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The Paradise Within Thee: The Undying Promise of Transcendence in Paradise Lost

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Abstract of the Thesis

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John Milton's *Paradise Lost* in its simplest sense is a poem about disobedience, loss, and sin. Borrowing much of its inspiration and material from the Book of Genesis, the great English epic tells of the Fall of Man, or the choice of Adam and Eve to disobey God by eating the forbidden fruit of the tree of knowledge. The consequences of this action are, according to Milton and Christian tradition, tremendous. The very first lines of *Paradise Lost* emphasize this point, telling how "Man's first disobedience" brought "death into the world and all our [humanity's] woe" (I.1, 3). In my examination of the technical elements of *Paradise Lost*—including character development, Latinate syntax and rhetoric—I analyze the various ways that Milton reveals the potential that humanity has for ameliorating the burdens of the Fall and reaching greater spiritual heights. My aim is to demonstrate how *Paradise Lost*, while being a poem primarily telling of humanity's first sin, also functions as an inspirational poem—one that promises that the fallen human beings that Milton was writing for can hope for spiritual transcendence. In other words,

they can hope for a form of personal development that can bring them closer to the God that both Milton and his readers believed in so fervently.

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Acknowledgements

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The Paradise Within Thee:
The Undying Promise of Transcendence in *Paradise Lost*

I

The Renaissance was a particularly important time for the idea of the individual and for the pursuit of individuality. As Jacob Burckhardt explains, rather than thinking of oneself as a member of a race, people, party or family, one was encouraged to think of one's self as spiritual individual, capable of contributing the state and world of art in unique and significant ways (143). A man could not just gain knowledge and excel in one particular field; he could succeed in all fields, becoming what Burckhardt calls the "all-sided" or what we might now like to think of as the "Renaissance man" (148). Such a conception of humanity and individual potential lies at the very heart of *Paradise Lost*. As a poem that tells of "man's first disobedience," this great English epic shows readers the drastic changes that can befall mankind as a result of a single sin by an individual (I.1). Not only do Adam's and Eve's transgressions bring "death into the world and all our woe"; their noncompliance with God's will also encourages their maker to change the way the heavens organize themselves (I.3; X. 648-714). These changes are so great that they eventually lead Adam to greater miseries. He bursts out in anguish, "O miserable of happy! Is this the end / Of this new glorious world [?]" (X. 720-1). But however much Milton demonstrates the potential that human beings have for disturbing the moral order of the world, he also makes known the ability that an individual has for earning the right to improve themselves

morally and the world around them. In fact, humanity's potential to bring out these changes is one of the first attributes that Milton has his God provide mankind when its creation is announced:

[I] will create
Another world, out of one man a race
Of men innumerable there to dwell,
Not here, *till by degrees of merit raised*
They open to themselves at length the way
Up hither, under long obedience tried,
And Earth be changed to Heav'n and Heav'n to Earth,
One Kingdom, joy and union without. (VII. 154-61, emphasis mine)

The promise and hope this pronouncement gives to humanity is later stressed by the archangel Raphael, as he tells Adam in Paradise that there might come a time when “men / With angels may participate,” that is, if Adam is found obedient (V.493-4, 501). Of course, Adam does fail to remain obedient to God's law, thus leaving humanity with the prospect of death, struggle, sadness and pain. Yet despite the fact that Milton makes it clear that mankind is forever beholden to these and other punishments, he also assures his readers are still endowed with the potential to develop in ways that bring them closer to God and the divine. In this essay, it is my intent to reveal how Milton encourages readers to see that, despite the Fall, human beings still have to potential to improve themselves and their relationship with God. By demonstrating the ways in which Milton reveals humanity's capacity for seeing, interpreting, and internalizing elements of the divine, I seek to show that, throughout *Paradise Lost*, Milton constantly works to help human beings perceive their potential for spiritual transcendence, and, by doing this, Milton ultimately makes his epic much more than a poem about man's first disobedience; he makes it a tool for helping his fallen readers see that, though Paradise is in a sense lost, one does not have live with the perspective that the human condition is something beyond repair. One can, Milton argues,

still hope to be raised, as it were, “by degrees of merit” and live in a way that brings one closer to and more in tune with the expectations of God and His will.

There has been substantial scholarly interest in the various perspectives that Milton offers readers in *Paradise Lost*, most notably in the works of Stanley Fish, whose influential book *Surprised by Sin* focuses on the possible responses that readers might have to the poetic situations and style of Milton’s great epic. Fish’s arguments concerning the overall effect that the poem has on readers revolves around his take on Milton’s narrative focus in *Paradise Lost*: “Man’s first Disobedience and the fruit / Of that forbidden tree” (I.1-2; Fish1, 39). Believing that the main objective of the poem is to reveal how the Fall made readers the way that they are, Fish contends that one of the objectives of *Paradise Lost* is to provoke readers into realizing the limitations of their perspective as fallen human beings (Fish x, 38). What are Milton’s reasons for these provocations? Fish argues that Milton means to challenge the way that postlapsarian readers perceive his epic in order to remind them that they are indeed fallen individuals. He says: “...the reader who fails repeatedly before the pressures of the poem soon realizes that his difficulty proves is major assertions—the fact of the Fall, and his own (that is Adam’s) responsibility for it, and the subsequent woes of the human situation” (Fish 38).

Ultimately, this argument in many ways narrows the scope of Milton’s epic and the arguments that the poet makes concerning the current state and potential of humanity. For one thing, Fish’s argument fails to recognize something that Milton indicates several times in *Paradise Lost*: the inability of man to properly perceive certain matters, particularly those concerning divine entities and celestial events, has been a part of man’s condition even before the Fall took place. Raphael makes this clear to readers before discussing the war between heaven and hell to a prelapsarian Adam in Book Five. He says:

how shall I relate
 To human sense th' invisible exploits
 Of warring spirits, how without remorse
 The ruin of so many glorious once
 And perfect while they stood, how last unfold
 The secrets of another world perhaps
 Not lawful to reveal?
 ...what surmounts the reach
 Of human sense I shall delineate so
 By lik'ning spiritual to corporal forms,
 As may express them best. (V. 564-70, 571-74)

After explaining this to Adam, Raphael reinforces the idea of humanity's limitations by telling Adam that the battle between the angel Michael and Satan is a "fight / Unspeakable" to human ears (V. 296-7). Then, after being asked how and why God created the world, Raphael once more stresses that Adam is made in a way that does not allow him to understand all there is to know about the universe. Instead, Raphael tells Adam that he only can be granted "knowledge within bounds" (VII. 120). Thus, having this in mind, it becomes clear that Milton conceived of a prelapsarian humanity with certain limitations, limitations that prohibit one from completely understanding the mysterious ways of God to men. Though the revelation of these limitations might remind Fish of the Fall, it is far from clear that this is exactly what Milton intends for us to feel while reading *Paradise Lost*. I submit that Milton did not create, as Fish suggests, his epic to mock postlapsarian readers into self-reflection, but rather to guide us in a more compassionate way so that we, as Adam says, may learn how "in contemplation of created things / By steps we may ascend to God" (Fish *Surprised* 50; V. 511-12).

One of the ways that Milton encourages his fallen readers to recognize their ability to ascend in this manner is by offering concrete examples of postlapsarian human beings who are allowed to attain a greater understanding of God through time and prayer. One of the more prominent examples of such an inspired person in *Paradise Lost* is the poet himself. Along with

Adam and Eve, Milton stands as one of the few fallen human beings in this epic whom readers come to know intimately. As a man who understands the burden of his reader's postlapsarian condition, Milton offers himself up as an example of a fallen individual who has found a way to touch and be touched by the divine. Readers come to understand this almost as soon as the poem opens in Book One, that is, when Milton asks his "Heav'nly Muse" to make him worthy of the task he is about to undertake (I.6).

What in me is dark
Illumine, what is low raise and support,
That to the height of this great argument
I may assert Eternal Providence,
And justify the ways of God to men. (I.22-6)

The nature of the request here says a great deal about the kind of inspiration Milton is seeking. He is simply not looking for inspiration that will help him find the right words for his epic. He is also looking to make a spiritual ascension, and, in order for this to take place, he asks his muse to illuminate and raise parts of inner self.

This is not the only instance in which Milton asks to rise above his current fallen status in order to see things that have been invisible to other humans. A much more intimate and personal sharing of his identity and psychology takes place in the opening of Book Three, as the poet asks a "holy Light" to inspire him while he makes the bold attempt to discuss Heaven, its Lord, and all the beauty that emanates from these things (III.1). Before being granted this wish, however, Milton makes an effort to explain why this light is particularly significant to him, a poet humbled by blindness. There are several occasions when he emphasizes his weakened capacity to perceive and participate in the world around him: "from the cheerful ways of men / Cut off" (46-7). The turning of the seasons (41), the approach of morning (42), and the blooming of a summer rose (43), are all images that Milton presents readers in order to stress the limited capacity of his

corporeal frame, yet despite these limitations, Milton makes it clear that his physical challenges have not robbed him of his ability to obtain the gift of divine inspiration. Quite the opposite. After making his woeful condition known to his readers, he shows how the holy light can illuminate what is dark in him and raise him to greater heights of awareness and spirituality. He thus commands the light:

Shine inward and the mind through all her powers
Irradiate. *There* plant eyes. All mist from thence
Purge and disperse, that I may see and tell
Of things invisible to mortal sight! (III. 52-5)

Immediately after these lines, the narrative of *Paradise Lost* continues. Milton describes the heavens as they appear suddenly to him, telling of God's decision to take pity on mankind after it falls victim to Satan's temptations (II.130). Ultimately, the progression of this narrative concerning events in heaven suggests that Milton has indeed succeeded in his effort to break through the limitations that his flesh has placed on him. Just like in the opening of Book One, Milton provides his readers with reason to believe that a divine figure has brought him to a higher state of being and sight. By demonstrating this repeatedly to his readers, Milton encourages his fallen audience to see that their own fallen status is not a static condition. As postlapsarian readers of *Paradise Lost*, we are not made to think, as Fish argues, that human beings are "hopelessly limited" by the fallibility of our senses, because, as the fallen Milton makes it clear, a postlapsarian man can be allowed to transcend some of the limitations of even an impaired body, so much so that he can successfully bring himself and those listening to him a greater sense of divine realm and its happenings (Fish 28).

Milton's ability to become divinely inspired in Book Three is just one instance in which a postlapsarian man in *Paradise Lost* is shown to have the ability to attain exceptional, more divinely inspired insights into ways of God. Throughout his exchange with Raphael, Adam also

reveals that, even though he is a human being with limited capabilities, he can still perceive some aspects of the celestial realm, or “Things above earthly thought” (VII. 82). Such is the case even after the Fall. After having broken God’s only commandment, Adam is shown some of the consequences that follow his and Eve’s disobedience. The archangel Michael reveals all the hardship that will befall mankind after the Fall. At times, the images of humanity’s future sufferings become too much for Adam to take. They overwhelm him to the point that he wishes that no other man be burdened with foreknowledge of what awaits his progeny: “Let no man seek / Henceforth to be foretold what shall befall / Him or his children” (XI. 770-2).

Unfortunately for Adam, lamentations like these do not prevent Michael from continuing to reveal the future to him. Although he at one point stops revealing actual images to Adam, he does still force to listen as he himself tells of events that await human beings in a postlapsarian world (XII 11). Finally, after all the images of the future are shown and all of Michael’s tales are complete, Milton indicates that Michael revelations do in fact help Adam understand God and His ways in a much more pious manner. While making one of the final moral statements of

Paradise Lost, Adam says:

Henceforth I learn that to obey is best,
And love with fear the only God, to walk
As in His presence, ever to observe
His providence and on Him sole depend,
Merciful over all His works, with good
Still overcoming evil and by small
Accomplishing great things, by things deemed weak
Subverting worldly strong, and worldly wise
By simply meek, that suffering for Truth’s sake
Is fortitude to highest victory
And to the faithful death the gate of life:
Taught this by His example whom I now
Acknowledge my Redeemer ever blest. (XII. 561-73)

At this moment, readers are shown a postlapsarian man who, though guided by an archangel, still manages to bring himself to a higher level of knowledge. His mind transcends, in a sense, moving from a place of ignorance and hopelessness to a state of knowledge and purpose, a state that demonstrates a better understanding of God and the expectations he has for humanity. The sheer benefit of this knowledge is something that Milton makes sure his readers do not undervalue before leaving *Paradise Lost*. Immediately after having Adam make this declaration of faith, Milton has Michael point out the importance of these ideas by telling Adam that they can help him forever keep a part of the blessings that Eden gave once him. As soon as he hears Adam say that he has understood the value of loving and being obedient to God, Michael says to him:

This having learned thou hast attained the sum
Of wisdom. Hope no higher, though all the stars
Thou knew'st by name and all th' ethereal powers,
All secrets of the deep, all nature's works
Or works of God in Heav'n, air, earth, or sea,
And all the riches of this world enjoy'dst
And all the rule, one empire. Only add
Deeds to thy knowledge answerable, add faith,
Add virtue, patience, temperance, add love,
By name to come called charity, the soul
Of all the rest. Then wilt thou not be loath
To leave this Paradise but shalt possess
A paradise within thee, happier far. (XII. 575-87)

Here, readers are told that there are some prelapsarian qualities of humanity to which mankind can still aspire. Though the fields of Paradise are lost, all is not, according to Milton, lost. As Michael suggests, human beings can retrieve some measure of the perfection found in Eden, that is, if they internalize the essential wisdom of Christianity and act with kindness, love and obedience to God. By presenting his readers with this moral argument, Milton once again points out that the mind of postlapsarian man can transcend the woes derived from his fallen

condition and achieve a greater understanding of God and godliness. In having this hope for better days and a more pious mind, Adam is granted the gift of never having to completely lose all of the gifts that Paradise has given him. He can, Milton suggests, always have a “Paradise within” him that can be reawakened in a way that makes him “happier far.”

Adam’s epiphany is not all that argues for mankind’s potential for spiritual improvement. The actions of Eve also play a significant role in showing readers that, though mankind has brought “death into the world” through its transgressions, the potential of humanity to progress has not been entirely lost (I.3). As the poem delves into the aftermath of the Fall, Milton makes clear that, as a the poem’s main postlapsarian female character, Eve too has the potential to reach greater spiritual conditions. Being the first to transgress God’s only command and taste the forbidden fruit, Eve has traditionally been seen a figure of blame, as a temptress that bears a degree of responsibility for Adam’s first sin (Higgins 639-40). In some ways, Milton’s epic bolsters such an interpretation of Eve, as he allows Adam to suggest that her seductive qualities are like those belonging to Satan: “Out of my sight, thou serpent!” (X.867). But while this image of Eve is in part what defines her character, it alone does entirely not define her role in *Paradise Lost*. Milton adds something more to her narrative He allows her to be a figure who actively works for her redemption and plays an important role in the restoration of man’s destined journey towards salvation in Christ. Indeed, there is a moment in *Paradise Lost* where the very idea of humanity’s potential to restore the wrongs of the Fall is nonexistent. While contemplating the faultiness in his disobedience, Adam comes to think that there is nothing but woe in store for him and his progeny. He says, “Both Death and I / Am found eternal and incorporate both, / Nor I on my part single: in me all posterity stands cursed” (X. 815-18). This sense of helplessness, anger and despair only becomes blunted once Eve responds to it with hope, care, love and

remorse. Just when Adam seems most enraged and in contempt of her, Eve desperately offers him her affection. She accepts full responsibility for the Fall (“this misery befall’n / On me”) after telling him that, despite all that has transpired between them, she still loves him and hopes that he will never abandon her (X.928-9):

Forsake me not thus, Adam, witness Heaven,
What love sincere and reverence in my heart
I bear thee, and unweeting have offended,
Unhappily deceived. Thy suppliant,
I beg and clasp thy knees. Bereave me not,
Whereon I live: thy gentle looks, thy aid,
Thy counsel, in this uttermost distress
My only strength and stay! (X.914-21)

These outcries and shows of remorse end up moving Adam greatly, as his change in attitude toward Eve demonstrates. Soon after hearing these lines, Adam decides to reciprocate Eve’s affections and finally end the bickering between them. He tells her:

...rise, let us no more contend, nor blame
Each other, blamed enough elsewhere, but strive
In offices of love how we may light’n
Each other’s burden in our share of woe (X.958-61)

In the end, this offering of reconciliation proves consequential for all of mankind. Eve claims to be redeemed by Adam’s offering, telling him that she now feels restored “to a place / Of new acceptance hopeful to regain” his love (X.971-2). In the end, the redemption of Eve allows Milton to make two significant moral arguments, each of which illuminates the potential that a postlapsarian humanity has to improve itself for the betterment of mankind. For Eve personally, her reconciliation with Adam demonstrates that a fallen woman can restore her moral standing through shows of sincere humility and remorse. On the other hand, in the larger scheme, Eve’s redemption in the eyes of her husband also plays a significant role in human history, as it allows the course of humanity to continue on towards its final redemption through Christ. As a fallen

human being, Eve demonstrates there is indeed a great capacity for redemptive humility and love in a postlapsarian world. Though innocence and Paradise are to a degree lost because of her first transgressions, there is still, Milton suggests, some part of her that can preserve the prelapsarian bonds of affection that Satan at one point calls “the happier Eden,” that is, the love between her and Adam (IV. 507).

The ability of Adam and Eve to regain elements of their prelapsarian selves and strive for better days is not something that happens without divine sanction. In the beginning of Book Eleven, Milton makes it clear that one of the gifts that God gives to humanity is called prevenient grace. What is prevenient grace? According to Jackson Campell Boswell, a scholar who sees it as a consistent theme in Milton’s poetry and prose works, prevenient grace is an Augustinian concept, which acts as “a temporary aid or assistance given by God enabling man to exercise his free will and to accept the gift of salvation.” Unlike other forms of grace, prevenient grace, Boswell says, is given by God even before a human being uses his or her free will to seek divine aid (Boswell 83). This form of grace plays a consequential role in Adam’s and Eve’s redemption in *Paradise Lost*. The gift of salvation is exactly what they seek after they begin to understand the immorality of their disobedience, and, in the opening of Book Eleven, Milton makes it clear that God does allow them to obtain some degree of salvation by providing them with a remorse inspired by prevenient grace. He says:

Thus they in lowliest plight repentant stood
Praying for from the mercy-seat above
Prevenient Grace descending had removed
The stony from their hearts and made new flesh
Regenerate grow instead that sighs now breathed
Unutterable which the spirit of prayer
Inspired and winged for Heav'n with speedier flight
Than loudest oratory. (XI. 1-8, emphasis mine)

Ultimately, Milton makes it known that these remorseful prayers are heard, as he shows Jesus asking God to take notice of how pleasing His children's change of hearts is (XII.22-30). Indeed, the changes in their hearts are remarkable and should not go unnoticed by Milton's fallen reader. Because of the show of contrition that God has allowed them to make through his gift of prevenient grace, Adam and Eve are said to undergo a physiological change. The stoniness of their hearts morphs into a "new flesh," a new physiology that is so profound that moves Jesus to speak on humanity's behalf. By revealing this change to readers, Milton once again demonstrates there are ways that, after being inspired by a divine entity (in this case prevenient grace), mankind can transcend the woeful limitations of a fallen state. Even the bodies of postlapsarian humans, he indicates, are capable of rejuvenation. Despite the Fall, the flesh of man is not bound to one eternal condition. Piety and humility can be given through the generosity of God and change a fallen individual in ways that bring one closer to him and his will.

Throughout *Paradise Lost*, Milton uses his characters in ways that argue for the idea that palpable spiritual change can be made by men and women after the Fall, that is, so long as a postlapsarian human being is willing to live with patient hope and obedience. Through the examples of Adam, Eve and himself as poet, Milton encourages his readers to see that individuals that live with postlapsarian imperfections are rewarded in having humble and pious desires for somehow regaining perfection. By hoping for a vision that does not come from the human eye, Milton is given the ability break through the boundaries of blindness. By internalizing the wisdom of heavenly spirits, Adam is also allowed see past his postlapsarian and live in a more divinely warranted manner. As Eve strives to once again regain the love that her transgressions put at risk, she helps bring herself, her lover and all of humanity onto a road paved by Providence. Each of these circumstances is not merely an instance when fortunes change for

the better for Milton's main postlapsarian characters; they are rather moments in *Paradise Lost* when Milton demonstrates that the human condition is mutable, that there are indeed ways to rise above the tragedies of the Fall and bring some of the happiness that was lost in Eden back to mankind. Such an idea demonstrates that there is a part of the human condition that allows for spiritual progression, and, as the next section of this essay demonstrates, this aspect of humanity is one that Milton shows his readers is also a part of their essential nature as postlapsarian individuals.

II

It has been my intent to demonstrate the ways in which Milton shows how spiritual transcendence can be attained through the examples of *Paradise Lost*'s main postlapsarian characters. What I now wish to do is illustrate how Milton enhances this essential theme by revealing to readers that this same potential belongs to them as well. Throughout *Paradise Lost*, there is a consistent effort on the part of Milton to help his fallen readers see that there is a chance for them to obtain certain kinds of spiritual and moral transcendence. In order to effectively convey this message, Milton pushes the reader to see beyond the limitations of his or

her senses, and in the process reveals that there is a postlapsarian human capacity for perceiving, understanding, and accepting godliness even on a postlapsarian earth.

Before discussing the ways in which Milton encourages his fallen readers to see their ability to transcend in ways that bring one closer to God and understanding his will, it is first important to point out the characteristics that the poet ascribes to godliness throughout *Paradise Lost* (V. 512). Some scholars, like William Empson, have argued that one of Milton's aims in characterizing his epic's God is to turn him into an ineffable being, that is, as an entity that is "mysteriously one with Goodness itself" (Empson 92, 93). Indeed, turning God into an abstraction like "goodness" would be a reasonable choice for Milton, as his initial description of God in "Christian Doctrine" demonstrates that Milton believed that the nature of God was such that it could not be completely understood by the human mind: "Nature and reason alone are insufficient for correct ideas about God. To know him as he really is transcends man's power" (Milton "Doctrine" 639). In *Paradise Lost*, Milton provides his readers with this mysterious conception of God almost as soon as he appears in Book Three. After hearing God's decrees concerning the eventual Fall of Man, the angels of heaven are commanded to sing the praises of Jesus. The angels begin their hymn by praising their creator, extolling the magnificence and unintelligibility of His incorporeal substance. They sing:

Thee, Father, first they sung omnipotent,
Immutable, immortal, *infinite*,
Eternal King, Thee Author of all being,
Fountain of light, Thyself *invisible*
Amidst the glorious brightness where Thou sitt'st
Throned *inaccessible*. But when Thou shad'st
The full blaze of thy beams and through a cloud
Drawn round about Thee like a radiant shrine,
Dark with excessive bright thy skirts appear
Yet dazzle Heav'n that brightest seraphim
Approach not but with both wings veil their eyes! (III.372-82, emphasis mine)

The words of the angels here provide Milton's reader with the idea that, though God's words may be heard by the ear of man, His true essence cannot be grasped in its entirety by the human mind. Were a human being to try to define exactly what God is, he or she would have to try to access the inaccessible, see the invisible, and contain what is eternally infinite. It is as if Milton says to the reader, "Yes, God's word and his decrees can be read and heard by humanity, and I certainly have the ability to translate these things to you as an inspired poet. However, knowing the utterances of God does not provide one with the ability to fully understand nature of the speaker. Not even I or the angels can comprehend or express the true essence of our maker." Ultimately, this message leaves those engaged in *Paradise Lost* with the idea that their humanity will undoubtedly prove to be a burden in their attempts to understand the ineffable and mysterious nature of God.

Although the effort to fully understand godliness might be burdensome for some, this does not mean that Milton relinquishes all attempts to bring readers to a state where they can better perceive elements of the divine in *Paradise Lost*. As a poet and Christian theologian, Milton makes it clear that helping his readers "repair the ruins of our first parents by regaining to know God aright" is a worthwhile cause, even if one has to reveal a true "knowledge of God and things invisible" to those who can only perceive things through their senses ("Education" 227). One of the instances when Milton can be seen using his poetic craft to meet this said goal occurs when he first describes Eden. While trying to qualify the beauty of his "blissful Paradise" in Book Four, Milton puts himself to the task of describing the divine beauty of this place, while also letting his readers know that this form of beauty is essentially indescribable. Yes, there is, as C.S. Lewis points out, a lengthy list of natural objects and things that one would assume would be typically found in any paradise, including noble trees (217), golden fruits (153), nectarine

waters (237-40; Lewis 48-51). As expected as these objects might be, Milton makes it clear that these particular pieces of nature cannot be fully comprehended by a postlapsarian human being, because the sheer splendor of these objects is supposed to be incomprehensible by means of regular sensory perception. Not even Milton's "nice art," the poet admits, can capture the true nature of Eden (241). As Lewis says, "The naïf reader thinks Milton is going to *describe* Paradise as Milton imagines it; in reality the poet knows (or behaves as if he knew) that this is useless. His own private image of the happy garden, like yours and mine, is full of irrelevant particularities..." (48).

Despite the fact that Milton acknowledges the unknowable qualities of Paradise, the poet still does not abandon the noble task of trying to make the reader in some way *feel* the magnificence that God provides the scene. He does this in a manner that calls attention to the inherent deficiency of his reader's critical faculties, while simultaneously encouraging one to recognize humanity's capacity for sensing the divine. Towards the end of his description of Paradise, Milton forces his readers to compare Adam's and Eve's Paradise to several other mythical paradises. His poetry examines several geographical locations, until Milton finally establishes the exact location of where he believes Adam and Eve are located. But however concerned Milton is with geography when describing Paradise, the poet also encourages his readers to make qualitative comparisons between the mythical paradises described and the one that Milton says God initially created for humanity:

Not that fair field
Of Enna where Proserpine gath'ring flow'rs,
Herself a fairer flow'r, by gloomy Dis
Was gathered, which cost Ceres all that pain
To seek her through the world, nor that sweet grove
Of Daphne by Orontes and th' inspired
Castalian Spring might with this paradise
Of Eden strive, nor that Nyseian isle

Girt with the river Triton where old Cham
(Whom Gentiles Ammon call and Libyan Jove)
Hid Amalthéa and her florid son,
Young Bacchus, from his stepdame Rhea's eye;
Nor where Abássin kings their issue guard,
Mount Amara, though this by some supposed
True Paradise, under the Ethiop line
By Nilus' head, enclosed with shining rock
A whole day's journey high, but wide remote
From this Assyrian garden where the Fiend
Saw undelighted all delight, all kind
Of living Creatures new to sight and strange (IV. 268-87)

As readers work their way through each description of these mythical paradises, they are given a progressively grander sense of how blissful Paradise is by understanding more and more what it is not. The process begins by understanding that Eden is more beautiful than Enna. After comprehending this, our sense of the magnitude of that beauty increases when we realize that Eden is more beautiful than the “grove of Danphne.” This sense then again increases when Milton then compares Eden to the “Nyseian isle,” and it continues to grow until we once again return to Satan. Ultimately, this swelling awareness is the means by which Milton assures us that some level of the divinity, beauty, and bliss that God sheds on Paradise can indeed be felt by the reader. While describing the effect that Milton's description of Eden has on the reader, C.S. Lewis explains that he feels as though “some light” shines through the things and places Milton describes (48). Whether it be a light one sees or just a simple recognition of the poet's efforts, there can be no doubt Milton's description of Paradise works in ways that make readers more aware of the fact that fallen humans can be made to sense the greatness and beauty that existed in Eden. Though Eden's loveliness, like God, essentially remains a mystery in Paradise Lost, some part of that mystery can be experienced by Milton's audience, and, by encouraging his fallen readers to recognize this, Milton shows that there are greater levels of spiritual understanding that human beings can reach. The beauty and divinity of God's ways, he argues, are not

completely outside the realm of human comprehension. A fallen reader can in some way feel himself coming to a greater understanding of the mysterious ways of God and thereby transcend into state which can better sense the divine beauty that was once Eden's.

Paradisiacal descriptions are not the only tool that Milton employs in order to expose his reader's ability to better sense the divinity within godly things. The very same aims of Milton's description of Eden are echoed in the poet's approach to syntax and the construction of his verse. Many critics, including the modern poets T.S. Eliot and Ezra Pound, have made critical evaluations of Milton's verse based on its complex, Latinate style. Eliot very forcefully complains that, by using such an "involved syntax" and "tortuous style," Milton ultimately uses the English language in a way that is not only bad; it also, Eliot argues, deadens poetic qualities of it (Eliot 14). A similar analysis on the complexities of Milton's syntactical approach has been offered by C.S. Lewis. Although he does not argue that Milton's style harms English poetry, Lewis does admit that Milton's verse often creates complicated relationships between the words he chooses (Lewis 47). Take, for example, this passage that Lewis uses to explain the various ways in which Milton's form complicates his poetry's overall content:

There gentle sleep
First found me and with soft oppression seized
My drowsèd sense untroubled, though I thought
I then was passing to my former state
Insensible and forthwith to dissolve. (VIII.287-91)

While analyzing these lines, Lewis finds a great deal of ambiguity. He says, "I do not know whether *untroubled* qualifies me understood, or *sense*, and similar doubts arise about *insensible* and the construction of *to dissolve*" (Lewis 47). Such a lack of concrete relationships between words is indeed frequently found in *Paradise Lost*, and Milton's preference for this as an element

of style often leaves the reader asking, “Is there a right way to understand this passage? Can I make a case for this passage’s meaning without ever worrying about being refuted?”

There has been an effort to explain why Miltonic verse might be designed in ways that make readers ask such questions. In his essay “Interpreting the *Variorum*,” Stanley Fish argues that Miltonic ambiguity is in fact a tool of the poet’s, one that provides readers with the privilege of creating their own personal meanings of Milton’s work for themselves. Ambiguity, in this sense, is the means by which Milton “transfers the pressure of judgment onto us [the reader]” (Fish “Interpreting” 2074). Ultimately, each of these critics is right recognize that words with various degrees of complexity and ambiguity are tools that Milton uses extensively in his poetry, and, while Fish may be correct in suggesting that the obfuscation of language puts the challenge of interpreting Milton’s work on the reader, there may another reason behind Milton’s decision for making the relationship between some of his words so hard to pinpoint and understand. In allowing his words to become essentially ambiguous, Milton allows the language in *Paradise Lost* to resemble the mysterious nature that he associates with his version of God. His poetic style, in this sense, becomes aesthetically elevated and more divine in character, because it inevitably shares the inconceivable nature that the poet associates with the incorporeal and physically unfathomable God he creates in Book Three.¹ Furthermore, by employing language in this manner, Milton also can be said to use ambiguous words in a way that has two major consequential effects on the readers of *Paradise Lost*. The first is that it obliges a postlapsarian reader to deal with words that share similar characteristics with Milton’s God. The second effect

¹ The idea that Milton would allow his words to share characteristics with his God should not be thought of as ironic or coincidental. As Milton tells us in Book Seven, Jesus himself, one of the figures of the Christian trinity functions as an extension of God’s word. Before creating the earth in *Paradise Lost*, Milton says to Jesus, “And thou my Word, begotten Son, by thee / This [creation] I perform: speak thou and be it done!” (VII.163-4). This statement ultimately demonstrates that language for Milton has potential to become elevated in its form and content. It can, in other words, become more divine based on its style and the method by which it is used.

can only be experienced by those readers (like Lewis, Fish and Eliot) that recognize the ambiguity within Milton's syntactical constructions. Perhaps against their will, these readers are forced to accept that, throughout *Paradise Lost*, there are passages without one clear meaning. There are, in other words, sections of the poem that in their purest form will forever remain open to interpretation and mysterious in nature. By accepting this, the reader ultimately is compelled to do exactly what the archangel encourages the fallen Adam to do before leaving Paradise: to submit to the unknowable and abandon the hope of knowing things that cannot be completely understood by the human mind (XII.576-81). Such is the path, according Michael, that belongs the truly faithful, and treading it is the best hope that Adam and Eve are given have as they leave Paradise, bringing humanity step-by-step slowly towards "the happy end" of Christ's arrival on earth (XII. 605). In this sense, Milton's use of language and the linguistic constructions he employs are the means by which he places his reader closer to the tract toward righteousness. His syntax is not difficult just so that it can become more complex or Latinate. Instead, it serves a much higher purpose. It elevates the character of his postlapsarian readers by requiring their obedience. It also shows us, the members of Milton's fallen audience, that there are indeed ways that human beings can transcend from a fallen state to one that is greater, this is to say to one that is much more in tune with the expectations that God declares through His appointed messengers.

One cannot understate the value that Milton places on the act of submitting to divine entities that share the mysterious qualities that he ascribes to his epic's God. The type of submission that his syntactical approach demands from his readers is one that Milton encourages throughout *Paradise Lost*, not only through the way he uses the English language for his poetic purposes. The benefits of submitting to mysterious, godly entities are also expressed by poet himself in the very first moments of Book Three, when he boldly calls to and subsequently

describes a holy light that will help him as he describes the heavenly realm. While discussing their takes on Milton's poetry and prose, Richard Strier and John Peter Rumrich have examined those instances when the Milton demonstrates a certain degree of immodesty, even arrogance. Strier points out that there are moments in Milton's essays suggesting that humility is not a positive value (262). Arguing the same vein, Rumrich suggests that one of Milton's goals as a poet is to the gain glory that comes from "fulfilling the role of national prophet" (52). Nowhere in *Paradise Lost* is this sense of bravado and exceptionalism expressed more forcefully than in the opening lines of Book Three, as Milton makes his first reach into the heavens for inspiration. But as bold as Milton's task may be in this section of the poem, his words suggest that there is a level of doubt, uncertainty and even astonishment as he deals with a divine entity.

Hail, holy Light, offspring of Heav'n, first-born,
Or of th' Eternal coeternal beam
May I express thee unblamed? Since God is light,
And never but in unapproachèd light
Dwelt from eternity, dwelt then in thee,
Bright effluence of bright essence increate.
Or hear'st thou rather pure ethereal stream
Whose fountain who shall tell? Before the sun,
Before the heavens thou wert and at the voice
Of God as with a mantle didst invest
The rising world of waters dark and deep,
Won from the void and formless infinite. (III.1-12)

The first line of this passage reveals that Milton certainly has a sense of anxiety over the issue of describing the nature of the divine light he sees (May I express thee unblamed?). Such uncertainty seems understandable to the reader, as Milton seems to be given two totally different ways of seeing the light. We could, Milton implies, see this divine light as the firstly created "offspring of Heav'n," or, quite oppositely, we could see it as a "co-eternal beam" that has always existed with the "Eternal," this is to say with God. Ultimately for Milton, this paradoxical description proves to be beyond fixing. Rather than saying whether or not it is fair

to refer to the light as a “pure ethereal stream / Whose fountain” remains mysterious, he simply proceeds with the narrative of his epic, explaining only how he intends to use this divine light as he begins talking about heavenly events that he says are “invisible to mortal sight” (III. 55).

Thus, Milton leaves the reader without a concrete, fully comprehensible description of the light and its origins, but his choice to do so does carry certain moral implications. It suggests that he, like the reader who deals with the perplexities of his language, finds himself compelled to continue on with the narrative of *Paradise Lost*, even without having the certainty of knowing exactly what some elements of his narrative are or mean. Whatever mysteries or ambiguities define the light and its origins, they do not prove to be so burdensome as to keep him from using the light to describe the heavenly realm, and, by leaving these issues unresolved, by refusing to peruse curiosities that cannot be satisfied, Milton in turn reveals that there is a piety that comes with giving up the pursuit of the unknowable. Such is the means by which Milton makes himself an example for his fallen readers, showing them how one can progress into a greater state of seeing and understanding godly things by abandoning attempts at attaining unknowable information. Instead of becoming one of the demons of hell who searches for “vain wisdom” using “false philosophy,” readers are encouraged to accept their limitations as humans and by so doing live with the hopes of achieving the heightened spirituality of men like Milton through time (II. 565).

Protecting his fallen audience from “thoughts more elevate” that will lead the human mind through “wand’ring mazes lost” is one of the more important goals of *Paradise Lost*, and it is one that Milton strives for throughout his great epic (II.558, 561). In his efforts to encourage his readers to accept that God did “not divulge / His secrets to be scanned by them who ought / Rather admire,” Milton fills *Paradise Lost* with paradoxical concepts that leave the reader with

no choice but to accept the limitations of humanity and therefore become a better, more spiritually enriched Christian (VII. 73-5). One of the more significant instances when the paradox is employed in this manner occurs at the beginning of Book Eight, after Adam inquires into the sun's relationship with the earth. In response to these questions, Raphael provides Adam with a list of probable celestial motions or events, each of which he neither confirms nor denies. Instead, he only leaves Adam with the idea of their possible existence, refusing to satisfy his desire for certainty. Towards the end of his reply, Raphael then concludes by offering Adam even more paradoxical ideas with nothing more than the suggestion that he not seek to unravel or work his way through them. He says:

But whether thus these things or whether not,
Whether the sun predominant in heav'n
Rise on the earth or earth rise on the sun,
He from the east his flaming road begin
Or she from west her silent course advance
With inoffensive pace that spinning sleeps
On her soft axle while she paces ev'n
And bears thee soft with the smooth air along,
Solicit not thy thoughts with matters hid.
Leave them to God above. Him serve and fear! (VIII. 159-68)

Heeding this advice, Adam decides not to inquire any further. He rather chooses to submit to the unknowable nature of the universe. In doing so, he becomes "cleared of doubt" and "lowly wise," and changes his thoughts in ways that God has deemed are more suitable for him as a human being (VIII. 179, 173).

This same change in Adam is one that Milton frequently works to bring about in his fallen reader. In Book Four, the poet provides his audience with a very complicated description of the angel Uriel's travels through the heavens. While describing the angel's flight down toward earth, Milton provides the reader with two possible ways of interpreting the celestial scene surrounding Uriel, saying:

Whether the prime orb,
Incredible how swift, had thither rolled
Diurnal or this less voluble earth
By shorter flight to th' east had left him there
Arrayed with reflected purpl' and gold
The clouds that on his western throne attend. (IV. 592-97)

Here, readers are provided with two distinct means of interpreting the sun's (or prime orb's) movement as Uriel makes his way earthward. The sun, Milton tells us, is at this point either rolling to the west (diurnal), or it is standing still as "this less voluble earth" rotates. Which of these two motions are we to assume is the correct one? Milton does not let us know. He instead provides us with these two antithetical ideas, a paradoxical concept that leaves the reader without a means of knowing the exact motions of the celestial realm. But as frustrating as this unresolved issue can be, its paradoxical nature is something that is meant to discourage readers, because, as Milton tells us, it is only by submitting to the unknowable nature of certain things that we become more humble and obedient people. As Michael leaves Adam with nothing but paradoxical celestial movements to contemplate, so Milton leaves us with no real way of understanding the movement of the sun. We are rather left with a paradoxical means of interpreting its motions, and by providing his fallen readers with no choice but to accept that there are things that we as humans cannot know entirely, Milton encourages us to, like Adam, become "freed from [the] intricacies" of astronomical events and thereby turn into someone who is "lowly wise" (VIII.182, 173). Such is the means that Milton works to improve the moral nature of his fallen audience, helping them see that there are indeed paths one can tread that lead the fallen to a better, more divinely warranted form of behavior.

Milton's preference for leaving his readers with confused or unresolved situations and concepts cannot be understated. Throughout the poem, there are several instances in which

theological, philosophical and cosmological issues are turned into paradoxical concepts, ideas that by their very nature confuse the reader and leave him or her with no other choice to accept the complicated nature of the issues discussed. In Book Three, the idea of God's foreknowledge into human affairs is put forth and subsequently obfuscated. At first, Milton makes it seem as though there is no question as to God's ability to see into future events. Milton's God initially talks about the Fall as if it has already happened, explaining to his angel followers just how tragic it will be when humanity ultimately "harken[s] to his [Satan's] glozing lies / And easily transgresses the sole command" (III.93-4). But soon after making it clear that he indeed has seen the inevitable transgression of Adam and Eve, Milton's God very oddly obfuscates the idea that he has foreknowledge of the Fall, saying: "*If I foreknew / Foreknowledge had no influence on their fault / Which had no less proved certain unforeknown*" (II. 117-9, emphasis mine). By making this statement, Milton's God in many ways makes the issue of His foreknowledge less certain. Rather than leaving the issue of divine foresight unequivocally clear, Milton complicates the issue, thereby leaving the reader in a much more confused position than perhaps would be preferred when dealing with theological concepts as consequential as this one.

Similar moments in which Milton complicates issues and confuses his readers arise when Milton provides descriptions concerned with the nature of the heavens and Heaven itself. Before explaining the story of Satan's defeat by the armies of God, Raphael leaves the reader with only a vague notion of what exactly the true nature of Heaven is. The vagueness of his description comes from his choice to leave Adam unsure as to whether or not the natural world on the earth is comparable to that which is found in Heaven. Raphael asks, "Though what if Earth / Be but the shadow of Heav'n and things therein / Each to other like more than on Earth is thought?" (V.

574-6). Ultimately, this question goes unanswered. Raphael simply begins to tell his story, leaving Adam and the reader with a metaphorical way of understanding Heaven that the reader cannot say is either suitable or misplaced with absolute certainty. This same method is also implemented as Milton describes the motions in the heavens after the Fall. While describing the celestial movements or changes that leave the postlapsarian world with “pinching cold and scorching heat,” Milton makes it unclear if these changes were brought about by either a forced tilt of the earth’s axis or a change in the position of the sun (X. 691). Rather than providing readers with a clear thesis on this issue, Milton just provides antithetical ideas coming from people of different perspectives, saying:

Some say He bid his angels turn askance
The poles of earth twice ten degrees and more
From the sun’s axle: they with labor pushed
Oblique the centric globe. Some say the sun
Was bid turn reins from th’ equinoctial road
Like distant breadth to Taurus with the sev’n
Atlantic Sisters and the Spartan Twins
Up to the tropic Crab, thence down amain
By Leo and the Virgin and the Scales
As deep as Capricorn to bring in change
Of seasons to each clime. (X. 668-78)

Here, readers are presented with two very different ways of interpreting the changes taking place outside earth. We are told that there are some who believe that the earth has either tilted its axis, while there are others who believe that the sun has changed position in order to bring about the natural order of the world as it stands today. Ultimately, Milton ceases working through this problem and he concludes: “At that tasted fruit / The sun as from Thyéstean banquet turned / His course intended” (X.687-9). But even though Milton abandons his exploration of the celestial motions by saying that the sun turned his course, the issue as to whether or not the earth or the sun altered its motion to bring out these changes in the heavens

remains open. The question still stands: is the sun's course turned because the sun itself has moved, or is it rather because the earth has turned its axis "twice ten degrees," thus making this sun's motions different from its movements before the Fall? While an answer to this question in the end does not change the fact that the natural world on earth is indeed shifting, there is still an air of uncertainty left within this passage, as there frequently is whenever Milton deals with the subject of heavenly motions. All too often, the poet denies his readers the satisfaction of believing that they know exactly what goes on in the heavens. Surety in these matters is placed outside of the reader's reach, and by leaving aspects of the celestial realm unknown, Milton ultimately allows *Paradise Lost* to have the potential to bring the reader a much humble worldview—one that exists with the knowledge that, as Raphael says, "Heaven is for [human beings] too high / To know what passes there" (VIII. 172-3). Leaving his readers without sure footing when dealing with cosmological issues is the means by which he improves their moral character; it is the way he helps those engaged in his epic live in a way that makes spiritual growth and elevation possible for them.

Assisting his readers in ways that might provide them with a more righteous worldview is one of the essential tasks of Milton as a writer. As a polemicist, Milton engaged in political, moral and religious issues with a passion for finding pious solutions to the various problems in his society, and, through the instruction his essays provide, he attempts to bring readers to a condition that is more aligned with the expectations that God has for humanity. As Milton says in the essay "Of Education": "The end of all learning is to repair the ruins of our first parents by regaining to know God aright..." (227). In order to obtain this knowledge, all people need, he suggests, is the proper instruction, and, to the best of his ability, Milton offers this to readers by showing them how to properly evaluate objects that exist in the spiritual realm. Consider this

while looking at the ways that Milton uses similes in Book One of *Paradise Lost*. As Satan makes his way to call out to his followers, Milton takes on the task of describing his size and provides two similes that give the reader a complicated idea about the magnitude of Satan's shield and spear:

He scarce had ceased when the superior fiend
Was moving toward the shore. His ponderous shield,
Ethereal temper, massy, large and round,
Behind him cast. The broad circumference
Hung on his shoulders like the moon whose orb
Through optic glass the Tuscan artist views
At evening from the top of Fesolè,
Or in Valdarno to descry new lands,
Rivers or mountains in her spotty globe.
His spear (to equal which the tallest pine
Hewn on Norwegian hills to be the mast
Of some great admiral were but a wand)
He walked with to support uneasy steps
Over the burning marl (not like those steps
On Heaven's azure) and the torrid clime
Smote on him sore besides, vaulted with fire. (I. 283-98)

The exact size of Satan's shield and spear become difficult for readers to comprehend as readers first makes their way through this passage. At first, we are made to think that Satan's "large and round" shield has a circumference as grand as that of the moon. However, this perception soon changes as readers are quickly told that the moon being described is not of the exact magnitude as the actual orb that circles the earth. Instead, Milton makes it clear that the diameter of the moon he is describing is supposed to be measured on a much smaller scale, that is, as it appears through the lens of a telescope. A similar method of description is made while Milton discusses the spear that Satan carries. As Stanley Fish points out in one of his main areas of focus in *Surprised By Sin*, the reader of this passage is initially made to think that this weapon is as massive as the tallest pine, but after just a few more words, the reader is then corrected and told that the spear's magnitude is comparable to that of a wand (Fish *Surprised*

23-4). Each of these similes proves difficult to deal with, as the various scales that Milton offers readers for analysis are inconsistent and conflicting in their very nature. But as difficult as these similes may be to work through, they do carry certain teachings, lessons that Milton uses to instruct the moral character and vision of his readers. In *Surprised by Sin*, Fish argues that, by complicating similes in the way that he does, Milton means to teach us that there are perspectives outside the realm human understanding and that we ourselves cannot comprehend the objects being described as they truly exist (25, 27). While this may be true, there is also another message behind Milton's similes, one that provides the reader of *Paradise Lost* with an understanding of Satan that fits the devil's moral character. In each of these similes, the reader is provided the opportunity to have a sense of awe over the sheer mass of Satan and the objects he carries. We are first asked to imagine objects of overwhelming mass, the gigantic moon and the most massive pine that that we can visualize. However, before we are allowed to become too impressed by the size of these objects, Milton takes away our ability to become astonished by them, leaving us instead with the idea that Satan and his weapons are not as impressive and extraordinary as one might initially think. They are instead quite small, or at least small to beings with perspectives that are not like our own. Ultimately, this diminution of Satan's size reflects the minuteness of his moral character. The monarch of hell, Milton implies, should not be thought of as a grand figure, because, in reality, he is not grand when compared to the omnipotent powers he so vainly defies in *Paradise Lost*. Milton's similes in Book One provide this perspective by correcting the vision that the reader brings to the text. Simply put: the poet challenges the reader's ability to perceive things not of this world, and by so doing he instructs those engaged in *Paradise Lost*, elevating their understanding of spiritual beings so that they,

his fallen readers, can learn to see demonic figures in a way that corresponds with the moral composition of their character.²

Milton's expansion of his readers' capacity for seeing the moral nature of spiritual beings becomes all the more clear when one compares the corrected vision of Milton's reader to that of Satan in Book Four. After Satan first beholds Adam and Eve, their happy condition in Paradise, and the love they share for each other, he becomes riddled with guilt, pain, and despair. In one of his more compassionate soliloquies, Satan tries to rationalize his evil intentions for the happy couple, who he admits are so beautiful in their "harmless innocence" that they cause him to melt emotionally (IV.398, 399). It is at this point when Satan provides readers with his perspective on the size and scope of Paradise. Imagining himself trying to persuade Adam and Eve to the righteousness of his cause, he says:

League with you I seek
And mutual amity so strait, so close,
That I with you must dwell or you with me
Henceforth. My dwelling haply may not please,
Like this fair Paradise, your sense, yet such
Accept your Maker's work. He gave it me
Which I as freely give. Hell shall unfold
To entertain you two her widest gates
And send forth all her kings. There will be room
Not like these narrow limits to receive
Your numerous offspring. If no better place,
Thank Him who puts me, loath to this revenge,
On you who wronged me not for Him who wronged. (IV.375-87)

² I am indebted to Stanley Fish for the idea that Milton's style both corrects and instructs the reader (*Surprised* 56). However, I do disagree with Fish as to the reasons for Milton's corrections and instruction in *Paradise Lost*. In *Surprised by Sin*, Fish suggests that Milton challenges the fitness of one's perspective so as to prove to the reader, who fails repeatedly before the pressures of the poem, "the fact of the Fall, and his own (that is Adam's) responsibility for it" (38). This humbling is done, Fish argues to encourage self-examination, which ultimately reminds fallen human beings of both their powerlessness and the idea that "Christ has taken it upon himself to do it all" for us (45). While I agree with Fish that the poem does work for the moral edification of its readers, I also believe that this edification instead comes from the poem's encouragement that the reader remain humble, "lowly wise" and content only with what God deems fit for us in this world (*Surprised* 49; VIII. 173-7). For more on my response to Fish, see pages three and four of this document.

At this point, Satan reveals his belief that Paradise, though splendid, is not abundant enough to receive the offspring of Adam and Eve. In other words, Satan believes that Paradise is too small. Such an evaluation implies that the perfection of Eden is not such that it can accommodate all of mankind, and it shows how Satan's sight is of a kind that can see faults in the paradises that God creates. Later on in Book Four, this idea of Paradise's size is corrected and the absolute perfection of Eden is demonstrated. As Adam and Eve together thank God for all the gifts he has given them, they refer to their expected progeny and the world's capacity to hold them, saying:

and this delicious place
For us too large where Thy abundance wants
Partakers and uncropped falls to the ground.
But thou hast promised from us two a race
To fill the earth who shall with us extol
Thy goodness infinite both when we wake
And when we seek, as now, Thy gift of sleep. (IV. 729-35)

The content of this passage reveals that Satan's conception of the size of Eden is wrong. Through their joint prayer, Adam and Eve argue that Paradise is not too small for them and their "numerous offspring." Instead, their words demonstrate that there is in fact an abundance in Eden, one so great that there is apparently nothing preventing Adam and Eve from filling all of the world with their children. Satan's sight, based on this, is not only discredited; it is also shown to be blasphemously wrong in that it denies God's ability to provide for the first two humans He creates.

The correction of Satan's perspective holds significance in that it ultimately shows readers why a proper understanding of godly places and spiritual things is necessary. A vision that misunderstands the true size and scope of these things, according to Milton, is faulty, deviant, and belonging to God's first and greatest foe. A true understanding of God's creations, on the other hand, distances one from Satan in that, by having a sight that is distinct from his, a

reader achieves a trait that distinguishes certain aspects of himself or herself from that of the archetypal figure of evil in Judeo-Christian tradition. The reader will notice also that Satan never has his interpretation of Paradise's size corrected. That privilege of truly knowing how much Paradise has to offer is only granted by Milton to the reader. Thus, Milton's corrections of the reader's understanding of the spiritual realm are more than just instances when the imperfections of regular human sight are revealed. They also are moments when Milton works to change the vision of reader for the better—in a way that brings the postlapsarian reader's sight to a status that is both greater than the one he or she first brings to the text and that is less like the one belonging to main fiend and moral villain of *Paradise Lost*, Satan.

Distancing the reader from satanic behavior is one of the primary effects of Milton's poem style in *Paradise Lost*. One of the more important things that define Milton's Satan as both a character and as a rebel is his ambition, a fault to which he is able to admit: "Till pride and worse ambition threw me down" (IV.40). This is the trait, he says, that causes his great fall, and it's also part of what compels him to lure Adam and Eve into their first transgressions. He wants to claim part of the new world God created for himself: "By thee [evil] at least / Divided empire with Heaven's King I hold / By thee, and more than half perhaps will reign, / As man ere long and this new world shall know" (IV. 109-12). Ambition is also that which he tries to evoke within Eve, telling her that she would break the limitations of her current human condition and be like the gods. He promises her: "ye shall be as gods / Knowing both good and evil as they know" (IX. 708-9). However, as Milton makes clear throughout *Paradise Lost*, transcendence is not something that comes from personal ambition alone. Efforts of this nature inevitably lead to great spiritual lapses, or a condition that is essentially weaker and further removed from God. Satan's ambitions lead him to hell. His commitment to possessing earth with the tools of evil

ultimately dims his face, leaving him with a less favorable appearance that reflects his morally corrupt intentions, character, and desires (IV. 114). Eve as well, by reaching for a life that is not warranted by God, brings herself and eventually all of humanity to a fallen state. Each of these instances reveals how little personal ambition like Satan's can achieve. An external source, according to Milton—be it prevenient grace, a Holy Light, or Heavenly Muse—is ultimately what is needed for one to exceed the limitations that human life and flesh are given. This is exactly the role that the poet allows *Paradise Lost* to play for his fallen readers. Being a poem that owes its creation to muses and lights from Heaven, Milton's great in turn epic becomes an agent endowed with the power to inspire us, make us know God better, and bring us on the path of righteousness, not by our own volition but by recognizing our great need for God, His Grace, and messengers like Milton who try to teach us the benefits of obedience, humility and faith.

III

There is a story concerning the genesis of Milton's inspiration for writing *Paradise Regained*. A friend of Milton's and Quaker named Thomas Ellwood was said to have approached the poet and was shown a copy of *Paradise Lost*. After reading the epic, Ellwood then asked the poet if he had ever considered writing a sequel, telling Milton, "Thou has said

much here of Paradise lost, but what hast thou to say of *Paradise found?*” Later on, after having written the sequel to his great epic, Milton approached Ellwood with a copy of *Paradise Regained*. While recounting this experience with the poet, Ellwood says that Milton admitted to never having thought of the concept of writing about the regaining of Paradise until he (Ellwood) had mentioned it to him (Beer 300, 301, 364). After seeing how much time Milton spends challenging his readers, showing them that there are indeed paradisiacal conditions to which to the fallen human can return, one can understand how the idea of could have eluded him. So much of his first epic demonstrates the possibilities that fallen human beings have for strengthening their spiritual status and bringing it to new heights. In doing this, Milton’s craft in *Paradise Lost* brings his readers the comfort of knowing that the joys and promises found in Eden are far from being beyond our reach, nor does he, the poet, allow us to think is there reason for believing that the postlapsarian individual cannot be improved in ways that might bring him or her, as it were, closer to God.

Elevating the character of his readers is the means by which Milton demonstrates one of the more important arguments made throughout *Paradise Lost*: that the human condition, though fallen, is not so low that it has to lose all hope of transcendence. The failures of Adam and Eve are indeed consequential. Death and woe are with us because of the great transgression that Milton focuses on in his great epic, yet despite the fact that the poem’s narrative focus is on the Fall of Man and those events leading to it, this subject alone does not encompass all that the poem brings and argues to readers. Through his main postlapsarian characters, the example of his own transcendence, the instruction that he gives, and the humility he encourages readers to feel in *Paradise Lost*, the poet tries to give us hope, a tragicomic hope that tells the reader, “Yes, you are fallen, but there are ways God allows you to rise. Indeed, a true understanding godliness may

be out of your reach, but your ability to perceive it can be improved by properly reading my divinely inspired words.” Acknowledging this aspect of the poem demonstrates just what kind of a gift *Paradise Lost* is, not just to the fallen readers that are made to realize their given capacity to transcend toward greater spiritual heights, but also to the God that Milton believed in so fervently. By leading his audience in ways that bring them hope in a fallen world, Milton shows the undying promise of transcendence that is offered to the faithful, which, when accepted by his postlapsarian reader, can assuage the sense of woe one might feel over the Fall and bring one closer to seeing the justice behind God’s ways to men.

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