appear at line 8, she is invoked to speak on a very specific and limited topic:

Musa, mihi causas memora, quo numine laeso
quidue dolens regina deum tot uoluerit casus
insignem pietate uirum, tot adire labores
impulerit. (I.8-11)

(Muse, recall to me the causes, for what wounded will or what grief did the queen of the gods drive a man distinguished for his piety to go through so many misfortunes, to encounter so many labors.)

The demand that the muse tell the narrator what he needs to know recalls the end of Hesiod's invocation to the *Theogony*, in which he asks, “ταυτά μοι ἔσπετε Μουσαι, Ολύμπια δώματ' ἔχουσαι / ἐξ αρχης, καὶ εἶπαθ', ὅ τι πρῶτον γένετ' αὐτῶν” (“Tell me this from the beginning, Muses who dwell in Olympus, and say, what things among them came first,” 114-115), but whereas Hesiod is asking the muses to tell him the whole *Theogony* from the beginning (*ταυτα*, “this,” refers to the birth and lives of the gods), Vergil's narrator here merely asks for the cause that initiates the tale that he will tell. Hesiod wants the whole story; Vergil wants the reason behind the story. Because the *Aeneid* extends far beyond these “causas,” telling not just of Juno's *ira* but of all the suffering that anger causes for Aeneas, the narrator's voice distinguishes itself from that of his muse, introducing the poem from the beginning as a tale backed by divine authority, but constructed and sung by a mortal man.

By separating his voice from the muse's, Vergil's narrator buys himself something neither Homer's nor Hesiod's narrator has: critical distance from the events in the narrative. The poems of both Homer and Hesiod, because their narrators claim to convey the story straight from the gods to our ears, are presented to the reader as immediate, as self-evident, self-revealing narratives that hide nothing from mortal minds. This immediacy bears out Auerbach's claim about the *Odyssey* that “what is momentarily being narrated... is the only present, pure and without perspective,” and that “this 'real' world [of the poem] into which we are lured, exists for itself, contains

nothing but itself; the Homeric poems conceal nothing, they contain no teaching and no second meaning” (*Mimesis* 12, 13); just as every detail about the characters and their world in these poems is externalized, leaving no room for interpretive speculation, the narrative too presents itself as nothing but surface, as pure communication, without complication by some pesky narrator that might have his own ideas about the significance of the events being narrated. But this is not the case in the *Aeneid*. Because Vergil's narrator establishes himself from the beginning as an independent voice, calling on the muse but at the same time distinct from her, he is able to question the knowledge the muse imparts. “Tantaene animis caelestibus irae?” (“can such wrath dwell in heavenly minds?”), the narrator asks of the muses in an impudent moment immediately after he first invokes their aid, expressing a moment of doubt, of disbelief that such suffering as Aeneas experienced could be sent from the gods (I.11). This doubt emerges later with a more critical edge as Aeneas wars against the Rutulians:

Quis mihi nunc tot acerba deus, quis carmine caedes
 diuersas obitumque ducum, quos aequore toto
 inque vicem nunc Turnus agit, nunc Troius heros,
 expediat? tanton placuit concurrere motu,
 Iuppiter, aeterna gentis in pace futuras? (XII.500-504)
 (What god may tell me now of such great horror, who tell of so many
 different deaths of opposing leaders, whom now Turnus, now the
 Trojan hero drives forth in the succession on the level plain? Was it
 pleasing, Jupiter, so greatly to disturb peoples who would live together
 in lasting peace?)

Once again the narrator sounds a note of disbelief that the source for his tale could come from the heavens in his first question, but the second question adds to the first a touch of irony, perhaps even of sarcasm; if Jove can be pleased to disturb these peoples with war, a war between future friends, then presumably the gods can easily tell the narrator about the death on that bloody field, if only because they caused it to happen. These small critical moments in the *Aeneid*, the “critique of the waste and

futility of war” Porter mentions in which the narrator stops narrating in order to comment upon the action, complicate attempts to read Vergil's epic straightforwardly as propaganda for the empire by suggesting to us that perhaps we do not have to approve of the gods' carrying-on and of the wars men fight in their names, and that, though the story may have a divine source, it is still left to mortals to decide the import of their tale. This is precisely the “perspective” that is lacking in the Homeric epics: the small gap between the narrative and the individual who receives and relates it that prevents the narrative from being wholly and immediately present, from becoming the only reality, and that allows a narrator or a reader not just to sing or to hear but also to think.

Given that *Paradise Lost* narrates the fall of man from his immediate communion with the divine to an epistemological position mediated by the lack of that communion, we can on some level read Milton's epic as an explanation of how epic history moves from primary to secondary epic, from Homer's *ἄειδε θεά* to Vergil's *cano*. But in its opening invocation, *Paradise Lost* sets itself in a more complicated relation to those predecessor texts, and particularly to the *Theogony* and to the *Aeneid*. On the one hand, Milton's narrator rejects the immediacy of the Hesiodic narrator through a double allusion. The opening of the poem invokes the “Heav'nly Muse,”

that on the secret top
Of Oreb, or of Sinai didst inspire
That shepherd, who first taught the chosen seed,
In the beginning how the heav'ns and earth
Rose out of chaos[.] (6-10)

There are two relative clauses here, the first of which (“that on the secret top... that shepherd”) identifies the narrator's muse as the one that inspired “that shepherd,” and the second of which identifies the shepherd as the one “who first taught the chosen seed”; the connection between these two clauses, between inspiring and teaching, is “that shepherd,” who is the object of inspiration and the subject or agent of teaching.

While most commentators assume that “that shepherd” refers to Moses, Porter notes that Hesiod also seems to fit the invocation's description. He writes,

Hesiod, too, had been pasturing sheep on a hillside when the Muses called him (*Theogony* 23). Furthermore, the next two lines [9-10] are more literally referable to Hesiod than to Moses. The Muses tell Hesiod “from the beginning” (ἐξ ἀρχῆς, *Theogony* 115) “how the heaven and the earth and all things else rose out of chaos.” “Chaos” (χάος) is Hesiod's own word, first attested in Greek here in the *Theogony* (line 116). (47)

Though Moses gives us the story of Genesis and thus narrates God's separation of the heavens from an earth that was before “without form, and void” (Gen. 1:2), for Porter the verbal echo in Milton's lines points more clearly to Hesiod. Porter might have added that the connection between the two clauses in lines 6-10 is stronger if this moment alludes to Hesiod. Both Moses and Hesiod are “inspired” when divinity makes itself present to them: Moses when God appears to him to deliver his commandments and Hesiod when the muses appear to him to teach him to sing the *Theogony*. But whereas for Hesiod this inspiration causes him to teach “how the heavens and earth / Rose out of chaos,” Moses' role as Genesis' narrator is unrelated to his encounter on Sinai's top with God, in which he is given no narrative but only commands. Only Hesiod's narrator teaches the chosen seed *because* he has been inspired.

But confining the allusion at lines 6-10 to the *Theogony* does not work, even if *Paradise Lost*'s construction of tradition would allow us to do so: lines 9-10 may be “more literally referable” to the *Theogony*, but lines 6-7 point quite specifically to Moses, and specifically to Moses receiving God's commandments on top “Of Oreb” (Deut. 4.10-14) “or of Sinai” (Ex. 19:20-20:17). In contrast, Hesiod's muses appear to him on Mount Helicon. These two texts, one Judeo-Christian, one pagan, one about God's law, one a narrative of the gods' beginning, cannot be reconciled with each other, but neither can one win out over the other, since the allusion seems to refer

quite specifically to both at the same time. This ambiguity or doubleness is located most concretely in the element that ties those two muses, and the two clauses that allude to them, together: “that shepherd.” The deictic “that” seems to point specifically—*that* shepherd, not this one or the other one—and it introduces the clause “who first taught...” as a restrictive rather than a non-restrictive clause; in other words, the fact that “that shepherd” taught the chosen seed is not some coincidental fact but rather his identifying feature, the characteristic that makes him “*that* shepherd” and not another. This specificity slips when we realize that, as Porter points out above, the word “shepherd” refers as easily to Hesiod as to Moses while it at the same time through the restrictive clause anchors the identity of the shepherd as the one who taught the chosen seed to the shepherd whom the muse inspires.

Because the shepherd becomes the fulcrum for this allusion, it is worth looking at the two shepherding scenes that allow Exodus and the *Theogony* to be thus invoked simultaneously. In Exodus 3, Moses is leading a flock of sheep when he comes “to the mountain of God, *even* to Horeb,” whereupon God appears to him and tells him to save the Israelites from their slavery in Egypt. When Moses questions what he should say when the Israelites ask who sent him, God replies by identifying himself:

And God said unto Moses, I AM THAT I AM: and he said, Thus shalt thou say unto the children of Israel, I AM has sent me unto you. And God said moreover unto Moses, Thus shalt thou say unto the children of Israel, The LORD [YHWH] God of your fathers, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob, hath sent me unto you: this *is* my name for ever, and this *is* my memorial unto all generations. (Ex. 3:14-15)

As the editors of *The New Oxford Annotated Bible* note, God names himself three times in this passage: “I am that I am” (“I am who I am” in the NRSV), “I am,” and “Lord,” the tetragrammaton. “All three names are ambiguous,” they write, “as is appropriate to the mysteriousness of Israel's God, though they may emphasize God's immanence” (87 n.14-15). Human understanding—whether Moses' or the reader's—

may struggle to comprehend these names, but these names are mysterious to the fallen intellect precisely because they reveal God in his “immanence,” as absolute being, as presence. Hesiod's muses in the *Theogony* are likewise immediately present to him as he tends his flock, or at least they were, when they “taught [him] fine singing” (καλῆν ἐδίδαξαν αἰοιδῆν), saying,

'Shepherds that camp in the wild, disgraces, merest bellies:
we know to tell many lies that sound like truth,
but we know to sing reality, when we will.'
So said mighty Zeus' daughters, the sure of utterance, and they gave me
a branch of springing bay to pluck for a staff, a handsome one, and they
breathed into me wondrous voice, so that I should celebrate things of
the future and things that were aforetime. And they told me to sing of
the family of blessed ones who are for ever, and first and last always to
sing of themselves. (West 3-4)

Here again the voice of the divine speaks to be recognized, in order to make its presence known by demanding of Hesiod that he “first and last always sing of” the muses. And just as Moses is charged with telling the Israelites that God will smite their slavers, these divinities endow Hesiod also with a prophetic voice, allowing him to “celebrate things of the future” and to relate the “reality,” the truth, the muses know to sing. But the content of what each prophet is commanded to tell is very different. To “sing of the family of blessed ones who are for ever, and first and last always to sing of” the muses is, for Hesiod, to tell the story of how these “blessed ones” came to be, to deliver a history that takes place in time and that can be expressed in language. When God says to Moses, “I am that I am,” he presents exactly the opposite of a narrative: in expressing his “immanence,” God reveals that he is contained neither by time nor by language, that he cannot be described or determined except by reference to himself, and that, without quality or quantity, he simply *is*. God is God.

The slipperiness of the deictic “that” in line 8 of *Paradise Lost* shows just how far Milton's poetic world is from that of Moses, where God's naming points not just to

his specificity but to his being, to his presence in the world; “that shepherd” points ambiguously because *Paradise Lost* cannot speak in the language of God. More importantly, neither does it hear this divine language. Whereas both texts to which Milton's poem at this moment alludes depict the shepherds hearing their gods speak, in Milton's first invocation the interruption of the voice of God to which the poem's narrator might hearken and be inspired is conspicuously absent—it is only called for but never, as it does for Moses and Hesiod, does it appear before the narrator in the poem. Insofar as the poem is invoking Moses' God, this absence of the divine voice signals the difference between Moses' purpose and *Paradise Lost's*, where Moses in the passages alluded to is charged by God's “inspiration” to repeat God's commands (not to tell the story of Genesis), while Milton's narrator, like Hesiod, sets out to tell a narrative. Such narrative could not persist in the immediate presence of God, whose being denies the temporality of narrative and presents only itself; were God to “sing” as the narrator commands, the poem would simply stop.⁹⁰ Through the allusion, *Paradise Lost* reveals at the outset that it is contingent upon fallenness, upon the lack of God's presence. By doing so, however, the poem also refuses the poetics of inspiration presented in Hesiod, where divine presence *is* the source of narrative. Whereas Hesiod begins his poem claiming to have been *already* inspired, saying that the muses εδίδαξαν (“taught”) him fine singing, *Paradise Lost* begins calling for the muse's presence, demanding, “Instruct me,” an imperative in lieu of Hesiod's past-tense verb that implies that the muse is not yet present. Nor does invoking her seem to

⁹⁰ And this is why the poem establishes only a coincidental link between the inspiration of the shepherd and his telling of the beginning of the world. Milton's narrator could have just as easily invoked the muse who inspired “that shepherd *to teach* first the chosen seed,” but this would not have described Moses' situation. By confining Moses' inspiration to the top “of Oreb or of Sinai,” *Paradise Lost* establishes that the inspiration to which it alludes is an inspiration that does not yield narrative, and that can only yield command. See also William B. Hunter and Stevie Davies discussion of the identification of the muse in this early invocation, in which they point out this initial identification of God as the muse and then argue that, “for the Christian poet, there is available no direct theophany comparable with that of Moses,” and so, they argue, Milton's narrator has to move on, first to consider the Son as his muse, then the Holy Spirit (Hunter 32-35).

make her present, as it does in the *Iliad*. In contrast to Homer's ἀείδε (“sing”), which is immediately followed by the narrative the poem has asked the muse to tell, Milton's “sing” is followed by another twenty lines of verse in which we know that the muse is *not* singing because the narrator is still invoking. Neither taught by the muse, nor able to call her immediately into being, nor able to sustain her presence were she to arrive, the narrator of *Paradise Lost* invokes the muse to reveal her distance from him.

But if Milton's “sing” is not Hesiod's αἰδέειν nor Homer's ἀείδε, neither is it Vergil's *cano*. Though the opening of *Paradise Lost* rejects the immediacy of divine inspiration, its narrative voice at the same time turns away from the greater agency of the *Aeneid*'s narrator, who takes responsibility for the primary narrative—the tale of “arms and a man”—and leaves only the back-story, the “causas” of Aeneas' sufferings, to his muse. The difference between the two epic's relationships with their respective muses comes most conspicuously to the fore in *Paradise Lost* when Milton's narrator asks of his muse,

Say first, for heav'n hides nothing from thy view
Nor the deep tract of hell, say first what cause
Moved our grandparents in that happy state,
Favored of Heav'n so highly, to fall off
From their Creator[.] (27-31)

In his edition of the poem, Elledge calls these lines “an epic convention” and notes that “Homer and Virgil both began by asking the Muse to tell which gods (or why a god) had caused the events of the story” (p.9, n.28). The difference, which Elledge's note elides, between asking *which* (τις, also meaning “who”) of the gods caused the fight between the Trojans and the Greeks, and asking *why* Juno plagued Aeneas is not inconsiderable, and it signals the difference between the immediacy of Homer's narrative and the Vergilian narrator's more questioning, critical stance toward his muse: the voice of the *Iliad* only needs to know who “brought these two [the Trojans and the Greeks] together to contend” (I.8), to know the characters in the story, while

the narrator of the *Aeneid*, who has already named the “who” behind Aeneas' troubles in the fifth line, demands an explanation for the goddess' behavior, a reason why Aeneas has to suffer at Juno's hands. Milton's epic question moves somewhere between these positions, settling on neither though seeming to adopt both. Like Vergil's narrator, *Paradise Lost* asks for the “cause” of the tale that will unfold, more a “why” than a “which” or a “who,” but this “why” quickly becomes a “who” in line 33, when the narrator asks, “Who first seduced them to that foul revolt?” The poem can conflate these two questions—“what cause?” and “who?”—because Satan is neither a “cause” of the fall in the way that the “dolens regina deum” is the cause of Aeneas' suffering, nor is he simply the agent responsible for the history being told the way that Zeus is the one who “brought these two [the Trojans and the Greeks] together to contend” (*Iliad* I.8); instead, as the first chapter showed, the very fact of Satan's fallenness, rather than his specific intentions, leads Adam and Eve to fall—his fallenness causes them to become like him.⁹¹ In other words, the reason for the fall, the “why,” is Satan himself, the creation of fallenness he embodies, and therefore the “why” is also a “who,” without the complicating factor of motive that is Vergil's object of inquiry. Milton's narrator thus goes beyond the *Iliad*'s demand for just the facts and instead invokes the muse in order to understand the underlying causes of the events that the poem narrates, just as Vergil's narrator does, but the question “what cause?” in *Paradise Lost* implies no insolence, as Vergil's question does, because it bears no critical edge; the pursuit of causes in Milton's universe does not lead his narrator to question the motives of gods or the righteousness of divine anger, and so he can ask the heavens for answers without running afoul of his intention to “justify the ways of God to men.”

⁹¹ See Chapter 1, section 3.

In the absence of the *Aeneid's* critical stance toward the gods, *Paradise Lost's* turn to the muse for answers signals a very different balance of power between narrator and muse, a balance that reflects more broadly the relationship between the human and the divine in each poem. Despite his initial surrender to an absent muse in the opening of the poem, Milton's narrator does not heap all responsibility for the poem on his divine inspiration; in Book VII, he speaks his own *cano*, claiming, "More safe I sing with mortal voice, unchanged / To hoarse or mute, though fall'n on evil days, / On evil days now fall'n, and evil tongues" (VII.24-26). But this "I sing" places a very different emphasis on human agency than does the *Aeneid's* *cano*. Milton's narrator ventures to claim "I sing" only after he has announced, "Half yet remains unsung, but narrower bound / Within the visible diurnal sphere" (21-22), indicating a shift in the narrative from divine and infernal affairs to the world perceptible to human senses. Just as in the *Aeneid*, where the narrator sings "arma virumque" but asks the muse to tell of "regina[m] deum," the narrator in *Paradise Lost* seems to be dividing labor with the muse, asking the divine spirit to tell him about the affairs of heaven while taking for himself the concerns of the "visible diurnal sphere." In the *Aeneid*, however, the concerns of human history are of greater importance than the squabbling of gods. When, in his own Book VII, Vergil's narrator invokes his muse again to signal the shift from the wanderings of Aeneas to the war that will lead to the founding of the Roman race, he announces to Erato that "maior rerum mihi nascitur ordo, / maius opus moveo" ("a greater order of things opens before me, a greater work I begin," VII.43-44).⁹² With the event that will culminate in the founding of the Roman race approaching, Vergil's narrator signals an expansion of the narrative, a movement

⁹² This is the first time in the poem that the narrator names his muse. Erato, the muse of lyric poetry and particularly of love poetry, seems to me a strange choice of muses at this moment, at which Vergil's narrative turns to war, battle, and slaughter, the stuff of which epic poems are made. Why Vergil's narrator would appeal to this specific muse (who is occasionally Ovid's muse in the *Amores*), and what it might mean that he chooses this muse rather than Calliope, I have not the expertise to speculate.

outward from small matters to large that lets us know that what is about to happen is of world-historical importance. In contrast, Milton's Book VII invocation, while also signaling a movement toward an important event in human history—the fall of man—calls this new narrative “narrower bound,” a smaller rather than a greater order of things.⁹³ This moment in *Paradise Lost* diminishes “the visible diurnal sphere,” even as the poem turns toward it, by comparison with the great war in heaven, marking the world of human beings as something less than the divine.

In contrast to the *Aeneid*, where the narrator's *cano* limits the muse's authority, the “I sing” of *Paradise Lost* shows only the limitations of the narrator; the “mortal voice” with which he sings is “narrower bound,” confined to tell of the “visible diurnal sphere” that is less expansive than the heaven that created it. That Milton's narrator chooses this moment to voice his “I sing” thus only reinforces his surrender to the muse in Book I, demonstrating his own subordination to divine authority by claiming for himself the lesser half of the song. This is not the subordination of Hesiod's or of Homer's narrators, who serve as vectors for the song of an immediately present muse, but rather it is once again the recognition of a gap between narrator and muse, and specifically a gap between the muse's authority and the authority of a narrator who must invoke a divine presence because he knows himself unworthy to proceed otherwise. Thus the narrator asks the muse in Book I, “Instruct me” (I.19), saying that his mind is “dark” and “low” (I.22, 23), while in the subsequent invocations he begs the muse to “plant eyes” in his mind (III.51, 53) and “implores” Urania to “govern... [his] song,” that he be spared the fate of Orpheus (VII. 38, 30); every time he invokes his muse, Milton's narrator does so to ask her to help him to overcome some

⁹³ The etymology of “narrow” may also be in play here. The OED lists the adjective “narrow” as cognate with “Middle Dutch *nar, nare, naer* narrow, dreary, dismal (Dutch *naar* disagreeable, unpleasant, sad, dismal), Old Saxon *naro, naru* narrow, depressing.” Certainly, the fall of man is a “depressing” subject, and this use of “narrower” in Book VII may be predicting the narrator's announcement in Book IX, “I now must change / Those notes to tragic” (5-6).

deficiency, pointing in all instances to his own inadequacy to the task at hand. Such proclamations of unworthiness are foreign to both the vatic narrators of Hesiod and Homer and to Vergil's critically distanced narrator, for the first two because the muse's presence eliminates the problem of mortal deficiency, and for the third because, for Vergil, the voice proper for telling the story of arms and a man is that of another man.

Such claims of inadequacy do, however, appear in later Christian epics.⁹⁴

After beginning his song, “Canto l'arme pietose e 'l capitano / che 'l gran sepolcro liberò di Cristo” (“I sing the pious armies, and that Captain / who set the great tomb of our Savior free,” I.1.1-2), the narrator of *Gerusalemme Liberata* continues,

O Musa, tu che di caduchi allori
non circondi la fronte in Elicona,
ma su nel cielo infra i beati cori
hai di stelle immortali aurea corona,
tu spira al petto mio celesti ardori,
tu rischiara il mio canto, e tu perdona
s'intesso fregi al ver, s'adorno in parte
d'altri dilette, che de' tuoi, le carte. (I.2)
(O Muse, who do not string a garland of the fading laurel fronds
of Helicon, but far in heaven among the blessed choirs wreath
deathless stars into a golden crown, breathe into my heart the
fire of heavenly love, illuminate my song, and forgive me, if I
interweave any decoration with the truth, if I adorn the pages
with any delightful things but yours.)⁹⁵

The resonance with the opening of the *Aeneid* in these lines is strong, but the difference between Vergil's *pietas*, the devotion of Aeneas less to the gods than to his

⁹⁴ This is not to imply that claims of unworthiness by the speaker in literature begin with Italian epic. Curtius, discussing what he calls “affected modesty” in literature, traces such gestures back to Cicero and in particular to judicial oratory, but then notes that “it is very early transferred to other genres,” pointing to Latin writers Tacitus, Gellius, Ennodius, and Fortunatus, before moving on to Christian writers like Jerome (83). “In the Rome of the Empire,” Curtius writes, “formulas of submission could not but develop as courtly glorification of the person of the Emperor increased. ... In the pagan Rome, then, formulas of self-disparagement were current which could be taken over by Christians” (84). My project is invested in tracing differences rather than apparent continuities, and it is certainly the case that gestures of submission by Christians toward their god, as in the case of Christian epic invocations, take a very different meaning from gestures of submission by Romans toward their emperor, but recognizing these differences requires first a recognition of the history of such rhetorically similar expressions of inadequacy.

⁹⁵ Translations are from the Esolen translation of the poem, but I have modified them in places to reflect the more literal sense of the original. Italian text comes from the Sansone.

family and to the future of his people, and Tasso's "l'arme pietose," the Christian devotion of Goffredo's men to the purpose of reclaiming a holy site, immediately sets the two epics apart. And though Tasso's narrator, like Vergil's, invokes the muse at a distance, claiming first "Canto" and then only in the second stanza calling to the "Musa," this invocation only subordinates the narrator to his muse by asking in advance, "tu perdona"—Tasso's narrator will be doing the singing, but that singing may well be flawed and untrue, and so he must be forgiven by the muse whom he asks to inspire him with "celesti ardori."⁹⁶ As in *Paradise Lost*, the claim "I sing" in *Gerusalemme Liberata* expresses the weakness of the narrator; in this case, the narrator's weakness is the risk he runs of being wrong, the possibility that he might speak "d'altri dilette, che de' tuoi," other pleasing things not given him by the muse. These "d'altri dilette" are in parallel with "fregi al ver," decorations of the truth, indicating that to speak anything other than what the muse tells him is to speak falsehood. The narrator goes on to explain that the cause of this risk, what makes it such decorations of the truth possible, is the seductive nature of poetic language:

Sai che là corre il mondo ove piú versi
 di sue dolcezze il lusinghier Parnaso,
 e che 'l vero, condito in molli versi,
 i piú schivi allettando ha persuaso.
 Così a l'egro fanciul porgiamo aspersi
 di soavi licor gli orli del vaso:
 succhi amari ingannato intanto ei beve,
 e da l'inganno suo vita riceve. (I.3)

⁹⁶ I am using the Germanic "forgive" for *perdona* instead of the obvious cognate, "pardon," in order to convey more the sense than the etymology. "Pardon" in English frequently indicates official exculpation from guilt, whereas "forgive" often suggests emotional content, a relinquishing of anger and personal reconciliation with the offender; thus the president pardons you, but does not forgive you, while your friend forgives you. "Forgive" is also the term we usually associate in English with religious pardon—we ask God to forgive us our sins—and so it is the more obviously appropriate term in this instance. The two words in their formation are identical: a word for "give" (*donare* and *giefan*) plus an intensifier (*per-* and *for-*). That both the Latinate and the Germanic would persist in English is likely a result of their different distributions in English, and the amateur philologist in me guesses that "pardon" came to function in an official capacity because it entered the language through the French-speaking court after the Norman invasion.

(You know the world delights in lovely things, for men have hearts sweet poetry will win, and when the truth is seasoned in soft rhyme it lures and leads the most reluctant in, as we brush with honey the brim of a cup, to fool a feverish child to take his medicine: he drinks the bitter juice and cannot tell—but it is a mistake that makes him well.)⁹⁷

Adorning the truth is not, for Tasso's narrator, equated with lying; the aesthetic pleasures of poetry, the “dolcezza il lusinghier Parnaso,” are independent of its truth content, and thus the narrator can worry that he will tell “fregi al ver” rather than the “diletti” that come from the muse while describing both truth and untruth as beautiful or pleasing. And the danger for the narrator is precisely that both are pleasing; as part of “il mondo ove piú versi / di sue dolcezza il lusinghier Parnaso” (“the world [that] delights in lovely things, for men have hearts sweet poetry will win”), he is presumably drawn by the temptations of beautiful verse and thus prone to excessive “fregi,” to decoration without regard to truth.

Tasso's narrator thus submits himself to the approval of a muse whose “diletti” are always truthful because the medium in which he writes encourages error, leading the pleasure-seeking mind of mortal man toward the “soavo licor” (sweet liquor) of delightful verse without regard for the “succhi amari” (bitter juice) of truth. But this submission to his own muse who is “su nel cielo” (“above in heaven”) does not match the narrator's submission to the “Heavn'ly Muse” in *Paradise Lost*. Whereas Tasso's narrator fears that poetry is too seductive to be entirely safe, Milton's narrator in Book VII expresses concern that just the opposite is true, that his poetry might not be seductive enough to stave off “the barbarous dissonance / Of Bacchus and his revelers, the race / Of that wild rout that tore the Thracian bard” (32-34). Contrary to the

⁹⁷ This stanza is itself an allusion to the opening *De Rerum Natura*, l.936-943, in which Lucretius claims that he writes in verse because, just as coating the rim of a cup with honey will coax a child to drink wormwood needed for a cure, he “musaeo contigens cuncta lepore” (“touches everything with the muse's charm”) in order to make the bitter truths of atomism more palatable to his audience. The great difference between the two passages is the truth each poem is trying to make us swallow: whereas Lucretius teaches us a “ratio,” an account of the nature of things—both a science and a philosophy—Tasso's “vero” is both historical and, more importantly, spiritual, a Christian allegory.

readings of many critics trying to understand this invocation as biographical, the narrator's fear here is not that he will, like Orpheus, be torn limb from limb; he does not ask for protection from the revelers themselves, but rather he asks the muse to “drive far off” only their “barbarous dissonance,” the “savage clamor” that “drowned / Both harp and voice” of Orpheus (32, 36-37). Neither is this, as Fish would have it, the fear “of having your voice taken from you” (*Milton* 296). The narrator is quite clear that his voice is “unchanged / To hoarse or mute,” not silenced, not taken from him; but he is concerned that it may, nevertheless, go unheard, that his song may be swallowed by the revelers' “dissonance.” In the *Metamorphoses'* account of Orpheus' demise, the poem refers to the blood “non exauditi ... vatis” (“of the unheard poet,” XI.19) and describes Orpheus, “in illo tempore primum / inrita dicentem nec quicquam voce moventem” (“in that moment speaking without effect for the first time, nor moving anyone with his voice,” XI.39-40), describing a poet who can still speak, but whose voice has lost its effect. The reason his words do not move the bacchantes is that, as *Paradise Lost* describes it, his song is “drowned” in the din:

Cunctaque tela forent cantu mollita, sed ingens
clamor et infracto Berecynthia tibia cornu
tympanaque et plausus et Bacchei ululatus
obstrepuere sono citharae[.] (XI.16-19)
(And all of their weapons might have been softened by his
singing, but the huge noise and the Berecynthian flutes⁹⁸ and
the drums and the sound of the blows and the cries of the
bacchantes opposed the sound of his lyre.)

When Milton's narrator asks the muse to drive off the sound of the Bacchic revelers, he is expressing a fear that his voice, and thus his poem, might be lost amongst the barbarous noise of the audience his poem addresses, and so lose its ability to affect that audience, just as Orpheus' song, which had the power to “soften” the Bacchantes' weapons, is “inrita,” without effect, when the sound of the rout opposes it. Here the

⁹⁸ I am using Mandelbaum's translation for “infracto Berecynthia tibia cornu.”

verse does not have the inherent ability to persuade even those who are “schivi” (averse), as *Gerusalemme Liberata* does; Milton's narrator must instead call on the muse to keep the noise of the “schivi” away that his poem might be heard. The divine in Milton's poem is thus not the bringer of truth to the universally persuasive language of men, as it is in Tasso's poem, but rather the muse is the bringer of one man's language to other men's ears, the force that makes *Paradise Lost* intelligible over the common din.⁹⁹

But this turn to the muse as a mediator that can bring *Paradise Lost* to other men's ears only occurs halfway through the poem, at the moment when the narrator takes over the singing with the muse as his guide. Until this point, Milton's narrator seems to follow *Gerusalemme Liberata*'s request of the muse, “tu rischiara mio canto” (“illuminate my song”); “what in me is dark / Illuminate,” Milton's narrator asks in Book I (22-23), while in Book III he calls the muse “thou celestial Light” and asks her to “Shine inward, and the mind through all her powers / Irradiate” (51-53). Though both poems ask the muse literally to shed some light on their respective situations, however, the object of illumination is different for each. Tasso's narrator asks his muse to enlighten his song, to keep his “diletti” on the path of truth. Milton's narrator instead asks that his own mind be “illuminated” and “irradiated,” that the muse compensate for his lack of vision rather than for the dangerously seductive nature of the verse itself. Whereas in Book VII the narrator submits himself to the muse because of his inability to reach other men, here he must invoke her aid because, while “heav'n hides nothing from [her] view / Nor the deep tract of hell” (I.27-28), divine and infernal events are “invisible to mortal sight” (III.55)—that is, he must invoke her aid because of his mind's inability to “see” heaven. In these references to light and

⁹⁹ Kerrigan describes the reason for this mediation between singer and reader: “Milton cannot sing of Creation unless the Spirit who presided over Creation also presides over the creation of his song. Similarly, the reader cannot [sic] understand the song unless the presiding Spirit also governs him. Thus Urania, source of all inspiration, must ‘find’ the appropriate audience for the inspired epic” (133).

particularly to seeing, *Paradise Lost's* early imprecations to the muse resemble the proemium of the first book of *The Faerie Queene*, in which Spenser's narrator asks his "Goddesse heauenly bright" to "Shed thy faire beames into my feeble eyne" (I.4.1, 5). As in *Paradise Lost*, Spenser's narrator needs divine light to "raise [his] thoughtes" that they might compass the divine object of his song—in this case, "that true glorious type" of his "Goddesse," Gloriana or Elizabeth (I.4.6, 7). As in the *Aeneid*, only the heavens seem capable of revealing the heavens, and so the narrators of *The Faerie Queene* and *Paradise Lost*, who unlike Vergil's set out to glorify (or justify) their gods, find themselves paradoxically incapable of doing so without the aid of those objects they wish to praise.¹⁰⁰

Each narrator's inability to praise the divine without first calling on the divine to help them, however, arises from a different source. Spenser's narrator frequently claims that his own personal inadequacy prevents him from doing justice to Gloriana without her divine aid; thus he describes himself in the first proem as dressed "in lowly Shephards weeds" when he is "enforst a farre vnfitte taske" by the muse, and calls himself "all too meane" to "blazon broade emongst [the muse's] learned throng" (I.1.2-3, 7-8), suggesting that a singer of pastoral verse is ill-equipped to the task of romance epic. This insistence on his lack of ability as an epic poet continues frequently throughout the proems of *The Faerie Queene*, and before the end he tells us that he is only an "Apprentice of the skill" of verse (III.3.1) and merely a "rusticke Muse" (III.5.2), and that he is his goddess' "basest thrall" (V.11.6). As in *Gerusalemme Liberata*, this inadequacy causes the narrator to ask his goddess to "pardon the boldnesse" of the singer (V.11.6), but for Spenser's narrator the problem is

¹⁰⁰ William Kerrigan makes the claim that Spenser's "invocation is hardly theological at all," and that his epic "is dedicated to Elizabeth and England, not to God, and its invocation does not establish a theological relationship between the poet and his source in inspiration" (62). But inasmuch as the narrator invokes Elizabeth as his "Goddesse," it seems to me that he is invoking her as a divine entity, and thus his relationship to her is also a "theological relationship."

not, as in Tasso's poem, that his verse may stray from the truth, but rather that his lack of poetic skill makes him unsuited to "discourse of so diuine a read, / As [Glorianna'] great iustice prayesd ouer all" (V.11.7-9). Earlier in the poem, he similarly asks,

O pardon me thus to enfold
In couert vele and wrap in shadowes light,
That feeble eyes your glory may behold
Which ells could not endure those beames bright
But would bee dazled with exceeding light. (II.5.1-5)

Here the narrator returns to the problem of seeing the divine, but, instead of asking her to illuminate his weak eyes, he now asks her forgiveness for obscuring her brightness for the sake of "feeble eyes" that could not bear it. A moment that resonates with Raphael's assertion in *Paradise Lost* that he can relate the war in heaven only by "lik'ning spiritual to corporal form" (V.573), this apology for allegory appears, like the passage in *Paradise Lost*, to point at a more general infirmity of mankind, to the inability of human eyes to behold divine subjects. Subsequent poems, however, suggest otherwise. For when in Book III Spenser's narrator returns to the difficulty of portraying Gloriana, again asking pardon for his "coloured showes" that only "shadow" her "glorious pourtaict" (3.8, 7), he points out that another poet has indeed shown her "in liuing colours, and right hew" (4.1). Sir Walter Raleigh's poem, the narrator claims, showed "his heauens fayrest light" complete with "the wonder of her beames bright," suggesting that Gloriana need not be veiled to be portrayed or seen. Upon viewing these "beames bright" that he claims cannot be viewed in Book II, Spenser's narrator finds his "sences lulled," suggesting that the "feeble eyes" of the second poem are his own, and that his infirmity is not shared by a greater poet like Raleigh. It is the narrator's own weakness, his own ability to see his muse, that forces him to resort to allegory, to "vele" her, and thus it is also his own weakness that causes him to call out to that muse to help him to see better.

Milton's narrator likewise admits to a problem with his own eyes, but significantly that very admission suggests that his "feeble eyes" are not what requires him to enlist the muse's aid to his song. In Book III, the narrator refers to his muse as "holy Light" and as the "Bright effluence of bright essence increate" (1, 6) before lamenting,

but thou
Revisit'st not these eyes, that roll in vain
To find thy piercing ray, and find no dawn;
So think a drop serene hath quenched their orbs,
Or dim suffusion veiled. (22-26)

While the narrator of *The Faerie Queene* has weak eyes that cannot see Gloriana's "beames bright" without divine aid, the eyes of Milton's narrator cannot see those beams at all: he is blind, "equaled ... in fate" with "Blind Thamyris and blind Maeonides, / And Tiresias and Phineus" (III.33, 35-36). If this impairment of vision were the cause of the deficiency that causes him to call out to the muse, as it is for Spenser's narrator, then Milton's narrator would thus need the muse to "plant eyes" in his mind in order to view the "things invisible to mortal sight" about which the first half of the poem tell not because he is mortal, but simply because he cannot see. But if his blindness leads him to call on the muse in the first two invocations in the poem, it isn't clear why, in Book VII, he should be able to take over singing, making the muse his mediator rather than his guide. For though he may be able to sing "more safe" once he has returned to the "visible diurnal sphere," it is not because that sphere is visible *to him*; what gives him authority to sing of the "narrower bound" and not of "things invisible to mortal sight" cannot be his ability to perceive the former and not the latter.

Denied "mortal sight" that would allow him to sense the "visible diurnal sphere," the narrator instead claims in Book VII that his "mortal voice" gives him authority in these later books:

Standing on earth, not rapt above the pole,
More safe I sing with mortal voice, unchanged
To hoarse or mute, though fall'n on evil days,
On evil days though fall'n, and evil tongues. (VII.23-26)

Though, as Michael Lieb notes, the “prevailing assumption” is that these lines, “followed by the allusion” to Bacchus, “refer to Milton’s situation brought upon by the Restoration,” it is worth noting that the narrator says that he is “fall'n on evil days” immediately after he has traced his downward movement from the “empyrean air” to the “diurnal sphere”—he has literally “fall'n” into a world of “days” (*Violence* 70).¹⁰¹ The phrase “fall'n on evil days” also admits of more than one reading. The idiom “to fall into” means, according to the OED, “To happen, or be thrown *¶*into, on, or upon (a period of specified character)” (35b), suggesting a passive meaning, and so the narrator may be saying that he has suddenly found himself living in evil days through no fault of his own. But it is also possible to read “on evil days” as adverbial and to read “fall'n” as a description of the narrator's moral condition; on evil days—which is just to say every day in the fallen world—the narrator is a fallen man.¹⁰² This second reading gains force from the similarity between the narrator's claims here and Satan's opening speech in Book I, in which he first recognizes Beëlzebub by saying, “If thou beest he; but O how fall'n! how changed,” and then says of himself that he will not

¹⁰¹ For a brief survey of discussions about this claim, see Lieb’s note on the quoted sentence (n.19, 70-71). Lieb later in his study gives his reason for reading this invocation as in some way biographical: “What is at issue is the extent to which our own understanding of the terrors portrayed at this poetic moment are conditioned by our willingness to believe that they in fact encode a crisis of the most personal sort, a crisis that is very much the product of historical exigencies that bestow upon Milton’s epic an urgency and immediacy of profound significance” (73). My question is why we should have to look outside the text for this “urgency and immediacy”; if we are willing to understand the poem on its own terms, to believe what the narrator is telling us, then the narrator’s fear of being drowned out while being torn limb from limb seems, to my mind, to present enough of an urgent and immediate threat. Kerrigan gives a different reading to these lines, understanding them alongside IX.44 (Milton’s fear that he writes in “an age too late” for epic): “The inspired narrator of *Paradise Lost* feared ‘an age too late,’ feared nothing less than the death of true poetry” (81).

¹⁰² The repetition of “on evil days” in these lines looks forward to the repetition of the description of Eve’s fall “in evil hour” in Book IX (780, 1067), linking the first moment at which humans gained knowledge of evil with the continued suffering that knowledge produces. In Book XI, Adam cries out to Raphael, “O visions ill forseen! Better had I / Lived ignorant of future, so had borne / My part of evil only, each day’s lot / Enough to bear” (763-766), where the lineation reinforces the notion that “each day’s lot” after the fall is each man’s “part of evil.”

“repent or change, / Though changed in outward luster, [his] fixed mind” (I.84, 96-97). A gesture that once again reveals the closeness of the poem's language to Satan's, the fact that the narrator in Book VII uses the words of Satan recognizing his fallen state at the moment when he himself has “fall'n” from heaven to earth suggests a similar recognition on the narrator's part.¹⁰³ The narrator's descent from heaven to earth is thus in some sense a descent into his own fallenness, and his return to the “visible diurnal sphere” a return “evil days” that are the consequence of being fallen.

Since mortality is the price of knowing evil for Adam and Eve, the “mortal voice” with which the narrator sings is a product of his own fallenness, and as such it proves his participation in the “narrower bound” to which he turns in Book VII. Without needing to see it, the narrator thus possesses authority to sing of the “visible diurnal sphere” simply because he belongs to it. But though this emphasis on his own fallenness in this third invocation proves that he is capable of singing of the “narrower bound,” it also explains why he could not by himself sing in the earlier books, why he needed the muse to be his source when the poem was telling of “things invisible to mortal sight.” The limit of the narrator's authority is his mortality, his fallenness; because fallenness consists in not-knowing, and particularly in not knowing God, the narrator from the beginning is “narrower bound,” necessarily confined to the “visible diurnal sphere” by his mind's inability to know the heavens or indeed to know anything beyond his own experience. Yet, unlike the personal deficiency of Spenser's narrator that makes him unable to see the goddess that stronger eyes like Raleigh's may behold, the inadequacy of Milton's narrator runs much deeper and goes far beyond the narrator himself. For whereas in *The Faerie Queene* the narrator's

¹⁰³ As Fowler notes, the narrator continues to connect himself to figures in hell in the next lines. “In darkness, and with dangers compassed round, / And solitude” (VII.27-28) recalls Sin's description of herself in Hell as “in perpetual agony and pain, / With terrors and with clamors compassed round” (II.861-862). Stephen M. Fallon also picks up on this resonance, but sees it as a moment in which “Milton is not in control of the subtle dialogue across half his epic” (Benet 173); Fowler's note on these lines answers Fallon's concerns directly, claiming that Milton “believed everyone was sinful.”

infirmity sets him apart from others who might sing of Gloriana, in *Paradise Lost* the inadequacy of the narrator to the task of singing about divine and infernal matters is precisely what sets him among “the race / Of that wild rout” whose noise he fears. Fallenness is not simply his condition, but the general condition of the “visible diurnal sphere,” the “native element” (VII.16) to which all who sing “with mortal voice” do not fall, but which they are, like the narrator, fallen on.

And this is ultimately the problem facing the narrator of *Paradise Lost* in the poem's first three invocations. While his own fallenness makes him unable to reach the sphere of the divine, the fallenness of humankind makes each man, including the narrator, unable to reach any other. The revolt into particularity that is the consequence of not knowing the divine limits each individual to her own experience, rendering direct communication between individuals impossible; cut off from the divine truth that tied language to the world, the same words in the fallen world mean different things in each individual's context, and so one can never invest one's words with the meaning one wishes to convey.¹⁰⁴ In a poem that sets out to “justify the ways of God to men,” this rift between particular individuals necessarily poses a serious threat to the narrator's stated purpose. But by attempting to circumvent this threat by appeal to the muse, Milton's narrator only renders his voice more powerless. No matter how many times he calls to her, the narrator as a fallen man cannot make his divine muse immediately present, and so his repeated invocations can only reveal his distance from the muse he begs for aid, a distance from the divine that itself points to the narrator's distance from his fellow man. To try to overcome this distance by calling out to the muse yet again in Book VII, asking her to mediate between his song and his “fit audience, though few” (VII.31), can only be a futile endeavor; it is an attempt to get out of the fallenness, to heal the rift between man and God that is

¹⁰⁴ See Chapter 2, n. 5.

constitutive of the poem itself, that is the reason that the narrator must set out to “justify the ways of God to man” in the first place. So long as the narrator addresses his words to the muse, *Paradise Lost* remains hopelessly anchored in its own fallenness and its own particularity, unable to point beyond its own context and thus helpless to speak to any other.

III. “BY ME THE PROMISED SEED SHALL ALL RESTORE”

At the beginning of Book IX, the moment at which he first announces the content of his new, “more heroic” argument, Milton's narrator finally tries a different approach. The book opens, “No more of talk where God or angel guest / With man, as with his friend, familiar used / To sit indulgent” (1-3), signaling most obviously the end of the immediate presence of divine figures in the human sphere that is the consequence of Eve and Adam's transgression. At the same time, these lines also point to the end of the narrator's attempts to recreate that immediacy by addressing the muse. Though the opening of Book IX is frequently numbered as the fourth invocation in *Paradise Lost*,¹⁰⁵ it is markedly different from the previous three insofar as it does not actually invoke anything; while the muse still makes an appearance in these lines, the narrator has stopped talking to her and now only talks about her, mentioning briefly his “celestial patroness” at line 21 and thence proceeding to allude to her only twice more through third-person genitive pronouns (22, 47). This shift in the muse's position from second-person to third-person accompanies several significant revisions that this opening makes to earlier invocations, the most blatant of which is the narrator's reference to the muse's “nightly visitation unimplored” (22). In Book VII, the narrator tells the muse that he is “not alone, while thou / Visit'st my

¹⁰⁵ Though there are many who dispute that the opening of Book IX is an invocation, even those disputes tend to recognize that it has a similar structure to the previous invocations. Fowler, to avoid the issue, simply calls these “personal prologues” (466), while Hunter and Davies claim that the poem in Book VII is “the last true invocation” (35), and that the opening of Book IX is only “apparently analogous” (36).

slumber nightly” (28-29), and so the mention of the muse's “nightly visitation” in Book IX points directly back to the previous invocation. Later in that same Book VII invocation, however, the narrator asks the muse, “So fail not thou, who thee implores” (38). The relative clause here, “who thee implores,” does not specify what the narrator implores the muse to do, and so, though the narrator at this moment is asking the muse specifically to protect his song from the “barbarous dissonance” of Bacchus' revelers, the identification of the narrator as he “who thee implores” seems to function more generally as a description of the narrator's relation to the muse: he is someone who implores her—to sing, to plant eyes in his mind, to protect him from failure, etc. When he describes the muse's “nightly visitation unimplored” in Book IX, the narrator repudiates that relationship, not simply by ceasing to implore her, but by revising his earlier claim about her nightly visitation and thereby denying that he ever implored her to visit his slumber nightly. Though he does not deny that the muse may come to him, the narrator tells us, she does so of her own accord, not because he invoked her.¹⁰⁶

This explicit repudiation of invocation midway through Book IX's first paragraph is already in evidence implicitly in the opening lines when the narrator states,

I now must change
 Those notes to tragic; foul distrust, and breach
 Disloyal on the part of man, revolt,
 And disobedience: on the part of heav'n
 Now alienated, distance and distaste,
 Anger and just rebuke, and judgment giv'n,
 that brought into this world a world of woe,
 Sin and her shadow Death, and misery

¹⁰⁶ Kerrigan reads this revision differently, seeing in lines 20-26 “a remarkable conjunction of voluntary choice and blind dictation” (137) that shows the narrator exemplifying “the radical form of prophetic inspiration defined in Calvin” (138). This reading resonates with Hunter and Davies’ interpretation, who claim that, in Book IX, “The state of mind [the narrator] describes is tantamount to that of a daemonic possession. The active feminine inspiration (operating below the level of consciousness to ‘dictate’ or breathe into him an ‘Easy... unpremeditated verse’ [23-24] [sic] is fully integrated into his receptive and listening mind, implying a synthesis of creative power analogous to that of the double-gendered Dove-Spirit of Book I. The Muse now possesses him as his automatic companion” (37).

Death's harbinger[.] (5-13)

In announcing a turn to “disobedience,” “woe,” and “Death,” this passage recalls the poem's first invocation, in which the narrator asks the muse to sing “Of man's first disobedience and the fruit / Of that forbidden tree, whose mortal taste / Brought Death into the world, and all our woe” (I.1-3). In Book IX's return to the original subject of the poem, the narrator omits the muse and instead says that he himself will “change / Those notes to tragic,” no longer dividing labor with the muse but now taking up the main subject himself. And in doing so, the narrator changes that subject somewhat. The first invocation asks the muse to sing of “man's first disobedience” and of “the fruit / Of that forbidden tree,” where disobedience belongs to man and the “mortal taste / That brought death into the world, and all our woe” belongs to the fruit; but because the fruit's “mortal taste” causes so much evil only because it is tasted, because *man* tastes it, which is just to say that he disobeys, the double subject of which the narrator wishes the muse to sing is in fact a single subject, the fall of man and its consequences. In this passage, the only agent capable of action is “man,” and so he becomes the sole source of “Death” and “woe” in the world. In the Book IX invocation, however, “disobedience” is still “on the part of man,” but “woe” and “Death” are “on the part of heaven / Now alienated.” The introduction of a second agent into the fall, one whose “judgment giv'n” is the immediate cause of man's suffering, suggests a world in which man and God are distinct entities acting separately from each other. The effect is not to relieve man of his responsibility for bringing death and woe into the world by disobeying, but rather this revision reflects the fact that, as a result of the fall, heaven becomes “alienated” from man, literally an “other” force acting at a “distance.” For the first time in the poem noting this distance, the narrator at the same time foregrounds the fact that he is singing in the context of divine alienation with the deictic “now” in line 19; since the poem has not arrived at

the fall, the “now” cannot refer to God's alienation from Adam and Eve and can instead only point to the fact that *now*, for the narrator singing (and perhaps also for the reader reading) at this moment, God is distant and other, a force distinct from the narrator's voice.¹⁰⁷

With heaven so far away and the ties between man and God now severed, the narrator thus acknowledges the consequences of fallenness and leaves behind his attempts to establish a relationship with an “alienated” muse, speaking in his own voice without invoking her aid, either to sing for him or to mediate between the poem and its audience. By revising the earlier invocations and excising the muse from the song, the opening of Book IX enables the process discussed in the previous chapter by which *Paradise Lost* recognizes itself as self-standing, as an individual that no longer needs to serve the muse in order to raise itself. But because that individuality is itself part of the reason that the narrator invoked the muse's aid in the first place, the question still remains how *Paradise Lost*, now having abandoned its futile attempts at divine mediation between particulars, can overcome its individuality and speak beyond itself—that is, how it can justify the ways of God to men. For the first time in this dissertation, the answer lies not in Satan, who immediately after Book IX becomes the overdetermined prince of lies Paul always suspected him to be and promptly falls out of view, but in the first fallen of humankind, and the first fallen who can be redeemed, Eve. Much is made of Adam's supremely unsatisfying “to obey is best” lesson recital in Book XII (561), but it is important to note that the final word in the epic goes to Eve, and that she in fact gets right what Adam, just when he thinks he understands, gets wrong. When Adam returns to her from his lessons with Michael,

¹⁰⁷ See also Rick's excellent discussion of “distance and distaste” in *Milton's Grand Style* (69-75), in which he notes that “The distance [between Heaven and Earth] is no longer no gap at all to the loving harmony of God and Man” (70).

Eve explains that she knows where he has been and what he has been shown, and then tells Adam,

but now lead on;
In me is no delay; with thee to go,
Is to stay here; without thee here to stay,
Is to go hence unwilling; thou to me
Art all things under heav'n, all places thou,
Who for my wilful crime art banished hence. (XII.614-619)

Her decision to cleave to Adam here, indeed to understand him as “all things” to her, resembles a less auspicious moment in Book IX, when Eve, having eaten the fruit and so transgressed, decides to tempt Adam to do the same because, in her words, “So dear I love him, that with him all deaths / I could endure, without him live no life” (832-833). In both moments, Eve understands that the state of her existence depends on her relation to Adam; to be with him is to be alive or in paradise, and to be without him is death, and loss of Eden. When Eve for this reason decides to present Adam with the fruit, she tells him outright that she offers the fruit to him because “bliss, as thou hast part, to me is bliss, / Tedious, unshared with thee, and odious soon” (879-880). Significantly, Adam responds by adopting a similar train of thought, asking himself, “How can I live without thee?”, before deciding

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. (IX.908, 910-916)

As does Eve, Adam here realizes that to lose Eve would be a permanent, incurable loss, one that could not be assuaged by “another Eve,” and this realization leads Adam to recognize that his fate is tied to hers, that not only is she “bone of [his] bone” but also that their “states” are inseparable, tied to one another.¹⁰⁸ It is for this reason that

¹⁰⁸ C.f. Rudat’s discussion of Adam and Eve’s “oneness,” as he calls it (120-125).

Adam chooses also to transgress, to fall with Eve rather than to suffer the pain of losing her.

But this line of reasoning in Book IX, particularly for Adam but also for Eve who leads him to fall, is sinful. Echoing Raphael's warning in Book VIII that Eve is worth Adam's "cherishing, thy honoring, and thy love, / Not thy subjection" (569-570), the Son rebukes Adam after the fall for following Eve's transgression, asking, "Was she thy God, that her thou didst obey / Before his voice," and reminding him that Eve was made "lovely to attract / Thy love, not thy subjection" (X.145-146, 152-153). As we know from the reason Adam gives for his sin just before he eats, what Adam "obeys" instead of God's command in choosing to eat the fruit is not so much Eve's claim the fruit has opened her eyes and dilated her spirit (IX.875-876) but rather her belief that their states are bound up with each other, an argument that raises love of an individual over love of God and "subjects" each individual to the other. Eve of course likewise subjects herself to Adam, but though her position beneath Adam in the divine hierarchy makes her subject to Adam already, her belief is no less subversive than Adam's; to raise her love of Adam over her love of God is likewise to replace God with Adam in the proper order of things. When the Son rebukes Adam for resigning his "manhood" (148), he thus does so not because Adam adopts Eve's proper position in the relationship, but because Adam, as the superior partner, should have known enough not to listen to Eve's argument, known no to "obey" it (*oboedire*, later *obaudire*, to hear). Eve is wrong to invest so much in the particular, in a single individual, and it was Adam's job to realize it.

In Book XII, however, after Adam has learned his lesson and pledged to obey God once again, he does not correct Eve when she again links her state to Adam's, elevating him to the level of "all things under heaven," but instead he is "Well pleased" at her words (625). The reason for his pleasure is very likely the fact that

Eve has already learned the final lesson that Michael taught Adam only a few lines earlier. After hearing all that Michael has to tell him in Book XII, Adam tells Michael, “Henceforth I learn, that to obey is best, / And love with fear the only God” (561-562), to which Michael responds favorably: “This having learnt, though hast attained the sum / Of wisdom” (576-577). If this “wisdom” is unsatisfying to readers, however, it is also not sufficient for Michael, who continues on to say that Adam must “add / Deeds to thy knowledge answerable”—faith, virtue, patience, and temperance; but most of all, Michael explains, Adam must “add love, / By name to come called charity, the soul / Of all the rest” (581-585). This love that Michael emphasizes must be different from the “love with fear” Adam mentions earlier in the passage, since Michael needs to tell Adam to “add” it to the wisdom he has gained, and indeed Michael explains the difference when he says that this “deed” of love, as opposed to the “wisdom” of love Adam has already gained, will be called “charity.” Rather than the love of God that Adam describes, “charity” or *caritas* is the “Christian love of our fellow-men” (OED 1c), a love of God *through* the love of individuals. Because God is “now alienated,” Adam can have knowledge that he must “love with fear the only God,” but his “deeds,” his actions on earth, must find an earthly target and so, Michael tells him, he must turn to his fellow man to express love, the “soul” of all the other virtuous deeds; and by loving others so, Michael concludes, Adam can “possess / A paradise within thee, happier far” (586-587).

When God was still present on the earth, this love of the individual above all else and as “all things” had been sin because it usurped God's place; in the absence of God after the fall, however, when all that is left on earth are individuals whose particularity signals that absence, this love of the individual becomes the means to

redemption, the way back to paradise.¹⁰⁹ Thus Adam does not rebuke Eve for calling him “all things” to her because she is displaying just that love, that “charity,” of which Michael had spoken. When she says to Adam, “with thee to go, / Is to stay here; without thee here to stay, / Is to go hence unwilling,” she shows that she already has found her paradise within through her love for Adam, for another fallen individual, with whom she can make her “solitary way” somewhat less solitary (649).¹¹⁰ This turn back to the particular, not away from the divine but in the absence of the divine, that Michael preaches and Eve embraces appears also in the narrator's rejection of invocation in Book IX. At the beginning of *Paradise Lost*, the narrator begins his poem by addressing his “Heav'nly muse,” renewing the address at the beginning of Book III and again in Book VII; as William Kerrigan notes, each invocation “does not communicate with the reader of the poem at all; addressed to God, the language performs a gesture of prayer toward God” (7). Throughout the first two-thirds of the poem, the reader listens in, a third party in a conversation between two people, as the narrator sings his song to her. But when the narrator finally recognizes his distance from heaven and ceases invoking his muse in Book IX, when he puts *her* in the third-person position in the poem, the narrator suddenly must be speaking to his “fit audience, though few.” Instead of trying to mediate the relationship between particulars through appeal to a universal representative that is not and cannot be present, the narrator, himself an individual, turns at this moment directly to those individuals he feared in Book VII, a fallen voice speaking to fallen ears, in an attempt to convey his “higher argument” to his fellow man.

¹⁰⁹ It is for this reason that the turn to the particular that entails the distance of heaven does not, as Silver argues, do away with metaphysics or transcendence (25-26); in *Paradise Lost*, God is always implicated in the turn to the individual and in the limits of human understanding.

¹¹⁰ This moment, perhaps more than any other, distinguishes the fate of Satan, who is doomed to damnation without salvation from the lot of Adam and Eve. For while Satan, flying alone to Eden, discovers with dismay, “Which way I fly is hell; myself am hell” (IV.75), Eve can look to one outside of herself, to Adam, and find in him, in that other, a paradise rather than the fallen world.

This turn to the particular returns us to the original problem of “patience and heroic martyrdom,” the “higher argument” that is never fulfilled in the course of the poem. To be a particular addressing particulars is the narrator's only option in the world his poem describes, and only in that turn to the particular does any hope of salvation lie. But the fallenness of the individual leaves a gap between particulars that still must be negotiated if that salvation is to be possible. In her final words in the poem, Eve points at the way across the gap:

This further consolation yet secure
I carry hence: though all by me is lost,
Such favor I unworthy am vouchsafed,
By me the Promised Seed shall all restore. (620-623)

Just as the fallenness that was caused by the elevation of the particular can only be undone by returning to the particular, so too here the originator of fallenness is also the promise of restoration. But it is just that—a promise, a thing foretold but not yet present. Eve's sin will be redeemed through her, but that redemption is far beyond her, in time and in capability, and so she herself “carries” this redemption only by pointing beyond herself; salvation is present in her as an absence, which is to say that it is present only negatively. It is in this way, through a negatively represented promise or possibility, that the fallen individual offers hope to other fallen individuals, and why in turning to each other they turn toward their own salvation. *Paradise Lost*, whose “higher argument” of “patience and heroic martyrdom” suggests the same “Promised Seed” that Eve’s race will produce, likewise cannot present its “higher argument” except negatively, except by *not* depicting it. As a particular speaking to particulars, the narrator can only intone fallen notes, the language of negativity, in which words and meanings are unstable, ambiguous, questions asking for answers while resisting them. To say, “this is my argument” is to undo that argument, to make it a problem rather than a claim, and to present that argument positively is to have it immediately

rejected by all particulars that rise up against it. Only by presenting “patience and heroic martyrdom” as a promise, as something not actually present within its lines, can *Paradise Lost* in its particularity point at the salvation it is powerless to portray; only by presenting that argument in negative, as an absence and therefore unable to be rejected, can the narrator offer that promise to others.

In discussing the truth content of the artwork, Adorno writes that

the fact that artworks exist signals the possibility of the nonexisting. The reality of artworks testifies to the possibility of the possible. The object of art’s longing, the reality of what is not, is metamorphosed in art as remembrance. In remembrance what is qua what was combines with the nonexisting because what was no longer is. Ever since Plato’s doctrine of anamnesis the not-yet-existing has been dreamed of in remembrance, which alone concretizes utopia without betraying its existence. Remembrance remains bound up with semblance: for even in the past the dream was not reality. (*Aesthetic Theory* 132)

The negativity of the artwork for Adorno, the enigma-character that makes the artwork always a question without an answer, renders it able to point to the possibility of a better world—to utopia—without “betraying” that utopia by pretending that we can imagine what it might look like or, worse, that it already exists. The negative language of fallenness that *Paradise Lost* presents offers much the same possibility; without access to divine knowledge, the language of fallenness can only ask questions about what is, but in doing so, in refusing to accept the present as it is and in constructing new possibilities in the refusal, that language can also point to something beyond it, to a better world in which the language of fallenness need not be spoken because that fallenness has been redeemed. Just as Eve’s womb, the empty space within her body, holds within it the promise of salvation, a nothingness inside that signals by its emptiness the abundance that will someday come, so too the absence of *Paradise Lost*’s “higher argument” points beyond the poem’s own fallenness, beyond its own inability to depict the world that God has promised will come, and thereby

points at the truth of that argument that cannot be described in verse, at the divine truth of Christ's sacrifice that itself promises the redemption of mankind. It is in this way, by delivering to us that promise, the poem can “justify the ways of God to men,” showing us what was so that we may have hope of what will be. The poem tells us of paradise lost so that we can think in negative the possibility of a paradise regained.

What is at stake in *Paradise Lost* is nothing less than the salvation of the individual whose coming-to-be the poem describes. Because of the structure of fallenness, because of the very lack that constitutes fallen individuality, each individual bears within itself the promise of redemption that points to a world better than this one. We fulfill that promise and find the “paradise within” by turning to each other, through the “deed” of loving something outside of ourselves that resists us and negates us (thus the injunction to love thy enemy) but through which we find a return to that which was lost, to a union in a mutual lack that is our common fate. As a poem describing a world in which individuality itself is the cause of suffering, *Paradise Lost*'s great achievement is thus to recover the inherent worth of the individual in the face of that suffering. In doing so, it also recovers the worth of its own poetic voice, a voice capable of singing on its own without appeal to the muse, without constantly calling attention to its own deficiencies, a voice that is worthy in its own right to sing *Paradise Lost*. More than one critic has found in Milton's great epic “the end of inspiration and the beginning of imagination” (Guillory ix), the movement from divine authority to authority centered in the human; but more than achieving this shift, the creation of a “new” mode of poetic authority, *Paradise Lost* at the same time vindicates that movement, showing how the individual can claim that authority as an act of love toward other individuals. This is a vindication of poetry itself, the assertion of art's ability to carry the promise of a better world that is uniquely human,

to speak suffering without succumbing to it, to make the particularity that separates us from our fellow man eloquent.

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