

Fall and Fallout: The Narrative Language of *Paradise Lost*

An Honors Thesis for the Department of English

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Acknowledgements

The present argument is an attempt to tell a story about *Paradise Lost*, which is, according to Northrop Frye, “the story of all things”.¹ The approach is not, by any means, a novel one. It is well represented in classical and traditional criticism of Milton, which almost uniformly attempts to take a zoomed-out, *gestalt* view of the poem. Yet, in recent years, the focus on textuality has generally moved criticism away from a narrative focus and toward a decentered understanding of the text. Certainly, there are merits for “dissecting” the poem in this fashion, but dissection inevitably abandons the integrity of the “whole” as such. *Paradise Lost* is so vital a text that every cut of its flank yields thought ripe for critical introspection, but the grandeur of the poem lies in its being a single *poem*, a gargantuan whole incommensurate with our capacity for critique. I am instead taking Frye at his word, and try to avoid the mistakes of certain predecessors: “the only ones who have abjectly failed with [Milton] are those who have tried to cut him down to size— their size”.² Better to at least strive to try and fail in the endeavor of a “whole” reading; better to trade dissection for a surgical approach that will allow us to sew up the hole/whole when all is said and done.

Before I could even harbor the ambition to give a “whole reading” of a poem like *Paradise Lost*, I had to be taught to read properly and with purpose. For this I am joyously indebted to the innumerable, dedicated educators who took me under their wing and trained me in this craft. Foremost among them is my thesis advisor, Ichiro Takayoshi, whose endless guidance and support in matters analytical, technical, vocational and personal have given me a model for not only how to practice literary criticism with insight and vigor, but also how to conduct oneself as a person worthy and capable of living the life of a thinker and educator. On a leisurely walk to a train station near his house, he said to me: “Anyone who says they don’t like being a professor is lying, because it’s a fantastic life.” In working with him, I’ve realized that the life is a good one because it combines the satisfaction of intellectual stimulation with the opportunity to contribute to the growth and development of others. Everything he has done for me has given me reason to believe in what he says, and to want to do it myself.

¹ Frye, Northrop. “The Return of Eden: Five Essays on Milton’s Epics.” *Collected Works of Northrop Frye, Volume 16: Northrop Frye on Milton and Blake*. Edited by Angela Esterhammer. University of Toronto Press, 2005. p. 37.

² Frye 36-7

Many other professors and teachers were also integral to my ability to complete this project. I don't have enough words to thank Lee Edelman for challenging me to think like a scholar and opening my eyes to the possibilities of critical thought; Jess Keiser for his great knowledge on Milton and insightful feedback during the writing stages; Anne Moore for her infectious enthusiasm and encouragement; Julia Genster for countless delightful, liberating conversations about literature and introducing me to *Paradise Lost* in memorably grand fashion; John Lurz for teaching me how to navigate the complexity and nuance of difficult texts; Jay Cantor for his thoughtful advice and wonderful sense of humor; my fellow thesis writers for their literary passion and useful comments; and every smiling, encouraging face in the Department of English that made East Hall and the study of literature feel like home. Thank you all for helping this project come to fruition.

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The most inexpressible of these thank-you's I owe to my family. In choosing to major in English and in choosing to write this thesis, I've been trying to write a story of my own: a story about who I am. My family has been following this story for as long as I've been writing it, and have supported its writing in every way imaginable. When I've changed my mind, they've embraced it; when I've succeeded, they've rejoiced; when I've failed, they've picked me back up again. They have been the wonderful constants in an undergraduate career filled with ups and downs. Acha, Amma, and Unni: this thesis is dedicated to you. Thank you for everything.

I

Introduction

“Poetry cannot report the event; it must *be* the event, lived through in a form that can speak about itself while remaining wholly itself.”³

Balachandra Rajan

The life of the poet John Milton coincides with an extraordinary transitional period in the history of human governance: namely, the advent of a resilient strain of republicanism, and the doom it foretold for the tradition of absolute monarchy. The monarchic institutions of Europe would come under considerable populist attack in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, but well prior to this, the Age of Reason laid the groundwork for the demise of the “Divine Right of Kings” doctrine that had long exacerbated tensions between the English crown and Parliament, between the remnants of absolutism and the burgeoning popularity of republicanism. During the reign of James I, the doctrine amounted to little more than an unspoken antagonism; but for his son, Charles I, however, stalwart assertion of “Divine Right” would spark a major conflict in the English Civil War and ultimately lead to regicide in 1649.⁴

Milton was greatly involved in the conflicts of his age and as Barbara K. Lewalski suggests, his “[p]olitical and personal anxieties led [him] to find his poetic voice”.⁵ He repeatedly took up his pen in support and defense of a “daring experiment in republican government... the kind of public service his whole life had prepared him for”.⁶ His prose particularly helped the nascent Commonwealth to “establish credibility by... answering the most formidable polemic attacks upon it”; simultaneously, his language and rhetoric were an integral part of the broader polemic targeting absolutist doctrine.⁷ In our age, however, it is Milton’s poetry that provides us with the most enduring record of the more abstract and ideological struggle couched in the political attack on “Divine Right.” I argue that this is the struggle

³ Rajan, Balachandra. “The Overwhelming Question.” *The Sewanee Review*, vol. 74, no. 1, 1966. p. 372.

⁴ Trueman, C. N. “The Causes of the English Civil War.” *History Learning Site*, 17 Mar. 2015, <https://www.historylearningsite.co.uk/stuart-england/the-causes-of-the-english-civil-war/>.

⁵ Lewalski, Barbara K. *The Life of John Milton: A Critical Biography*. Blackwell Publishers, 2000. p. 278.

⁶ Lewalski 236

⁷ Lewalski 236

between *premodernity* and *modernity* that defined the liminality of Milton's time and continues to manifest in the shocking duality of his poetical corpus.

The focus of the present investigation is *Paradise Lost*. Completed in the years following the Restoration of 1660, the poem crystallizes the conflict between premodern and modern thought at the core of its zeitgeist, and meditates on the resulting ambiguity that Neil Forsyth suggests would have been “familiar to many of Milton's own seventeenth-century readers” and “will have made the reading of Milton's great poem as powerful and persuasive, or scandalous, as we know it soon became”.⁸ The central *problem* of the poem, therefore, is one of dichotomous ideological identity; many commentators have directly and indirectly grappled with the premodern/modern rift in the poem, but most have generally attempted to “settle” this problem by one of two means. A large contingent of critics pick one side of the divide and focus their efforts on criticizing the other side. Among the most influential of these efforts are Stanley Fish's *Surprised by Sin*, whose Christian didacticism argument settles in favor of Milton's premodernity; and William Blake's *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell*, in which Blake argues that “Milton wrote in fetters when he wrote of Angels & God, and at liberty when of Devils & Hell... because he was a true poet and of the Devil's party without knowing it”.⁹ To settle in favor of God is to center the poem on Christian piety; to settle in favor of Satan is to legitimize the individual against the demands of this piety. These readings are assertive and conclusive in their arguments, but must invent complex rationalizations to explain the poem's incongruent elements, or ignore them altogether. They must make some sacrifice to achieve ideological uniformity, and often that sacrifice is insufficiently covered up.

Other critics have “settled” the problem using ambiguity. Gordon Teskey's *Delirious Milton*— on whose terminology and argument this thesis builds— confronts a historical and paradigmatic divide in the text between “divine Creation in the past and human creativity in the future”.¹⁰ He associates the former with the impetus for all human creativity to praise the original Creation; and the latter with “modernity,” a “future of making” that is “a creation produced entirely by man,” wherein “[w]e live not in nature but in

⁸ Forsyth, Neil. *The Satanic Epic*. Princeton University Press, 2003. p. 73.

⁹ Blake, William. “The Marriage of Heaven and Hell.” *The Romantics on Milton: Formal Essays and Critical Asides*. Edited by Joseph Anthony Wittreich, The Press of Case Western Reserve University, 1970. p. 35.

¹⁰ Teskey, Gordon. *Delirious Milton*. Harvard University Press, 2006. p. 2.

what we have made”.¹¹ This dichotomy manifests in the poem as a duel between “retrospective theory and prophetic poetry,” wherein the theoretical aspects of Milton’s work efface their own being to give due credit to the divine, while the work’s being a “poem,” a human artifact and emblem of human creative power, asserts its own being so vehemently as to engender a new ideological and historical territory.¹² And at the center of Teskey’s reconciliation is “delirium... a flickering on and off of hallucinatory moments in rapid succession, driven by some underlying contradiction”.¹³ Through “delirium,” Teskey argues, Milton is able to channel a shamanistic power that effects a “restoration of the aura” particular to the artist, both in the age of modernity and on into the continuum of history as a whole.¹⁴ Readings of this kind are able to account for the poem’s ideological complexity— as “delirium” certainly does— but do little for readership than establish a *mise en abyme*. By switching “deliriously” from one mode to the other, we become lost in an endless tessellation of the same ideological uncertainty, and lose our sense of the poem as a single coherent work, on par with the great epics of Homer and Virgil. We are instead asked to accept that the poem is fundamentally broken and unable to sustain a single creative vision.

The chief aim of this thesis, however, is to argue that we need not necessarily settle for one-sidedness or ambiguity in *Paradise Lost*, and indeed that such readings result from an inadequate appreciation of the narrative linearity of the poem. The charge is that readings that stop at ideological purity or ambiguity fail to recognize the storytelling endeavor that completely envelops the poem’s theoretical discourse, and that an appreciation for stories of the poem will illustrate that the rift between premodernity and modernity in the poem is smoothed out and logically sequenced by the use of *narrative*. I intend to show that the concept of narrativity and narrative structure explains how the poet is able to repair the ideological rift of his age and facilitate a shift from one narrative paradigm to another. This argument therefore contends that by treating the dueling modalities and perspectives of premodernity and modernity in *Paradise Lost* as “narratives” and not “competing ideologies,” we are able to transform the

¹¹ Teskey 6-7

¹² Teskey 9

¹³ Teskey 4

¹⁴ Teskey 9

poem's liminality and duality into a narrative progression that is perhaps more in line with the political thrust that drove Milton's professional career and animated his pen.

The project therefore attempts to restore to *Paradise Lost* a sense of revolutionary spirit by exploring its use of "narrative language." At its core is an assertion that the poem utilizes narrativity to recreate the history-defining event of the Fall and reread it to fit modernity's emphasis on the centrality of the human being, and that it does in this way make good on Milton's desire to "leave something so written to aftertimes" that will prove "doctrinal and exemplary to a nation".¹⁵ The Fall, through Milton's narrative footwork, is transformed into a human act insulated from divine influence, and therefore marks the *archē* of a decidedly-human historical narrative (what I will call the narrative of *Fallout*, lit. the narrative consequences of the Fall). We *emerge* from *Paradise Lost* in possession of a radically reworked history and teleology, and through these, we can contextualize ourselves as the arbiters of our own destiny and the keepers of a creation called "culture" or "society" that is on par with God's creation in "nature." The *Fallout* of Milton's writing the poem, it might be said, is an intimate and functioning understanding of our world as a modern one.

Terminology & Organization (1.1)

A number of terms and concepts are central to the readability of this argument, and as such, let us establish what they mean and to what they refer. The *premodernity/modernity* binary is thematically invoked during much of the discussion; both terms are derived from Teskey's *Delirious Milton* and generalized using the some basic principles of "modernity" established in Feisal G. Mohamed and Patrick Fadely's introduction to *Milton's Modernities*. Premodernity denotes something of, or relating to, a paradigm in which the central tenet of interpretation is the position of God as Creator and Animator. God is the point of gravity in a premodern context, and all things inevitably refer to back to their common origin in and enormous debt to the primordial Creator. Modernity, on the other hand, denotes something of, or relating to a paradigm in which the central tent of interpretation is the replacement of God as Creator and Animator with the supremacy of human creativity and will. Modernity centers on the human

¹⁵ Milton, John. *Complete Poems and Major Prose*. Edited with notes and introduction by Merritt Y. Hughes, Hackett Publishing Company, 2003. pp. 668-669.

as self-sufficient and in control of culture, which is made to rival God's contribution of nature. That which is modern may also refer to either an established paradigm of modernity or a transition toward modernity, even if that transition is not complete. Both the transitional movement and the resultant structure are included because the premodern model, by its nature, is averse to change, and cannot remain premodern in the face of "modernization." The modernity we look for (when we seek to identify modern currents) is focused on the insulation of society—the human creation and the human state—from that of nature—the creation of God. We seek out those passages that evince or encourage a "fundamental separation of society from nature" and/or a "division of time into an archaic past and ever-more modernized future"; in short, places where the poem enacts a schism of some sort in space, philosophy and history that ultimately separates humanity from God.¹⁶

The concept most important to the discussion is of course *narrative*. Narrative is related to "story," but is bigger than it, too. It refers to the composite *structural* phenomenon created by a story and the ideological argument implicated in its delivery. While storytelling focuses on a set of events, narrative couples those events with the extra-textual concerns of perspective, interpretation, context, etc. to transform a story into an argument/framework in which paradigms may play. "Story" is the most important element in "narrative," because it provides us with a means of accessing and modifying the ideological structure of narrative; by means of "story" and storytelling, we are free to edit, erase and recreate the ideological implications present in the overarching structure of narrative. This is why, I suggest, that Milton uses narrative technique to grapple with the dichotomy of premodernity and modernity in *Paradise Lost*: in so doing, he can engage with ideology in a more hands-on way and avoid the complexities of completely logical argumentation. In the context of the poem, "narrative" will be used to refer to various diegetic arcs—Satan's rebellion and battle against God, Adam and Eve's Fall, etc.—and the broader associations these diegetic arcs possess in their associations to particular understandings of Christian doctrine, such as the traditional link between divine conflict and absolute morality, and humanity's free choice to Fall.

¹⁶ Fadely, Patrick and Feisal G. Mohamed. "Satan or Samson?: The Question of Milton and Modernity." *Milton's Modernities*. Edited by Feisal G. Mohamed and Patrick Fadely, Northwestern University Press, 2017. p. 3.

The “structure” of narrative, as we will use it, occupies a temporal dimension and expands from an *archē* to a *telos*; when we discuss Milton’s narrative structures, we will often be operating from within the body of the structure, but will seek to identify them on the basis of their formative archēs and the teloi toward which they advance. For our purposes, narratives begin with an identifiable archē, and conclude with some signification— actualized or not— of telos. Terms such as these capture the sense of *diffusion* of the origin and conclusion into the “body” or narrative that is lost on terms like “origin” and “conclusion.” The Greek terms, however, directly intimate the ways in which the “beginning” and “end” of a narrative continually extend into and exert influence upon the narrative body as a whole. The *archē*, to borrow Teskey’s language, concerns the “origin and governing ‘principle’”.¹⁷ It is an event that produces all that comes after through this “principle” or ideological framework, which preserves a trace of the origin in each constituent element of the narrative. The archē is made manifest in each narrative consequence and every consequence of those consequences through the influence of this “archeological principle,” such that the whole narrative is made answerable to its origin.

Telos, for our purposes, is both a point and an energy: a *teleological thrust*. It is the long-awaited moment at which the “question” posed by the archē will be conclusively answered, and the whole narrative progression will be closed. But like the archē, telos also possesses a gravitational power over our reading of narrative: as the “chief” consequence of the archē, telos mandates all elements of the narrative push toward it. Telos is the point at which the narrative thrust will finally be stilled, but as such it can never “arrive” within the context of the narrative. This is the essential logic of telos that distinguishes it from such terms as “conclusion” and “ending”: telos can never itself be “concluded” or “past,” but emerges only as either a projection into an unreachable future (“capital-T Telos”) or as a convenient provision in the present moment that arises out of necessity when historical narrativity is exercised. It is a moment of conclusion that is not conclusive, simply because it does not arrive, but the possibility of it guarantees all narrative function. Telos stands upon an essential logic of deferral, but that deferral is not necessarily willing; we are pulled by narrative forces toward the moment of “wholeness” that telos is meant to represent, and until we get a sense of that wholeness, the burden of signification is passed forward. Therefore, the closest we come to actualizing teleology is in this feeling of deferral in which we

¹⁷ Teskey 6

continually push the burden of narrative conclusion forward. The teleological thrust is one of temporization and delay, whereby we await the impossible arrival of narrative conclusion.

The relationship between archē and telos in this argument is perhaps best illustrated in the logic of transgression and redemption in Christianity. On both an individual and a collective scale, Christian narrativity is actualized when sin occurs and the possibility of redemption is instated. A person will sin (archē) and thereby place themselves on a narrative path toward redemption in Christ (telos), in which they will engage with their conscience, become aware of their transgression, experience regret/grief/suffering, and resolve to repent. Repentance is the concatenation of the aforementioned teleological thrust, because redemption can only arrive in the distant future, when the Final Judgment is delivered. The sinner repents *ad infinitum* in a teleological fashion, and so long as this continues, the narrative of Christianity holds. Indeed, Christianity is that narrative which exists in the space between the positing of sin through interdiction and the redemption of inevitable transgression. Archē, for our purposes, is synonymous with sin, and telos— better expressed as this teleological thrust— is the experience of deferral onto another, “higher” result. In the poem, we find archēs where a narrative thrust may be said to originate; and teloi where a narrative thrust is either satisfied or deferred and backgrounded.

These terms and concepts guide what is essentially an attempt to tell a story about *Paradise Lost*, for the better part of Milton criticism takes on narrative form in a subconscious imitation of the poem itself. Forsyth makes this much clear in *The Satanic Epic*: insofar as his reading also aims to tussle with the play of narratives, it too is organized around a linear progression from Book One to Book Twelve that tries to respect the poem’s own linearity. This paper will not be so laborious in its pace, but will instead divide the poem into three loose “acts” that correspond to the three narrative steps outlined below. The first “act” is comprised of the first four books; the second “act” the next four; and the third, Books Nine and Ten. These rough divisions correspond to the narrative path we take through the poem’s revolution:

1. Act One/Chapter One focuses on the deconstruction of the premodern narratives that exist in the world of the poem’s composition, such that we are primed to understand Milton’s “new” narration of the Fall as truly “new” and free of pre-existing baggage.
2. Act Two/Chapter Two focuses on the meeting point between the premodern and modern worlds in the Garden of Eden, and considers how Milton uses this space to establish a point of “narrative transfer” from one mode to the next.

3. Act Three/Chapter Three focuses on Milton's assertion of the inherent narrativity of subjectivity, his positioning that narrative form and structure as the true motivator of all human action (including the Fall), and the way in which the postlapsarian world itself becomes a mirror for subjective narrative and allows for human beings to live in a world of their own selves.

The last two books of the poem are different enough from the rest to warrant separate consideration in the concluding chapter, where they will be subject to the question of how Milton's modernity changes our understanding of the Biblical history not directly relevant to the poem's stated subject, and our perception of Christian eschatology and prophecy.

This linearity is essential to our task, for to contend with the narrative(s) of the poem is to commit to viewing it as a single, linear whole, and to "trek" through the poem as if it were a physical threshold that we slowly, but steadily cross. For this reason, I often use the word "we" to refer to the audience/spectatorship/readers of the poem. I am of the Fishean school of thinking about *Paradise Lost* insofar as I believe the reader to be integral to the text, in a structural and diegetic sense. *Paradise Lost* is not an idle book one picks up after dinner—it is a space through which we move, whose ramifications we are asked to consider in realtime. It does not "occur" to us, and in any case it did not "occur" to Milton to write it; it *happens* to us, just as Milton's own relationship with the muse is one of visitation in vulnerability. As such, my use of the pronoun is emblematic of this belief that when "we" appear in the poem, "we" really are there. And since "we" are there, and since we have miles and years and worlds to cover, perhaps it is best that we get started.

II

Penning Chaos

I say unto you: one must still have chaos in oneself to be able to give birth to a dancing star. I say unto you: you still have chaos in yourselves.¹⁸

Friedrich Nietzsche

There is a brief moment of semantic confusion and logical inconsistency at the very beginning of *Paradise Lost*: namely, that Paradise is nowhere in sight, but loss itself is readily available. The epic voice's invocation begins with the brutality of crime and punishment, while a hazy mention of Paradise itself is reduced to a single epithet, "the blissful seat," swallowed by syntax that relegates it to naught but a jewel in the crown of "one greater man":

Of man's first disobedience and the fruit
Of that forbidden tree whose mortal taste
Brought death into the world and all our woe
With loss of Eden till one greater man
Restore us and regain the blissful seat¹⁹

In light of Paradise's absence and loss's presence, we have to reread and reset our expectations, all the way to the poem's title. We understand that the poem is "paradise lost," not "paradise being lost," or something like that. The poem's title reads like a front-page headline, gravely announcing something that, while immediate in our context, is already ceded to the past even before we've read it. Such is the temporal quagmire from which Milton begins, *in medias res*, though we quickly understand that the impossibility of "beginning" is part and parcel of the poem's mission. Confusion and foiled expectations, missed connections and semantic soup are just some of the symptoms of the first stage of Milton's grand narrative revolution. For prior to penning a new narrative and a new world along with it, the poet must address and critique the narratives that predate and preface his own narration. He must do so in order to ensure that we understand his modernity as a necessary replacement for a flawed system in premodernity, and to free that modernity of any lingering allegiance to the tenets of premodernity. It is only once this deconstruction is completed that the poet will be free to introduce a new "modern" narrative that stands as

¹⁸ Nietzsche, Friedrich Wilhelm. *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*. Translated by Walter Kaufmann, Modern Library, 1995. p. 17.

¹⁹ *PL* 1.1-5

a new creation, and not as an evolution upon the previous model. Using three techniques that I shall broadly term “readerliness,” “différance,” and “motion,” Milton deconstructs the common narrative paradigms and forms of premodernity such that his own narrative effort can begin without the baggage of the past, from a place of “newness.”

“Deconstruction” here is to be distinguished from “negation” or “resistance”; the latter aspires toward fragmentation of a whole, and does not necessarily contribute to the ideological complication that is required to truly efface, or at the very least disable, the influence of narrative. Rather, deconstruction is “turned toward opening, exposure, expansion, and complexification... toward releasing unheard-of, undreamt-of possibilities *to come*”.²⁰ The “mission of deconstruction” is to “show that things— texts, institutions, traditions, societies, beliefs, and practices”— what in this context we call *narrative structure* — “exceed the boundaries they currently occupy”.²¹ The deconstructive effort precludes the possibility of real ontological security by developing a critique from the body of structural thought; under a deconstructive light, it is revealed that self-critical drives, semantic excess and deferral, and the effacement of denotative practice are consequences of structurality itself. This chapter will observe how Milton uses traditional elements of poetic composition and Christianity to engage in a program of deconstruction, with the goal of illustrating how these techniques destabilize the assumptions and foundations of premodernity.

In the wake of Milton’s deconstructive effort, we are left with an “ideological *chora*” comparable to the vision of Chaos articulated in *Paradise Lost*. Indeed, Chaos provides us with an excellent model for approaching the end-product of Milton’s deconstruction: it immediately assaults the senses as a *non-conceptual* and *atemporal* space when it appears. Chaos is “a dark/ Illimitable ocean without bound,/ Without dimension,” where our traditional measurements and “time and place” are lost.²² It is a space of excessive motion and conflict, where confusion originates from the “eternal anarchy” between the “champions” of “Hot, Cold, Moist, and Dry,” whose warring nevertheless results in a “wild abyss.../ Of

²⁰ Derrida, Jacques. *Deconstruction in a Nutshell: a Conversation with Jacques Derrida*. Edited and with a commentary by John D. Caputo. Fordham University Press, 1997. p. 31.

²¹ Derrida, *Deconstruction in a Nutshell* 31

²² *PL* 2.891-4

neither sea, nor shore, nor air, nor fire,/ But all these in their pregnant causes mixed/ Confus'dly".²³ Chaos is a space of contraries in which the pillars of ontology are dissolved, a place that consumes difference even as it would seem to foster it. Chaos is absence through excess, silence through polyphony. Yet, the same vision bespeaks the poet's faith in its creative potential. Chaos is also the "womb of nature, and perhaps her grave," and can only be stilled when the "Almighty Maker" ordains its substance "his dark materials to create more worlds".²⁴ Creation ends in Chaos, but begins there too, and if Milton would seek to create the world anew, his creation must likewise must begin from a state of chaos that can be stilled and molded to suit a creative— in the most divine sense of the word— vision. After all: as Gordon Teskey writes in *Delirious Milton*, Chaos seems a "cosmological concept that is meant to stand in a dialectical relation to Creation".²⁵

Therefore, deconstruction recreates "Chaos" in an ideological register through the first four books. Narrative integrity is torn to shreds by the techniques of readerliness, différance and motion; and temporality is confused by a *misplaced* introduction that delays our arrival at the origin until that arrival can coincide with and *signify* an entrée into a wholly "new" narrative. Insofar as "Milton is a thinker of the archē, of the origin and governing 'principle,'" he is deliberate in withholding the origin until such time as he can become the sole arbiter of its truth.²⁶ By starting in a different place and in a different narrative, Milton need not answer to the question of the origin until his deconstructive work is complete — until his origin can emerge, as God's own, from Chaos. The deconstruction into Chaos, therefore, ultimately establishes the proper context for a narrative birth that will rival God's own by turning premodern certainties into

Readerliness (2.1)

Let me begin by hazarding an assertion: *Paradise Lost* begins deconstructing the world in which it was born even before its first line is complete. By inserting itself into the epic verse tradition, the poem

²³ *PL* 2.896-914

²⁴ *PL* 2.911-6

²⁵ Teskey 84

²⁶ Teskey 6

figures a maturation of the self-critical potential inhered in the structure of the epic poem. *Paradise Lost* develops and formalizes the cardinal “readerliness” that one finds in the text/metatext dichotomy of every epic, and by this “readerliness,” positions itself as a polemical work in literary guise. This technique, therefore, figures the first of the three deconstructive techniques Milton utilizes in Act One.

“Readerliness” here is to be distinguished from Roland Barthes’s notion of “readerly” and “writerly” texts. It is rather a shorthand for an observation Joan Malory Webber makes in *Milton and His Epic Tradition* on the form and goals of epic: “Whatever is assumed to be the informing purpose of any epic story, whether the Trojan war or the defense of fair ladies, provides not only the narrative but also a target for the author’s criticisms of society. To the extent that a world view is attached to the story, it too is criticized”.²⁷ Two assumptions are couched in Webber’s language: one is that a world view is attached to the “epic story, thus rendering it a “narrative” per our definition; and the other is that epic is a container for both this narrative and the criticisms of the poet. “Readerliness” describes the action of both assumptions: it suggests that the epic form structuralizes its diegesis into narrative (per our definition), and reminds us that the storytelling act allows the poet to engage in polemic.

Most texts that have narrators can be said to exhibit “readerliness” in some form, but in epic especially, the narrative process also serves a deconstructive function. This is because epic is almost always presented as a *recount*. The classical epics all follow the same structural blueprint: each takes a historical (or mythological) episode as its “diegetic document” to which it adds critical commentary and interpretation in narrative guise, made possible by a motif of historical perspective and revisitation. In the *Iliad*, it is the fall of Troy; in the *Odyssey*, the twenty year absence of the hero; in the *Aeneid*, the seeds of Rome. The muse, it would seem, is only interested in telling us that which we already know, though with a caveat of futurism, as Homer suggests in the *Odyssey*: “sing for our time too”.²⁸ It is this futurism, inherent in the recount, that “reopens” history, and subjects it to the needs of the present. The epic poets deign to return from a historical vantage point to the events of the past, armed as ever with critical and analytical tools. The first telling will assemble narrative, unifying its disparate and scattered diegetic and structural elements, but any subsequent retelling always carries with it the burden of revision which

²⁷ Webber, Joan Malory. *Milton and His Epic Tradition*. University of Washington Press, 1979. p. xi.

²⁸ Homer. *The Odyssey*. Translated by Robert Fagles, Penguin Books, 1997. Bk. 1, l. 12.

naturally complicates our confidence in the first telling's veracity; they are free to introduce differences and details that cause us to compare the two versions and ask after which version is "true." In this way, the second telling functions like a cross-examination: it will present the same narrative from a critical and introspective perspective, often bringing to light the antinomies and inconsistencies of the original. The epic poets simply use this technique to introduce uncertainty into the original narrative, and thereby weaken our faith in it.

Therefore, by framing their texts using this dialectic of historical revival, the poets already challenge the finality of their chosen subject in the context of a teleological history. The futurism of a poet like Milton, Teskey argues, "always implies a return, even if what is returned to is changed and enriched, as well as *destabilized*, by that departure".²⁹ The "epic return" constitutes a critical endeavor that destabilizes the historical narrative to which we "return" in the real world; it puts historicity and historical significance on trial. Epic always-already instigates instability in its subject matter; it approaches its chosen episode not with the authoritative confidence of historicity, but with the interpretive ambiguity of literature. Indeed, the readerliness of epic restores to the poetic subject its original interpretability: the case presented by the historical episode, formerly dismissed as resolved, is reopened, and its verdict falls again into the unknown.

One need only look to the invocation, the bombastic self-announcement and fanfare that has so long been a mainstay of the epic poet's toolkit, to find the most textual articulation of this readerliness. Though our oral tradition has long since left the classical epics behind, the invocation memorializes the immemorial link between narrator and narrative that underpins the form. In it is left the distinct residue of the process, both of writing and of reading; the invocation is not the only technique by which the poet appears in the body of the poem, but it serves as the most tangible indication of this appearance simply by announcing the subject of narration and the overall intent to narrate. This readerliness reaches maturity in Milton, whose invocation seems both judge and jury in its critical forwardness:

Of Man's first disobedience and the fruit
Of that forbidden tree whose mortal taste
Brought death into the world and all our woe
With loss of Eden till one greater Man
Restore us and regain the blissful seat

²⁹ Teskey 4, emphasis added

Sing Heav'nly Muse...
 ... I thence
 Invoke thy aid to my adventurous song,
 That with no middle flight intends to soar
 Above the Aonian mount, while it pursues
 Things unattempted yet in prose or rhyme³⁰

We might not immediately note the importance of the poem's very first word: "of." Even before the poem's scope and project are announced, the textual frame appears, by virtue of prepositional phrasing. It is not "Man's first disobedience," but "Of Man's first disobedience"; from the very beginning, the poem takes on the mantle of a critical or philosophical treatise, and quite literally wastes no time before installing its critical aims in the body of the text. In light of this, the poet's later meta-awareness of epic tradition ("things unattempted yet in prose or rhyme"), and the bold aim of justifying "the ways of God to men"³¹ seem appropriately *lawyerly*. Thus, *Paradise Lost* opens with a gesture of analysis that places considerable interpretive pressure on a narrative that, until this point, was understood to be a foundational support of the premodern world. The poem reopens the case of the Genesis narrative, as if to suggest that it may be *reread* in such a way as to show that things are not quite as they seem. Thus, epic readerliness is a destabilizing force in narrative equations, and contributes to the first act's deconstructive endeavor.

The readerliness of epic form guarantees that there is always *a* reader in *Paradise Lost* exerting critical pressure. But readerliness is also extended to *the* reader: the text welcomes equally the interpretive apparatus of the audience and interjects that voice into interpretive polyphony. As Stanley Fish argues in *Surprised by Sin*, the events of the poem not only encourage but demand our attentiveness and, more pertinently, our reaction. The reader fills both a diegetic and textual role in the poem, for he is both a "participant in the action and a critic of his own performance".³² We are expected—*demand*ed—to contribute another analytical voice to the poem. This voice naturally assists in the deconstructive effort by inserting another interpretive variable into the text and thereby aggravating its semantic confusion.

This kind of involvement is something the poet cannot accomplish from where the poem begins, with the reader in "spectator mode." The reader's interpretive voice is typically passive: even when we

³⁰ *PL* 1.1-16

³¹ *PL* 1.26

³² Fish, Stanley Eugene. *Surprised by Sin*. Macmillan and St. Martin's Press, 1967. p. ix.

produce critique, our comments are not recognized by or invited into the text. Milton must therefore pull, forcefully but with a great deal of tact and sleight, his reader into the lost world of his poem using moments of “textuality” that *demand* our interpretation, and are left unresolved without it. The verse produces sticky situations and logical quagmires that *entangle* the reader and can only be resolved through interpretation. When the epic voice cannot provide commentary to guide our reading— or when the voice itself produces these problems— the resolution must come from us and occur within us. Certainly, this moves us more than halfway toward a localization of power in human hands, but let us first consider those moments where our engagement is requested. Consider, for example, the simile that attends the fallen angels’ rise from the burning lake:

... As when the potent rod
Of Amram’s son in Egypt’s evil day
Waver round the coast uncalled a pitchy cloud
Of locusts warping on the eastern wind
That o’er the realm of impious Pharaoh hung³³

The epic voice itself provides this analogy which would seem, however briefly, to liken Satan to Moses even as it equates the angels themselves with the plague of locusts. There are two narrative consequences to be had from this moment of suggestive excess: in one case, Satan is validated as a messiah, and in the other, the demonic hordes are recognized as destructive and damaging. It is left to the reader to parse the trope, but in the absence of guiding commentary, it is also such that the reader’s reading reigns supreme. It may well be, in this case, that the cognitive dissonance we experience as a result of contrary suggestions is the true intention of the passage. The incongruity seems to both validate our admiration for Satan as a leader of a fallen people, and simultaneously critique our faith in him. There is a superposition of both readings within the mind of the interpreting body, and thus a superfluity of narrative possibilities in the reader; the reader therefore has the power to deconstruct the paradigm using reaction and response.

In this fashion, we are called upon to contribute to the conversation at various points in the poem. Most notable among these, however, is our introduction to God in Book 3. Fish is quick to defend Milton’s God, whom he admits presents “difficulties... for most readers”.³⁴ God’s first words in the text

³³ *PL* 1.338-42

³⁴ Fish 80

sharply criticize our ancestors for their free action in performative fashion. As Fish suggests, God's "shall pervert" carries with it the ominous aura of prophecy: it seems to script the Fall and ensure that it will occur.³⁵ Yet, although it is God's word that speaks the Fall into existence, the blame is left on humanity's shoulders: "Whose fault?/ Whose but his own? Ingrate!"³⁶ The reprimand cuts sharp as a knife; it possesses a weight and trajectory that finds its way to us. Even if we did not feel any kinship toward Satan (as Fish argues we should not), his threats seem vague in comparison to this chilling prophecy, which convicts and castigates our first parents so decisively that even we, at several millennia's remove, feel the sting.

Fish ultimately argues that the reader who "protests at the accusation... and turns aside to the flattery of worldly counsel or to the evasions of his own reason... betrays his iniquity and is deficient in contrition".³⁷ He raises an excellent point, but simultaneously reveals that this is a problem of interpretation and reaction on the part of the reader. For the "God" we meet in Book 3 is hardly that of Biblical authenticity; the rebuke, reaching its emotional climax at "ingrate," does not always call upon or even evoke the "milk of the pure Word": he is an invention of the poet himself.³⁸ The fate of God, and subsequently that of the reader, is dependent upon the interpretive reaction of the latter. If he seems villainous and vindictive, it is because the reader reads him as such; and if he seems pure in his directive and logic, it is because Fish's "ideal reader"—needless to say, a paradoxical manifestation of fallibility in spite of learning—is able to supplement the textual characterization with a rationalization along the lines of *Surprised by Sin*. The radical suggestion of such a paradigm is that God is entirely in human hands. Without a "proper" reading to save him, he too is vulnerable to re-interpretation. It is our reaction—on Milton's invitation—that complicates God, and in us that God may find salvation. A stunning reversal, indeed, and furthermore one in which the deconstructive power of interpretation is well represented.

Though the implications of this deconstructive technique evince a revolution already at work, at its core, the readerliness and interpretive emphasis of the poem works to destabilize the existing religious

³⁵ *PL* 3.92

³⁶ *PL* 3.96-7

³⁷ Fish 83

³⁸ Fish 57

narratives from historical, mythological, and theological points of view. The readerliness of the form frames the existent narrative of the Fall as a historical and/or mythological episode, and calls into question its traditional signification by announcing an effort to re-narrate and thus radically reframe it. Similarly, the theological stability of that narrative is made uncertain by the involvement of the reader, who is free to interpret ambiguities in the text in such a way as to subvert typical sureties, be it the alignment of Satan or the benevolence of God. *Paradise Lost* therefore invokes the critical apparatus early and often to unpack and deconstruct the narrative habits that predate and limit its ability to establish a “new” narrative.

The Ontological Quagmire of *Différance* (2.2)

It is critical to acknowledge that the readerliness of epic and the involvement of the reader are *structural* deconstructions of the first act. The aforementioned elements perform their work on a metatextual level which is intimately involved with but notably distinct from the diegesis, insofar as the poet, the muse, and the reader do not “interact” with diegetic characters or scenes in tangible ways. The destabilization is carried forth on a diegetic level by Satan, the poet’s most prominent deconstructive tool. Two of his cardinal traits and behaviors— “difference” and “motion”— reproduce the effects of deconstruction within the diegetic frame.

And surely, there has never been a figure more suited to deconstructive reading than Satan himself. The long and varied history of the primal enemy is marked by the instability of interpretation. As Henry Ansgar Kelly’s *Satan: A Biography* suggests, he is essentially and historically a variation on a theme in every instance. The figure of Satan cannot be fixed in place or defined beyond doubt— there always exists, in both accepted doctrine and the apocryphal tradition, something to prompt a reinterpretation and redrawing. His changing form and attributes evince an “interpretability” through which Milton gains the freedom to soften and edit existing narratives. It may be said, therefore, that Satan preemptively fractures the poem’s theological ethos and narrative stability, even as he becomes an essential part of it.

Firstly, there is a startling dearth of scripture in Milton’s Satan, and in the dominant biography of Satan as a whole:

We should also note what we do not find in the Old and New Testament. There is no pre-mundane fall of the Angels. There is no connection of Satan with the Serpent of Eden or the sin of Adam. There is no connection of Satan with the Angels who fall at the time of Noah. There is no Antichrist, only anti-christs, who are Human and are not directly associated with Satan. There is no rebellious Lucifer, only Jesus, the good Lucifer.³⁹

In short, there is no Miltonic Satan in the Old or New Testament, and no Testament, Old or New, in Milton's Satan. The most famous exploits of Milton's Satan are absent from scripture. It is rather that Milton's Satan is several interpretations removed from the Satan of scripture: the doctrinal loom weaves the scriptural flavor left by scattered appearances into the primordial "Satan" of literature, such that the vaguely-negative significance of the Biblical "opposer" is developed into the idea of evil that attends a "villain." Milton's Satan, as one such "variation" or "adaptation" of what is essentially a trope, therefore transforms the poem from a simple contribution to Christian mythos to a profound intimation of the mythos that yet underlies, and indeed defines, Christianity. Forsyth makes this much clear: "it is... Satan who makes the link to literature, since myths, from Aristotle to the present, have been seen as a category of literature. Myths are narratives, and Christianity, particularly when seen from the Satanic perspective, was seen to be narrative, too".⁴⁰ A variety of myths, many of them incarnations of the ancient combat myth, can be said to offer a Satanic figuration, but "none of them is really the origin of Satan".⁴¹ Introducing the "character of myth" to scripture, therefore, once again puts the authority and integrity of theology in contention with the literary flexibility of theology, demanding a reconciliation between these opposing forces.

The constant in Satan's many historical appearances, however, has been difference. To stand in opposition is his one commandment, and in the historical view, the implications of this on ontology are quite clear. For differentiation is the foundation of Christian ontology. The account of creation in Genesis focuses on the divine act of giving defined form to the formless void. "The earth was without form, and void; and darkness was upon the face of the deep. And the Spirit of God moved upon the face of the waters".⁴² From this shapeless beginning, God takes a mitotic approach to shaping Creation, dividing

³⁹ Kelly, Henry Ansgar. *Satan: A Biography*. Cambridge University Press, 2006. p. 172

⁴⁰ Forsyth 26

⁴¹ Forsyth 28

⁴² *The Bible*. Authorized King James Version, Thomas Nelson Press, 1987. Genesis 1.2

“waters” from “waters,” light from darkness, until he sets down to make life. Separation is the primary effect of divine speech: God’s words themselves mold the cosmos in their image, cleaving material from material until the world reflects the distinction present in each word from the rest. In Genesis, time itself is bound to this logocentric, differential means of ontology: “And God *called* the light Day, and the darkness he *called* Night. And the evening and the morning were the first day”.⁴³ In the Christian tradition the association between *logos* and differentiation, and therefore creation, is absolute; and thus, the Satanic energy of opposition plays a role in providing a pioneering mechanism of difference, and through difference, *being*.

It is this relation between differential ontology and language that Milton’s Satan exploits, by using his characteristic difference to evoke the Derridean *différance*, which “names” (though Derrida asserts that it is “neither a word nor a concept”) the paradoxical *relation of differing*.⁴⁴ Derrida applies the term to the “the play of difference, which... is the condition for the possibility and functioning of every sign” in language that defers the burden of signification or meaning-making from one signifier to the next in the linguistic system; in short, *différance* “explains” our inability to use anything but signifiers to assert the meaning of other signifiers.⁴⁵ It therefore encapsulates the infinite deferral of absolute existence brought on by differentiation: in order to assert its own being, the ‘differer’ must continually and endlessly point to the distinctions between it and everything else. It must embody and emphasize those distinctions; it must become exclusively those distinctions and mask all else, in order to maintain its ontological security. *Différance* substitutes conceptuality with the anxiety of interdependence, and insofar as Derrida expands its usability by linking language to ontology, we may also use the same assumption to connect the term to moral ontology in *Paradise Lost*.

In relating Satan to *différance*, we illustrate an essential collapse of a fundamental ontological paradigm through Satan's efforts. More generally, the Christian paradigm can assert absolute good and evil because it can associate one with God and the other with Satan, but insofar as Satan invokes the "relation of differing," we are no longer able to separate the two sides of the binary. Through an

⁴³ Genesis 1.5, emphasis added

⁴⁴ Derrida, Jacques. “Différance.” *Margins of Philosophy*. Translated by Alan Bass, The University of Chicago Press, 1982. p. 3.

⁴⁵ Derrida, “Différance” 5

invocation of *différance*, we find that it is no longer possible to count on the essential separation of good from evil that underpins our ability to distinguish them. The unsettling suggestion of this deconstructive phase is that the narrative certainty from which the denotations of “good” and “evil” are drawn is inherently farcical, and as such, we are forced to confront moral relativism and flexibility in its true form. *Différance* does not herald an embrace of immorality, as the typical narrative paradigm would suggest, but rather inaugurates an *entrée* into the much more uncomfortable space of amorality, or more appropriately, “suspended” or “moving” morality. It is only proper that Satan becomes the agent of *différance*, for he too comes “announcing the death of the tyrant”.⁴⁶

Satan makes his first “mission statement” early in Book 1, as he and Beelzebub lie prone on Hell’s burning waters. The speech constitutes the first explicit statement of difference, and suggestion of *différance*; it is, in the chronological view, Satan’s first declaration of (in)dependence:

To do aught good will never 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 labor must be to pervert that end
 And out of good still to find means of evil⁴⁷

Satan’s program is to resist absolutely, no matter the situation, as is suggested by the “never... ever...” construction. This absolute opposition— good against evil— is familiar to us, but critically, the second portion of the statement emphasizes the relationship of differing— *différance*— that exists between good and evil. The second sentence begins with “if,” an indication of the conditional tense that implies that if God’s will should change, the nature of evil will change along with it. The meanings of the terms “good” and “evil” both change to reflect changes in the will of God, which apparently may or *may not* be to “bring forth good out of... evil.” Just as importantly, the logic on both sides is to use the ontological *other*— “evil” for good, “good” for evil— to effect a propagation of self. “Good” is made from evil, and “evil” is made from good: in both cases, there is a crucial dependence that connects the manufacture of good to a prerequisite presence of evil and vice versa. Satan’s statement therefore makes clear that we cannot be assured of an essential difference between the two sides of a moral binary;

⁴⁶ Derrida, “*Différance*” 4

⁴⁷ *PL* 1.159-165

instead, we must confront the fact that morality itself is a Möbius strip, in which the distal ends of the spectrum feed into each other.

A related sentiment is expressed in the thought that concludes Satan's soliloquy atop Mount Niphates. Having resigned himself to the pursuit of evil without hope of redemption or forgiveness, Satan laments: "All good to me is lost./ Evil, be thou my good".⁴⁸ This sentiment makes little sense in a paradigm of absolute difference, for it would seem to suggest that evil and good can be synonymous, and that through one, one may yet actualize the other. For how could "evil" ever be *good*, unless both were defined in relative terms? It is only when "good" is understood as a personal good, a private good, and a *dependent* good, that "evil" may also be called "good." The final phrase therefore crystallizes the paradigm of *différance* that supports Satan's logic. It reminds us that "evil" and "good" alike are vacant and empty concepts, only meaningful in relationship to each other and subjects who are able to posit meaning in them. Absolute meaning is therefore shown to be a fantastical illusion rooted in relationality.

Thus Satan's difference/*différance* forecloses upon absolute signification and meaning. The radical effacement of *content* in *différance* enacts a paradigm shift from denotative meaning (in which words and concepts can be fixed) to connotative meaning (in which they must be defined in relation to words and concepts other than themselves). They are hollow and give the semblance of substance only in a system of differences. Of course, the shift from *content* to *form* is only perceptible when we place critical pressure on the narrative derivations of the text. For example: if we were to accept that God's will is good without questioning the *content* of that will, then yes, Good is absolute, and so too is Evil. But, in the case of *Paradise Lost*, there is no such moment when we are able to leave aside that questioning of content; after all, the poem itself seeks to "justify the ways of God to men".⁴⁹ The question of precisely *what* God intends is always alive in the poem. In each instance where Satan tries to articulate his difference— in each instance where he fulfills his role as the "differer"— we are led all the way to the shiftiness of signification, and come face to face with the formal relationships of morality. We simply have to make do with the uncertainty of a difference that resembles its ancestral *différance* to a fault.

⁴⁸ *PL* 4.109-10

⁴⁹ *PL* 1.26

Motion Sickness (2.3)

Milton's most unique contribution to the literary history of the Satanic figuration takes the form of a moving Satan. For Satan is a germ in the fabric of *Paradise Lost*, moving through the poem's firmaments and passages and promoting cross-contamination. Whether of his own will or as a fugitive, Satan's motion dominates his appearances in the poem and defines his niche in Satanic tradition. Consider, for example, the crossing of the gates of Hell in Book 2. The great barrier appears as Satan approaches it on "swift wings," with a flight that randomly "scours the right-hand coast, sometimes the left,/. . . shaves with level wing the deep, then soars/ Up to the fiery concave towering high".⁵⁰ Satan's flight is vertiginous, compounding motion with yet more motion; even as he flies, we are subjected to a constantly-shifting description of that flight, which moves with the unpredictability and complexity of an electron. The same is recalled much later, in Book Nine, when Satan's retreat from Eden is described: "thrice the equinoctial line/ He circled; four times crossed the car of night/From pole to pole, traversing each colure".⁵¹ He moves confusingly in nearly every appearance, and no barrier— be it Hell's formidable egress, with its "thrice threefold" gates,⁵² or the "hill or highest wall" circumscribing Paradise⁵³— can contain him.

This motion can be seen to serve a deconstructive or destabilizing function as well. For it brings into question the neat borders of the Christian world, enables a cross-contamination between the different landscapes and concepts of the poem, and ultimately precludes the possibility of stable differentiation between them. Regardless of challenge and difficulty, Satan "through start, rough, dense, or rare,/ With head, hands, wings, or feet purses his way/ And swims, or sinks, or wades, or creeps, or flies".⁵⁴ The rhythm of these onomatopoeic lines testify to Satan's admirable commitment, but they simultaneously point to what makes the Satanic energy so unsettling. We admire the tenacity of a figure so committed to coming out on the other side of Chaos, yet cannot help but be unnerved by verse that continually shifts in

⁵⁰ *PL* 2.631-5

⁵¹ *PL* 9.64-6

⁵² *PL* 2.645

⁵³ *PL* 4.180

⁵⁴ *PL* 2.948-50

such mechanical fashion, coupling the accented rigidity of a highly-regular iambic pentameter with a series of different— and somewhat creepy— verbs. Motion threatens a certain contamination within the clean divisions of the world, between locations and *concepts* alike. It is a curious trait that, especially here, conveys a sense of indefinable, unstable hyper-vitality that transforms itself as it works: indeed, the form itself appears to “move.” In paradoxical relation to his obdurate perseverance, he undergoes a movement in shape and scale that deconstructs conceptual borders, in addition to physical ones. What manner of protean beast is jumping the boundaries of Milton’s world? We are never quite sure. All we see is a strange shape, sometimes as large as the Leviathan, sometimes as small as a toad, “[c]oasting the wall of Heav’n,” blurred by its own movement in space, in time, in and out of intelligibility.⁵⁵

The Mount Niphates soliloquy, which follows Satan’s escape from Chaos, would seem at first to provide a respite from constant movement. Yet, it invokes motion in a motivic form to further the effacement of absolute conceptuality established by Satanic *différance*:

Which way I fly is Hell, myself am Hell,
And in the lowest deep a lower deep
Still threat’ning to devour me opens wide,
To which the Hell I suffer seems a Heav’n⁵⁶

The motif, evoked in the vertiginous, internal tumble from “lowest deep” to a still “lower deep,” achieves a relativistic realization of space and attendant affect. In these lines, Milton damns the possibility of absolute assessment by transforming the superlative of “lowest” into the comparative “lower,” and by extension turning Hell into Heaven. From these lines, we can conclude that Satan cannot escape his private Hell, but that the transformation of that Hell requires only a “movement” in perspective. Fie unto the beauty of God’s creation, says Satan: what glory has Paradise for the despairing, abject element? Or, more provocatively, what trouble is a momentary Hell when the situation could be far, far worse, and indeed grows as such by the hour? So long as motion continues, either physically or in motif, fixed assessment is meaningless. In its place is an endless recycling of concepts, which feed into one another as on a Möbius strip. Hell into Heaven, Heaven into Hell, *ad infinitum*.

⁵⁵ *PL* 3.71

⁵⁶ *PL* 4.75-8

Conclusion (2.4)

The poem produces these techniques of readerliness, *différance* and motion, and suffers its premodern predecessors to endure them. In so doing, it opens critical rifts in these paradigms we derive from premodernity, and invites us to install doubt in these spaces. Surely, they are not *effaced*: we still recognize them to be dominant, or once-dominant, narratives. But uncertainty opens the gates to a bevy of excess meanings that efface the certainty of those dominant narratives— and in narrative language, nothing is more damaging, more *chaotic*, than excess. They are not purged, but their narrative certainty is *ruined*: they can no longer be said to operate with the ideological security we demand from narrative.

The confusion of chaos is thus one of such false starts and resets, where an excess of narrative possibility ensures that each “rules” but “a moment,” as a series of interruptions prompt endless narrative turnover.⁵⁷ And, true to this theme, the first act’s conclusion gestures in such a way as to deconstruct the structures and narratives it has needed to posit in order to deconstruct. Satan, so long our guide and ally through Milton’s world, alights atop Mount Niphates, and having arrived at a literal summit in a blaze of glory, seems ready to give his speech of heroic ascension and to formally accept the role he has namelessly shouldered thus far. Yet, in a complete subversion of our expectations, he does no such thing; rather, he implodes in a dazzling, pathetic display of self-doubt and abjection: “Nay cursed be thou since against His thy will/ Chose freely what it now so justly rues”.⁵⁸ His ascension, his accolades, seem to work in reverse: “With diadem and scepter high advanced/ The lower still I fall”.⁵⁹ Surely, these are not the words of a hero, nor any protagonist. Rather, they exude the fatalistic pessimism of an antagonist whose tenure atop the hierarchy is coming to a decisive end, and signal the tragic collapse of a heretofore deep and “fleshy” character.

The poet strikes down the last remnant of our narrative faith in this inversion by stripping the last remaining hero of the first act of all relation to us. After the dust settles, Satan is a villain and nothing more, and we are left to experience the full chaos of an ideological vacuum. Certainty is lost; the origin cannot be identified; our shepherd has been put out to pasture. With nothing to hold on to, we are forced

⁵⁷ PL 2.907

⁵⁸ PL 4.71-2

⁵⁹ PL 4.89-90

to witness the our hero he *revert* to an unrecognizable shape. “His own shape” is enough to inspire amazement in Ithuriel and Zephon, who cannot recognize him, and his response does little to clarify his identity: “Know ye not me? ye knew me once no mate/... Not to know me argues yourselves unknown”.⁶⁰ A “grisly” shape is all that that is left of Satan the magnificent, whose glorious speech has even been reduced to a muddy thicket of anastrophe and antanaclasis, so as to reveal the flimsy pretext of rhetorical splendor.⁶¹ As Satan’s fate darkens and he flees the pursuing angels, we are left alone. Unable to return to a narrative paradigm whose instability has been revealed to us, we must wait in a chaos absent of heroes and narratives for the dawn of Milton’s day.

⁶⁰ *PL* 4.817-28

⁶¹ *PL* 4.819

III

Archeological (Inter)mission

You know also that the beginning is the most important part of any work, especially in the case of a young and tender thing...⁶²

Plato

The Bible's first words emerge out of primordial Chaos to set boundaries and create space: "In the beginning God created the heaven and the earth".⁶³ That "beginning" itself is a space that God occupies for a brief moment, before he establishes "space" as a concept, for before the beginning, there was only Chaos, a "deep" that lacked form and meaning.⁶⁴ The timeline is clear: first *is* Chaos, and next *arrives* an origin. In opening the second act of *Paradise Lost*, Milton signals that he too will be following this pattern by procuring a beginning out of the first act's chaotic vacuum of ideology:

Now Morn her rosy steps in th' eastern clime
Advancing sowed the earth with orient pearl
When Adam waked⁶⁵

The very first lines of Book Five are devoted to opening the next chapter of *Paradise Lost* with particular attention to the "beginning" as a concept. Dawn, like a seed, is being sown, and we, who had been abandoned in the garden, awaken with a new protagonist. But moreover, the image of dawn in "her rosy steps" echoes a ubiquitous Homeric construction; the poet begins by going back to the beginning of epic tradition and paying homage to his forbears. The text appears to be signaling that we have arrived at a new beginning, but one that is eerily familiar, one that radiates out of the past. The poem gestures that after the chaotic deconstruction of Act One, something is finally being posited and presented to us: this is the *Garden of Eden*, the origin of human history, as the seed imagery of the introduction would suggest. Much like the Paradise of the Bible, Milton's Paradise also emerges out of primordial chaos.

⁶² Plato. "The Republic." Translated by Benjamin Jowett, *The Internet Classics Archive*, Massachusetts Institute of Technology, 1994, classics.mit.edu/Plato/republic.html.

⁶³ Genesis 1.1

⁶⁴ Genesis 1.2

⁶⁵ *PL* 5.1-3

The grand gesture of “origin” inaugurates the strangest portion of *Paradise Lost*. The middle third possesses a time and temporality that seem alien to the diegetic thrust that exists on either side of it; the episode it supports exists curiously outside of the plot that began in Book 1 and seeks conclusion starting in Book 9. It is a single scene, the majority of whose characters seem built for precisely that scene and little else. And certainly, the lack of overt textuality in its introduction— in the form of the epic voice, an invocation or introduction, etc.— denotes an entrée into a strange world of pure diegesis wherein the critical, deconstructive machinery of the first act is momentarily absent. The second act initiates a program of *construction*: where the previous section dealt with the destabilization and confusion of narrative, the middle books of *Paradise Lost* begin to outline a brand new narrative of modernity that will pick up where premodernity concludes and carry us forth into a modern world.

Out of the Chaos of Act One, therefore, Milton must make a primary incision, put pen to paper and sculpt an origin. But in Milton’s case, the burden of beginning anew also requires that he *transition* from the narrative he leaves behind. Deconstruction prepares us to leave by illustrating the faults and flaws of that narrative, but a formal succession must still occur, and this is precisely the next step in Milton’s revolution. Act Two’s discourse is given over to this monumental task of narratively transitioning to a modern archē in the Garden of Eden and clarifying precisely what this archē means for the narratives that exist in *Paradise Lost*. The second act, as an intermission or interlude that bisects the diegetic meat of the poem, illustrates the narrative techniques by which Milton reconciles premodernity and modernity, and moves from one to the other.

This chapter will investigate the middle third of the poem as a meeting place for narratives of premodernity and modernity, and will explore Milton’s use of narrative techniques to transition from the former to the latter. I will illustrate that this work results in a paradigm that runs counter to the Christian tradition. Rather than contextualize humanity with respect to a divine conflict, Milton’s new narrative paradigm contextualizes the divine conflict with respect to humanity. The poem’s “Divine narrative”— which puts a divine conflict at the heart of the poem— will be shown to give way to an “Edenic narrative”— in which humanity becomes the focal point of the poem. In so doing, Milton suggest it is humanity that will decide the result of all divine conflict. Most importantly, this structure “purifies” the Edenic narrative of any dependence on divinity; it is free to be a human story. Indeed, the archē of

Milton's history and theology is built to give rise to a purely human narrative, in which divine actors have little choice but to defer to the foregrounded will of humanity.

An Unfamiliar Story: The Narrative Structure of *Paradise Lost* (3.1)

During our time in Eden, Milton takes pains to foreground the narrative language of his poem. While the epic voice narrates directly to us in the first and third acts, the diegetic material in Act Two—the war in Heaven, the Creation, Adam's first memories—are all delivered in nested narration. Raphael and Adam converse by taking turns as narrators of their respective stories and these stories in turn transport us through the poem's formal timeline and through scenes and locales heretofore unknown to us. The gesture may well be another homage to epic tradition: a great number of epics begin *in medias res*, but eventually find their way to a formal realization of timeline. Most often, they do so narratively. Odysseus recounts his voyage in the Phaeacian court; similarly, Aeneas's tale is laid out chronologically before the queen Dido. Adam indeed makes a small "invocation" to Raphael for the "full relation which needs must be strange," at which point Raphael consents to tell him the story of how the great enemy and Creation alike came to be.⁶⁶ The gesture is one that reminds us that Raphael's long and varied story is indeed a story, narrated live.

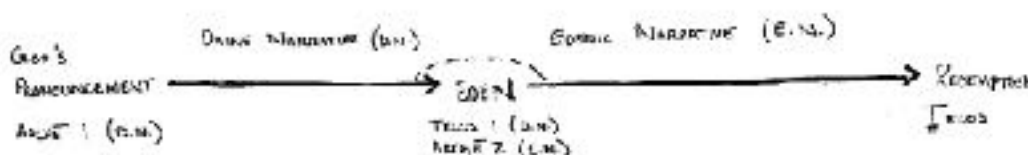
This is of course a strong testament to Milton's faith in the discursive and communicative powers of narrative: the poet seems to suggest that all the wild motion and tourism of the first act can be accomplished through vivid narrative, and indeed the poem seems to exhibit a metatextual awareness to that effect. In this instance, the poet frames the divine gift of knowledge in narrative style: Adam's questions on everything from the origins of the Satanic threat to the question of "how first began this heav'n" of Eden are answered through Raphael's narratives of Satan's dissent and the Creation, respectively.⁶⁷ Raphael himself acknowledges that the purpose of his visit is to narrate such that he might "answer [Adam's] desire/ Of knowledge within bounds"; the overall structure of the nested narratives therefore bespeaks Milton's understanding of narrative as an epistemological device capable of creating and communicating a body of knowledge through storytelling. This should not surprise us, because

⁶⁶ *PL* 5.556

⁶⁷ *PL* 5.86

Christianity itself, among many religions, delivers its theoretical discourse and paradigmatic exposition in narrative guise, most notably through the ancient art of the fable. Frank McConnell has that much to say about the Bible as both “the essence of story and the kernel of prophecy” at once: it conducts its theoretical and predictive work through narrative.⁶⁸ The poet simply takes advantage of a similar language and uses the master’s tools to dismantle— or, more accurately, build anew— the master’s house.

This foregrounding of narrative sensitizes us to the play of narratives in the poem as a whole; through it we come in to a broader understanding of how the poem is put together. For Eden is the space of *narrative exchange*: a place where divinity and humanity alike trade narratives as they see fit. Nearly all of the poem’s characters come and go from what is the center of Milton’s world and also the structural center of the poem (the middle third of a twelve-book sequence). The exchanges of narratives occur on a diegetic level (where Raphael and Adam tell of events in their own lives) and a textual one (where the poem plays with two different narratives at once), and in order to better illustrate this, let us make use of a crude schema that explains the poem’s underlying structure:



The timeline above depicts the linear function of the poem’s narratives, as they logically unfold. *Paradise Lost* never lays it out in this manner; it is rather a product of the reader’s own drive to organize and contextualize material that piles “wreckage upon wreckage” atop “one single catastrophe,” much as Walter Benjamin reads Klee’s *Angelus Novus*.⁶⁹ We encounter it in scattered fragments over the course of our journey through each narrative, and we are tasked with assembling it on the fly as new information comes our way. But once it is assembled, we can conclude that:

1. Eden is the point of transition between *two* distinct narratives, and
2. that the whole of the poem is organized around the interplay of two archēs and two teloi, which correspond and coincide with the aforementioned narratives.

⁶⁸ McConnell, Frank. “Introduction.” *The Bible and the Narrative Tradition*. Edited by Frank McConnell, Oxford University Press, 1986. p. 4.

⁶⁹ Benjamin, Walter. “Theses on the Philosophy of History.” *Illuminations*. Edited and with an introduction by Hannah Arendt, Schocken Books, 1969. p. 257.

Paradise Lost is a startlingly unified text, but through a cultivation of mutual alterity, Milton is able to suggest that there are indeed two distinct narrative structures at play in his poem. The first and most familiar of these is the poem's *Divine narrative*: its principle focus is the larger, extra-textual conflict between good and evil that consumes the better part of Christian theology and morality. Until this point (about the end of Book Four), the poem has focused on a single narrative arc; it has almost exclusively followed Satan across Milton's universe in a struggle against the "tyranny" of God. The actors in this drama are of either Heavenly or Hellish affiliation, and the drama itself concerns the battle between them. In many ways, the Divine narrative is the bread and butter of Christianity as a whole, insofar as the faith typically asks its followers to contextualize themselves in regard to this war of Heaven and Hell, and read human history as but a single consequence of this conflict. It is, in this sense, a premodern narrative that centralizes divinity at the expense of humanity; it asks us to contextualize humanity with respect to the divine conflict that turns the wheels of history. To be sure, however, this narrative took quite a deconstructive beating in the first act, and its traditional sureties have been summarily complicated beyond recognition. The first act has adequately prepared us to replace this narrative with what will come next.

A moment of indescribable alterity alerts us to the fact that there is an "other" to this narrative: a narrative isolated and insulated from the major conflicts and storylines of the first act. This "other" begins in a figuration that is only tangentially related to and peripherally aware of the greater conflict between Heaven and Hell; it is, for the large part, sheltered and insulated from the Christian schema, but simultaneously plays a central role in it. I speak, of course, of Adam and Eve, and seek to suggest that our distance from them, cultivated through an imagistic construction, establishes the existence of an *Edenic narrative* which interacts with and transforms our understanding of the Divine narrative, both within the poem and in the greater context of our world. Let us therefore consider how the alienation of alterity helps the text to establish the separation of these two narratives, and through them, crystallize the conflict of premodernity and modernity that is at the heart of the poem.

Satan's transition to unambiguous villainy coincides with a brief glimpse of these characters who will be with us from the beginning of Book 5 onward. Yet, their introduction is notably different from that of Satan. They appear at a distance and are *seen* far before they are heard, felt or known: "Two of far

nobler shape erect and tall,/ Godlike erect, with native honor clad/ In naked majesty, seemed lords of all".⁷⁰ The language here would seem to inject considerable salacity into the scene. The crass "erect" aside, the description of the couple confronts sexuality quite openly, as they are seen dallying in "sweet reluctant amorous delay" in their unambiguous marital "embraces".⁷¹ Fish refers us to Bishop Joseph Hall's "visual symbol for the waywardness of sinful man" in Eve's "wanton ringlets," which seem to pull "double duty as indicators of spatial position and [a dubious] moral status".⁷² Linguistically, there is considerable evidence to suggest that beneath the shining exterior of the image is depravity, and that there is nothing in Adam and Eve that we have not already seen on our tour of Hell, Heaven and Chaos.

Yet, while Satan's gaze, and perhaps our own, find these figures to be promiscuous and licentious, a mysterious voice— perhaps the poet, perhaps Satan's lingering morality, perhaps someone else entirely — argues against such an assessment: "Then was not guilty shame, dishonest shame/ Of nature's works, honor dishonorable,/ Sin-bred".⁷³ Certainly, this is another challenge of interpretation, and the last proper one of the first act's deconstructive effort: are we to trust our perception of their lecherousness, or take the text at its word that they are marked by "simplicity and spotless innocence"?⁷⁴ In either case, it is evident that the text curiously doubles back upon itself, and violently scrubs away at its own flesh to erase or undo the suggestions it has made. It is not content with those suggestions, regardless of who is speaking and who is interpreting.

This is a symptom of that which exists in excess of and at some remove from language. Adam and Eve exist as images of perfection beyond the discursive capacity of language, for the language would seem to imply undercurrents that may not actually be there, and must hastily regenerate itself in self-effacement. The more words that appear to describe the scene, the more these words struggle against themselves in pursuit of accurate description. The purpose of such text, then, is to accentuate the distance that exists between the signifier and the object of signification: they quite literally illustrate the failure of

⁷⁰ *PL* 4.288-90

⁷¹ *PL* 4.311-22

⁷² Fish 92

⁷³ *PL* 4. 313-5

⁷⁴ *PL* 4.318

language to describe and convey. Christopher Ricks argues that language, in this instance, fails to do anything but exacerbate and highlight the distance between spectators— diegetic and extra-textual— and the scene in the Garden of Eden: “certainly the word [wanton] is a reminder of the Fall, in that it takes us back to a time when there were no infected words because there were no infected actions”.⁷⁵ The language is “infected” from our view and in our use, and as a result it cannot do justice to Adam and Eve: they are at some remove from the text’s capacity to describe them.

The Edenic narrative is therefore introduced as radically *other* in that it is linguistically isolated from the Divine narrative. Its principle players are first presented with an alterity that exceeds the descriptive capacity of our vernacular and exacerbates the division between signifiers and their purported signification; the narrative can only be inferred by means of this “otherness” that puts it at an impassable distance from us. In a sense, this linguistic problem functionally imitates the “flaming sword” that will later guard the gates of Paradise against reentry: it keeps us from truly being able to reenter, recover and “recolonize” the lost space and innocence of Paradise. It is out of reach of even our language, and thus our imagination, and for this reason, we may properly identify it as the same “Paradise” from which we were expelled. It is, as Sir Walter Raleigh argues, a depressingly *unfamiliar* familiar space: “We cannot settle down in the midst of this “enormous bliss”; we wander through the place, open-mouthed with wonder, like country visitors admiring the Crown jewels, and then— we long to be at home.”⁷⁶

The Edenic narrative gets its name from Eden, which is quite literally isolated from the rest of Milton’s world by “hill or highest wall” and a posse of cherubim keeping vigilant— though fallible— watch.⁷⁷ Of course, Eden’s physical insulation amounts to very little in the grand scheme of the poem, insofar as Raphael, Michael and Satan all enter the Garden and interact with Adam and Eve. The isolation and insulation of Eden is rather more impregnable in the psychological and thematic senses. For ultimately, when Adam and Eve first speak, they betray the bliss of innocence that is lost on the rest of Milton’s world. Their voices and thoughts seem a world apart from all that the poem has concerned itself with to this point; the conversation references little more than themselves and their situation, and Adam’s

⁷⁵ Ricks, Christopher. *Milton’s Grand Style*. Oxford University Press, 1963. p. 110.

⁷⁶ Raleigh, Walter. *Milton*. Benjamin Bloom, 1967. pp. 122-123.

⁷⁷ *PL* 4.182

pure innocence of even death, “whate’er death is,” flashes up and evinces his and Eve’s complete insulation from all that is outside of Eden.⁷⁸ Eve’s first speech also features a humorous recount of her first encounter with Adam, wherein she thinks him “less fair,/ Less winning soft, less amiably mild” than her own reflection, and turns back.⁷⁹ The account is comedically incongruous with the poem’s dark and brooding ambience; as a moment of levity, it again accentuates the radical isolation and insulation of Eden. To be Edenic, therefore, is to be a world apart from the traditional themes of the poem: it is to be “innocent” and blissfully unaware of the danger and conflict that exists in the world.

Surely, we are of Satan’s party, and are taken aback to see the unaccountable innocence of Adam and Eve and their love, and find it a “sight hateful,” a “sight tormenting”— such aggression and despair is understandable in an encounter with the radically other.⁸⁰ In Book Five, however, Milton uses Eve’s reaction to her nightmare to remind us that the feeling of alterity is mutual between the narratives:

O sole, in whom my thoughts find all repose...
 ... I this night
 (Such night till this I never passed) have dreamed,
 If dreamed, not as I oft am won’t, of thee,
 Works of day past or morrow’s next design
 But of offense and trouble which my mind
 Knew never till this irksome night⁸¹

Satan’s contamination of Eden not only occurs on a literal level, but also in the figurative and structural register of narrative, as established by Eve’s recount of her dream. Much like us, Eve is of “startled eye” to awake and find her world unfamiliar and suddenly *juxtaposed* against the world of her dream.⁸² The narrative of her dream is a radically different from what she knows: it is one in which Adam does not appear, where nighttime is the time of movement and action, where the laws of common sense in Eden are turned upside down and the emissaries of God— “one shaped and winged like one of those from Heav’n”— promote the violation of his lone rule.⁸³ In the dream, Eve encounters a strain of the absolutely foreign and heretofore unintelligible, that which she “knew never till this irksome night.”

⁷⁸ PL 4.425

⁷⁹ PL 4.478-9

⁸⁰ PL 4.505

⁸¹ PL 5.28-35

⁸² PL 5.26

⁸³ PL 5.55

The dream, of course, foreshadows the Eve's inevitable temptation and fall; we are able to *recognize* it as crucial scene belonging to the Divine narrative, because Satan has already told us that he will use the Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil as a "fair foundation... whereon to build/ Their ruin".⁸⁴ However, Eve does not recognize it, and therefore it symbolizes a brief, unscripted intersection of the two narratives at the heart of *Paradise Lost*. For Eve is disturbed by the figurative entry of the Divine narrative into her world, brought on by the literal entry of Satan in to Paradise. Unlike us and Satan, she exists in an isolated and insulated world, wherein the workings of the divine subplot are critically unfamiliar. One must imagine Paradise as a space bereft of otherness; it is not prone to juxtaposition because it is shielded from the danger outside. But it is into this sterile and pristine unity that Satan's intrusion introduces a narrative "other."

The Edenic narrative, therefore, is essentially insulated from divine matters; this makes it appear as an "other" from a Divine narrative perspective, but also ensures that the Divine narrative always seems an "other," too. Perhaps this is precisely what makes the Edenic narrative so innovative with respect to epic tradition. Readership is used to seeing the intersection of divine and mundane in epic (with the latter often made the butt of the joke): the heroes and heroines of Homeric and Virgilian tradition are accustomed to interacting with gods and goddesses and weathering their influence on an episodic basis. It is curious, therefore, that we witness in *Paradise Lost* a human realm that is sheltered from the traditionally heavy-handed gods of epic; it is rare when we find a human condition that *isn't* familiar with the machinations of divinity, and to whom such machinations feel "other." In this way, the Edenic narrative is a modern one: its focus is on humanity as it stands on its own, and leaves divine matters to the margins.

Regardless, Eve's distress completes the mutual alienation of the two narratives, and reminds us that while they may both meet in Eden during the poem's second act, they are unrecognizable to each other and feel quite uncomfortable. Through alterity, Milton therefore establishes the presence of two separate narratives in his poem. And quite crucially, they correspond to the two modalities the poem brings together in premodernity and modernity. For the Divine narrative surely affirms the place of divinity at the center of all action, and the Edenic narrative similarly testifies to what Fadely and

⁸⁴ *PL* 4.521-2

Mohamed call the “fundamental separation of society from nature” that characterizes the original articulation of modernity.⁸⁵ The alterity discussed certainly evinces an essential separation between the human world and the chaotic “outside” of nature, the “imponderable otherness of the wilderness in which we live”.⁸⁶ In the mutual alterity of these narratives, therefore, we confront the great problem of *Paradise Lost* in its most vivid and irreconcilable form.

The Narrative Loom Mends All (3.2)

Our discussion of alterity thus returns us to the inevitable struggle to reconcile the poem’s disparate identities, and even seems to suggest that this is not possible. The two narratives are clearly “other” to each other; they are driven apart by a feeling of mutual alterity that affirms the presence of a rift in the poem’s overall structure and composition. The will of this project, however, is to assert the opposite: that the mutual alterity of the poem’s premodern and modern modalities is defused through the use of narrative structures and techniques. Nowhere in the entire poem is this more clear than in the second act, wherein narrative language is used to not only reconcile the Divine and Edenic narratives, but put them in logical sequence with respect to each other, such that the shift from premodernity to modernity will seem *natural*. Through the narrations of Raphael and Adam, Milton is able to *narratively* mend the rift in his poem’s structure, and moreover accomplish this in such a way as to reframe our understanding of the Divine narrative and foreground the Edenic narrative.

The first phase of this process—the reconciliation—intimates the power of narrative to counteract the weakness of alienation. To illustrate this, we may look to the drastic maturation of Eve from Book Five to Book Nine. Let us first consider that it is the dream’s startling lack of narrativization that causes Eve’s difficulty; this contact with matters “outside” of Eden is made with little regard for the comforts of context. It simply *occurs*, spontaneously and traumatically, and transforms unfamiliar distinction and difference into an oppressive and shocking alterity. The dream is, first and foremost, encountered without regard for the dominant context of Eve’s life. She suggests that she is “wont” to

⁸⁵ Fadely and Mohamed 3

⁸⁶ Teskey 13

dream of Adam, or of “[w]orks of day past or morrow’s next design”.⁸⁷ These dreams logically align with the reality of her life, and therefore can be understood in the context of the Edenic narrative. The “offense and trouble” of the Satanic dream, however, is unknown and does not fit with the context of Eve’s lifestyle; it therefore represents a narrative *inconsistency* with the Edenic narrative, and quite literally is “out of place” in Eve’s life.⁸⁸ Furthermore, we find that the dream itself is fragmented, and does not possess the logical consistency of narrative: Eve’s memory lapses at the moment she “could not but taste” the forbidden fruit, and at the zenith of her ascent with Satan when “suddenly” her “guide” vanishes as she sinks back to sleep.⁸⁹ There are gaps in Eve’s account that break up the narrative flow of the dream and heighten the dream’s aura of senselessness and incoherence. Not only does it not fit into a larger context of the Edenic narrative, but the encounter itself lacks a narrative logic of its own.

Indeed, the dream does not explain the nature of the Divine narrative, but instead thrusts Eve into one of its fragmented scenes and forces a meeting with inexplicable and unnamable horrors. Little wonder, then, that she awakens with “startled eye”: she is disoriented by her dream’s lack of context and incongruence with her life.⁹⁰ Adam, however, offers her a logical consolation:

Yet evil whence? In thee can harbor none,
Created pure...
... Yet be not sad:
Evil into the mind of god or man
May come and go, so unapproved, and leave
No spot or blame behind. Which gives me hope
That what in sleep thou didst abhor to dream
Waking thou never wilt consent to do⁹¹

Boethius may be the only figure in literary history who finds sufficient consolation from philosophy, for though Eve initially seems “cheered” by her spouse’s argument, she “silently a gentle tear let fall/ From either eye and wiped them with her hair”.⁹² Because Adam’s consolation proves so ineffective, Eve cries and opts to dry her own tears: a symbolic affirmation of her decision to cope with

⁸⁷ *PL* 5.32-3

⁸⁸ *PL* 5.34-5

⁸⁹ *PL* 5.86-91

⁹⁰ *PL* 5.26

⁹¹ *PL* 5.99-121

⁹² *PL* 5.129-31

her still-present grief on her own. This Eve is wounded and frightened, and cannot find solace in Adam's "wisdom, which alone is truly fair".⁹³ However, a transformation must occur in Eve between now and Book Nine, for the later Eve is confident, independent and crafty enough to assert her will before Adam and demand to be considered strong enough to resist temptation.⁹⁴ It is narrative that makes this metamorphosis possible, and explains the rift between Eve's incarnations. Only narrative logic is capable of defusing the tension and trauma of alterity, and Raphael's task in Act Two is no less than to introduce the Divine narrative to the Edenic couple in narrative form. Eve, alongside Adam, listens to "the story" of the war in Heaven and is "filled/ With admiration and deep muse" as a result.⁹⁵ Raphael uses the storytelling art to give context to and substantiate the vague and ominous warning he is sent to deliver; the story gives the warning some sense and inspires confidence in its meaningfulness. Adam seems to suggest as much on both his and Eve's behalf in the wake of the telling:

Great things and full of wonder in our ears
Far differing from this world thou hast revealed,
Divine Interpreter, by favor sent
Down from the empyréan to forewarn
Us timely of what might else have been our loss,
Unknown, which human knowledge could not reach,
For which to th'Ininitely Good we owe
Immortal thanks and His admonishment
Receive with solemn purpose to observe
Immutably His sov'reign will⁹⁶

The will to obey is *renewed* and invigorated by Raphael's narrative; his contextualization of the vague warnings and interdictions Adam and Eve have received give some substance to their signifiers. Raphael's narrative consolation even emboldens Eve to make claims about the nature of her enemy: she recalls the prideful Satan of Raphael's story in Book Nine saying that she does not expect a "foe so proud will first the weaker seek:/ So bent, the more shall shame him his repulse".⁹⁷ Of course, in Eve's case, this works out to be a tragic *overconfidence* very easily diagnosed as classical *hubris*, but it cannot be ignored that what Adam's logical assessment failed to do for her is accomplished quite powerfully through

⁹³ PL 4.489

⁹⁴ See PL 9.279-89

⁹⁵ PL 7.51-2

⁹⁶ PL 7.70-79

⁹⁷ PL 9.382-3

narrative structure. There is of course something to be said for how narrative context effects the Fall, but that matter will be shelved for now.

For now, the important point is that narrative is not only able to dispel the anxiety that attends alterity, but also to inspire confidence and even a sense of control over or understanding of that “other.” The story form can produce enough context to mend even the widest tears quite adeptly. We should therefore not be surprised that *Paradise Lost* keeps its composure in the face of its own dichotomy; it has the requisite narrative tools to weave in enough context to fill in its own gaps and rifts.

Moving On, Narratively (3.3)

Simply mending the tear, however, is not enough. Narrative can also preserve a diegetic and ideological *thrust* at the same time that it preserves unity. This is perhaps more important to Milton’s revolutionary aim than the simple act of reconciliation, though the latter is necessary for avoiding a sense of textual conflict and incongruity. In the final phase of the second act’s narrative play, we will consider how the poet fits the Divine and Edenic narratives into a single homogenized narrative structure that will transition from the former to the latter. This is, in essence, an extension of the narrative function described in the previous section: narrative form is able to create a superstructure in which discordant elements are woven together smoothly.

To illustrate this capacity, let us return to the schema of the poem’s narrative structure, and consider the second conclusion: that the interplay of two archēs and two teloi frame the poem’s overall timeline. In the grand scheme of the poem, both the Divine and Edenic narratives are bound by a larger narrative structure— the poem itself— that puts them in a logical sequence. By the time Raphael formally presents the Divine narrative to Adam and Eve, we already have a hazy knowledge of the first archē in Satan’s dissent, and can with confidence identify the ultimate Telos in the Son’s voluntary, redemptive sacrifice in Book Three: “I for his sake will leave/ Thy bosom and this glory next to Thee/ Freely put off and for him lastly die”.⁹⁸ The former is very clearly the archē of the Divine narrative, but the latter is a bit more complex. It is outside of the scope of *Paradise Lost* but figures an end to both the Divine and Edenic narratives— for now, let us table that discussion.

⁹⁸ *PL* 3.236-8

Two temporal significations exist in the Garden of Eden: the archē of the Edenic narrative, and the curious telos of the Divine narrative. The first of these is quite intuitive, insofar as it aligns with a traditional reading of scripture: it is natural to think of the Garden of Eden as the beginning of human history. We become aware of it almost as soon as Adam and Eve are introduced in the poem; indeed, their first words seem devoted to pointing out the potential for sin in Eden (which, to recall the definitions section, is a Christian archē): “God hath pronounced it death to taste that tree,/ The only sign of our obedience left”.⁹⁹ God requires of Adam and Eve “no other service than to keep/... this easy charge,”¹⁰⁰ and Satan is quick to file it away for later use, thinking it a “fair foundation... whereon to build/ Their ruin”.¹⁰¹ This is enough to qualify as an archē, since the pattern in the poem is that any legible potential for sin effectively guarantees that it will come to pass, and we know quite well that Adam and Eve will Fall. Where there’s a way, there’s a will, and as such the articulation of sinful potential itself establishes an archē.

Raphael moves to complete and encapsulate the Divine narrative by formalizing its missing pieces: namely, its own archē and telos. To complete a narrative is to close it, and in so doing, quench the intrigue and allure that naturally emerge from the narrative impulse. A “closed” narrative will fall into the background, even if it is still awaiting its ultimate end. To that end, Raphael provides the essential timeline that reframes our chronological understanding, and lays to rest the questions of the narrative; it offers us closure and puts every event and character in its proper place by narrating an archē and a telos. It is indeed with an archē that he begins:

As yet this world was not and chaos wild
 Reign'd where these heav'ns now roll, where Earth now rests...
 ... on such day
 As Heav'n's Great Year brings forth th'empyrean host
 Of angels, by imperial summons called,
 Innum'erable before th'Almighty's throne,
 Forthwith from all the ends of Heav'n appeared¹⁰²

⁹⁹ *PL* 4.427-8

¹⁰⁰ *PL* 4.420-1

¹⁰¹ *PL* 4.521-2

¹⁰² *PL* 5.577-86

Per Miltonic convention, Chaos briefly appears to properly prelude the origin, which is itself a shining ideal of *presence*. The whole of Heaven— perhaps the whole of “existence,” if one considers that Hell need not exist prior to the possibility of sin— gathers in a single space and a single moment to attend the proclamation of the Almighty. Milton’s understanding of the archē is clear from this depiction: narratives inevitably begin with unity and wholeness that suffers the threat of fragmentation resulting from sin. Indeed, we receive an overt articulation of this potential in God’s speech, which seems to precipitate the true archē of the Divine narrative:

... Him who disobeys
 Me disobeys, breaks union, and that day,
 Cast out from God and blessèd vision, falls
 Into utter darkness, deep engulfed, his place
 Ordained without redemption, without end¹⁰³

Even at the first reading, this seems an “addition strange” to God’s proclamation.¹⁰⁴ God anticipates and articulates disobedience, and describes the sentence that such disobedience merits. Why does he do this, if his will is the ultimate and irrevocable will? Shouldn’t disobedience be unthinkable, in the truest sense of the term? Exegetic challenges aside, the passage formalizes the archē of the Divine narrative in adherence to the tenets of Christian narrativity. Empson suggests that it is indeed God’s intention to foment rebellion: [p]resumably [God] wanted to drive into the open the insubordinate angels, at the first stage of his programme”.¹⁰⁵ It names a sinful potential, and no sooner does this potential appear than we find ourselves on the narrative path. The very moment that sin is defined is what “breaks union”: “All seemed well pleased: all seemed but were not all”.¹⁰⁶ The line’s covert gesture merits a few readings: we might at first be fooled by the repetition of “all” that by any measure preserves the sense of unity on either end of the line, and in its middle, but such is not the case. All were not pleased to hear God’s Word, and as a result, they are no longer an “all,” hence “all seemed, but were not all.” Factions form under cover of linguistic shadow, and the stage is set for action.

¹⁰³ *PL* 5.611-5

¹⁰⁴ *PL* 5.116

¹⁰⁵ Empson, William. *Milton’s God*. New Directions, 1961. p. 57.

¹⁰⁶ *PL* 5.617

What ensues is indeed rife with action, but surely, one cannot help but be struck by how *complete* the complete Divine narrative is; it leaves nothing out that the reader should want. It features a central conflict, three-dimensional characters with adequate motivation, twists and turns, innovations, heroes and villains, plenty of opportunities for the audience to cheer and plenty of opportunities for the audience to hiss and boo. Milton even seems willing to complicate or contradict theological norms in order to give the Divine narrative all the tension and intrigue that a narrative deserves, as when God exhibits a curious concern for the potential danger of Satan's rebellion: "Let us advise advise and to this hazard draw... what force is left... lest unawares we lose/ This our high place, our sanctuary, our hill".¹⁰⁷ The passage does not commit to the legitimacy of this fear, but dare not commit instead to the image of a sarcastic God, and as a result makes for challenging interpretation. It is a strange instance in which the demands of narrative briefly supplant those of theology.

And furthermore, one finds that Raphael's telling is aflame with classicism. Adam's "desire to hear, if thou consent,/ The full relation which must needs be strange" mimics the classical dialectic between man and god of the epic invocation, and sensitizes us to the classical resonances of the Divine narrative.¹⁰⁸ allusions abound throughout Raphael's account, such as when the Son, preparing to chase the rebels out of Heaven, is attended by "Victory... eagle-winged" and armed with "three-bolted thunder".¹⁰⁹ The imagery is that of the classical Jove, and further in the same passage, the line "In Heav'nly spirits could such perverseness dwell?"¹¹⁰ immediately recalls Virgil's introduction to the *Aeneid*, and almost exactly imitates the question that appears at 1.17 in that poem: "Can heav'nly minds such high resentment show?" Thematic currents in the Divine narrative also carry a decidedly traditional flavor. The completed narrative is properly Virgilian in its combination of Homeric modes; it borrows themes of war, divine intervention (when God decides to end the "perpetual fight" through the Son), encampment and counsel from the *Iliad*; and themes of travel, trial and the right to rule from the *Odyssey*. Indeed, Raphael's telling completes a portrait of Satan as the true "epic hero" of *Paradise Lost*, and likens him to Aeneas: he is a

¹⁰⁷ PL 5.729-32

¹⁰⁸ PL 5.555-6

¹⁰⁹ PL 5.762-4

¹¹⁰ PL 5.788

refugee of a failed war, cast out into the turbulent oceans of Creation to find a new home and inevitably resume his life of conflict, his life's conflict. Certainly, these resonances, instantaneous and motivic, cast the Divine narrative as an artifact of the "old" school and genetically similar to the Greco-Roman practice that Milton "with no middle flight intends to soar/ Above" in the totality of his "advent'rous song".¹¹¹ This is not strictly "teleological" signification, but critically our experience of the Divine narrative in Eden nevertheless relegates it to the space of that which has already happened; it is an old world text, even in *Paradise Lost*.

It is when we consider the telos of the Divine narrative, however, that the Edenic narrative is implicated. The poet forces an interaction with the Edenic narrative using teleology: the telos of the Divine narrative— which is necessary to its completion— is *localized* in the Edenic narrative. This is because both factions in the narrative— Heavenly and Hellish— implicate the isolated Eden in their ultimate goal. Both sides advance inevitably toward Eden, and seek to pervert— to *change*— its cardinal isolation to suit their own ends. Satan's logic is readily apparent by this point in the poem: he hopes to cheat his way to victory against the Empyrean host by seducing Adam and Eve to sin. But Raphael's tale reveals, through one of Milton's most shocking *additions* to theology, that God and the Son likewise find a means to an end in Eden. Adam guesses— quite correctly— that every act of creation is inherently purposive: he desires "to know... how this world... first began/ When and whereof created, *for what cause*".¹¹² Nothing is created with out cause; indeed, the creator rarely mobilizes creative machinery without some goal or aim in mind:

But lest [Satan's] heart exalt him in the harm
 Already done...
 ... I can repair
 That detriment...
 ... and in a moment will create
 Another world, out of one man a race
 Of men innumerable there to dwell,
 Not here, till by degrees of merit raised...
 Up hither, under long obedience tried,
 And Earth be changed to Heav'n and Heav'n to Earth,
 One Kingdom, joy and union without end¹¹³

¹¹¹ *PL* 1.13-14

¹¹² *PL* 7.62-4, emphasis added

¹¹³ *PL* 7.150-161

The reasoning startlingly proves that God's logic is no different than Satan's own: he too seeks to use Eden to smite his enemy. He positions the Creation as a preemptive measure to quell Satan's hypothetical boast for having seduced a third of the heavenly cohort, and thereby relates the will of his Good to that of Satan's Evil. Just as Satan hopes that corrupting Adam and Eve will throw a wrench in God's plans, God imagines that the ultimate triumph of humankind will silence Satan for good. In both cases, divine actors defer the burden of their combat onto the problem of human choice. "Virtue" and "seduction" both point only to a means of influencing or encouraging a particular choice in humanity; both are passive attempts to effect a certain result in the Edenic narrative.

Certainly, the reasoning on either side also feels a little incongruous when juxtaposed against the immensity of Creation, but perhaps this too is a timely reminder that Milton's take on the dissent in Heaven (for the better part of the Divine narrative is indeed literary invention) amounts to little more than a petty political squabble and egotistical conflict. Satan and God disagree on the issue of government, and the greatest effort from either can do no more than stick a thorn in the other's side. It is only through humanity that this conflict becomes a dignified struggle between good and evil, while human lives and destiny hang in the balance. Milton suggests, therefore, that the traditional understanding of theological hierarchy is skewed, or at the very least incomplete. Divine warfare may only be called "warfare" when humanity is there to raise the stakes. Both Heaven and Hell have to act through humanity to have any effect at all.

Both parties are thus trying to purpose Eden, and as such its importance to them—our importance to them, insofar as we too are of Edenic stock—is teleological. The Divine narrative *depends* upon the result of the Edenic narrative to attain its own signification, and as a result, it must defer its narrative thrust onto the Edenic narrative. This deferral is the mechanism that localizes a Divine telos in Eden. The latter receives the burden of signification and takes charge of it. Through a logic of dependence, the Edenic narrative becomes the center of theological focus, and Eden becomes the symbol of teleology in the Divine narrative, the "means" upon which the "end" depends.

Conclusion (3.4)

The composite narrative structure, therefore, constitutes a critical inversion of the traditional Christian paradigm: it is no longer that human destiny depends on the outcome of divine conflict, but rather that the divine conflict depends upon the human choices that will shape and direct the thrust of history. These choices will determine the conclusion of the Divine narrative: either humanity will covenant with sin and allow Satan to reign “more than half” of the Creation,¹¹⁴ or it will be “by degrees of merit raised” to repopulate Heaven and guarantee Satan’s failure.¹¹⁵ The composite narrative of *Paradise Lost* flips the script on how we are to contextualize and understand the relationship between humanity and its gods.

There are, of course, enough differences between the Divine and Edenic narratives to make us aware that they are in fact two separate narratives, and through critical anamorphosis, we may even deign to call it fragmentation. But Milton’s archē-telos dialectic critically preserves the continuity of the whole in spite of its incompatible parts. Just as the Divine narrative meets a concatenated telos in Eden, the same Eden blossoms forth as an archē in the Edenic narrative. The two narratives that so late seemed grossly incompatible are woven together by narration that eliminates the threat of alterity, and are ultimately woven into an overarching narrative—the poem *Paradise Lost*—that puts them in sequence, such that the Divine narrative naturally gives way to the Edenic narrative.

However, we should note that though the Divine narrative has no choice but to defer its narrative thrust onto the Edenic narrative, on the Edenic side this motion is completed not by a passive acceptance of the narrative burden, but rather an *assertion* of narrative prowess. Edenic actors make a *choice* to narrate. Raphael concludes his narration only to have Adam take it up, but in this instance, no invocation appears. It is rather the case that Adam takes charge of the conversation and imposes his narration upon his guest:

Therefore from this high pitch let us descend
A lower flight and speak of things at hand...
... Now hear me relate
My story which perhaps thou hast not heard¹¹⁶

¹¹⁴ *PL* 4.112

¹¹⁵ *PL* 7.157

¹¹⁶ *PL* 8.198-205

Adam boldly brings the narrative subject back down to Earth and commands Raphael to hear his own story; he certainly seems to wrest narrative control away from the divine. The point of narrative “handoff” is better understood as one of narrative “coup” or “revolution” from the Edenic side. For when human narrative and narration begins— when we encounter the true narrative archē of Milton’s modernity — it does not begin serendipitously in a “big bang”; it is as willful and assertive as the act of Creation itself.

But Adam is not the first to make such an assertion. The poet himself is quickest to the shores of modernity, as is seen in his introduction to Book Seven. It too tears the narrative focus away from the divine and pins it down on earth:

Descend from Heav’n, Urania, by that name
If rightly thou art called...
Into the Heav’n of Heav’ns I have presumed
An earthly guest and drawn empyreal air,
Thy temp’ring. With like safety guided down
Return me to my native element...
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,
In darkness and with dangers compassed round
And solitude¹¹⁷

“Descend” is the first word; Milton instructs his muse to come down to earth as he elects to sing in “mortal voice” and in his “native element.” This invocation is given over to the inauguration of Earth, of our home planet, as the locus of the coming narration. And at its core is the portrait of a man in a human society, undoubtedly Milton himself: he is fallen on the “evil days” of the Restoration, which has shamed him into a life “rife with tension and difficulty”.¹¹⁸ The poet, returning to earth from the fiery air of the empyrean, has no choice but to face the reality of his situation and relay that reality to us. And certainly, the gist of Milton’s dire situation reminds us of the reality we’ve just left in Paradise. Adam and Eve are also two figures of heavenly concern secluded in a tiny shelter in the middle of a dangerous, chaotic darkness. The world all about them, the world of *Paradise Lost*, swirls and teems with forces that eagerly anticipate their demise, for it is only by orchestrating the Fall that the Divine narrative can

¹¹⁷ *PL* 7.1-28

¹¹⁸ Lewalski 398

posthumously continue. They are doomed to become pawns in the war being waged all around them; their place in that conflict is already ordained, and no matter who wins, they are destined to lose. The poet uses his own situation to summon our sympathy, but he just as quickly directs that emotion toward the new focus of his text: our own, acutely human story, and what will be its unlikely triumph over the world of the past.

IV

My Self am Narrative

Where is the breast, which from itself a world did bear, and shaped and cherished...¹¹⁹

Goethe

Yes: Adam claims the power and responsibility of narration from the heavens and the heavenly and fits it to the contours of his humble human life. The story he tells is not a political history, but a personal one. Raphael's story is strange in that it prominently features suspicious details that betray its impersonality and omniscience. For how could Raphael have known what Satan whispered to Beelzebub on the night of the Son's ascension? And how can he confidently describe what occurred at the "Mountain of the Congregation" or in the rebel camp?¹²⁰ Raphael's narrative is hardly his own, but Adam's is acutely his own: his narrative focus never ventures to leave his own memory or experience, which he candidly admits at the very beginning of his recount: "For Man to tell how human life began/ Is hard: for who himself beginning knew?"¹²¹ One story attempts to transcend the subjective and be *objective*, while the other is content to come from human life and focus on human life: it is *subjective*, and makes no pretense otherwise.

This is, in essence, the spirit of modernity in narrative form. The gesture not only exemplifies the transfer of power from God to humanity, but also emphasizes that the human narrative does not need to model itself on the divine. It is content to be self-made, self-concerned, and self-insulated. Much like his Adam, the poet also gestures to take full charge of the narration in his opening to Act Three:

No more of talk where God or angel guest
With Man, as with his friend, familiar used,
To sit indulgent, and with him partake
Rural repast; permitting him the while
Venial discourse unblamed. I now must change
Those notes to tragic¹²²

¹¹⁹ von Goethe, Johann Wolfgang. *Faust: A Tragedy*. Translated by Bayard Taylor, Houghton Mifflin, 1912. p. 22.

¹²⁰ *PL* 5.766

¹²¹ *PL* 8.250-1

¹²² *PL* 9.1-6

The textual introduction properly sidelines all the trappings of premodernity. Forgone is the traditional unity of “God or angel guest” and humanity: Milton’s enjambment visually represents the nascent schism in narrative structure that was the focus of Act Two. He signals another beginning, another return to the question of the origin, but this origin no longer radiates out of a literary and historical past. It is immediate, it is “now”; it blossoms forth from “I,” the epic voice itself. And we have no difficulty in determining the identity of this “I”: the voice reveals several intimate details that confirm that Milton himself is the narrator. He invites us into his bedroom, where the muse makes her “nightly visitation unimpaired” and inspires what remains *his* “unpremeditated verse”.¹²³ The subject he has taken up is one that has “pleased” him “long choosing,”¹²⁴ and any concern he shows for its success comes from the realities of his life:

... 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 ear¹²⁵

If the poem should struggle, it may be because its poet writes in the wrong age, in too “cold” a “climate,” and perhaps a little too late in his life. The poet himself also raises the question as to where the poem originates; he no longer asserts that it is Urania’s text, but instead introduces a suspicion that it “may all be his.” But even if it is Urania who “brings it nightly to his ear,” it remains a narrative effort bound to and bound up in the life of its human parent. Divine inspiration cannot detract from or efface the reality that *Paradise Lost* is a human artifact.

Thus, as Act Three opens, the poet signals that the poem has shifted its narrative focus over to the Edenic narrative, to a narrative structure that is human in origin and human in content. All indications are that the text— on diegetic and metatextual levels— is now working with narratives of self that are only concerned with divine matters when they intrude on personal ones (much as Urania visits the poet’s bedroom). The essential isolation of the Edenic narrative blooms forth into a dominant narrative form that is both insulated and insulating. This is *subjectivity*: the inherently narrative phenomenon Milton uses to

¹²³ *PL* 9.22-4

¹²⁴ *PL* 9.26

¹²⁵ *PL* 9.42-7

explain the long-awaited archē—the Fall—as a human event exempt from divine influence, and the quintessential narrative form of a modernity that centers the human being in a creation of its own design. The broad goal of this chapter will be to investigate the subjective narratives that explain the Fall’s inevitability and its free choice, as well as argue that subjectivity forms the essential topography of the postlapsarian world—in short, the world of *Fallout*. For subjectivity is that which is able to twine the threads that fuel our discussion—the poem’s obsession with narrativity and the centrality of the human in modernity—with the central event of Milton’s theology: the Fall itself.

“I” Done It (4.1)

The “beginning” signaled in Book Nine’s textual introduction is the Fall. No other tragedy in *Paradise Lost* (there are many for those who will look) is quite as capable of turning the poem’s “notes to tragic”.¹²⁶ However, I part with critics like Millicent Bell who perceive an “essential *causelessness*” in Milton’s account of primal sin.¹²⁷ Their argument is in line with the account of the Fall in scripture: the “subtil” serpent tempts Eve out of the blue, and she accepts his scant reasoning without a single extra thought, all in a matter of six verses.¹²⁸ There is nothing in the scriptural account that we can point to as a *cause* for primal sin; it yields no anchor for deductive reasoning.

Paradise Lost, however, is an explanatory work. It may be that what Milton “wanted to understand— what it was a bitter personal necessity for him to understand— was the fallen state itself,” but the poem does more than explore the Fall: it *recreates* it, and in recreating it, the poem navigates the realities that make it both inevitable and a matter of free will.¹²⁹ There are any number of leads we might chase to answer the “whodunnit” of the epic question, but of interest to us is the narrative motivations of the Fall. In both the Divine and Edenic contexts, the Fall is shown to be a consequence of natural narrative development. As discussed in the previous chapter, the Divine narrative uses Eden in a teleological dialectic: God uses Creation and the *felix culpa* of the Fall to create good out of evil, while

¹²⁶ *PL* 9.6

¹²⁷ Bell, Millicent. “The Fallacy of the Fall in *Paradise Lost*.” *PMLA*, vol. 68, no. 4, 1953, p. 863.

¹²⁸ Genesis 3.1-6

¹²⁹ Bell 865-6

Satan hopes to orchestrate the regular *culpa* of the Fall as a means of bringing evil out of good. Both sides purpose the event to realize a larger aim. In order for the archē of the Fall to be truly “modern,” however, it must be of Edenic persuasion. It has to come out of the isolated and insulated narrativity of human experience, without leaning on external temptation. A “modern” Fall can not be the result of divine temptation; human beings have to be able to assume total responsibility for authoring it. I will argue that “subjective narrative” will allow Milton to reconstruct the Fall in this manner.

For “subjectivity” is precisely why our approach to the promised archē proves as problematic as it does. The closer and closer we come to the appointed hour, the more it seems that that hour has already come and gone. Well before the formal and long-anticipated Fall of Adam and Eve, we encounter characters that complicate our notion of prelapsarian perfection. From whence comes this strange couple we find arguing in Book Nine? They are wholly unlike the idyllic pair we meet in Book Four and with whom we dine in the second act. The argument and difference is unexpected to begin with, but moreover, Adam and Eve resort to rhetorical and logical techniques that might cause some confusion. Eve startlingly seems to guilt her husband by questioning his faith in her: “But that thou shouldst my firmness therefore doubt... I expected not to hear”.¹³⁰ Conversely, Adam becomes angry and irritated when his arguments fail to impress his partner (who has already suggested that reason is not convincing enough): “Adam fervently replied:/ O Woman!... Approve/ first thy obedience!”.¹³¹ Contrary wills, manipulative reasoning and choleric affect: these seem anathema in a place deemed “Paradise,” and suggest that there is in fact more than meets the eye when it comes to Adam and Eve.

Crucially, the argument sets up the Fall by introducing us to a flawed and fallible Edenic couple. It betrays the peculiar and unique faults of each in the form of very personal drives; in desperate pursuit of these personal aims, Adam and Eve resort to logic, rhetoric and affect that is wholly unsuited to Paradise and will ultimately cause them to lose it. For Eve, this thrust concerns a desire for independence and validation of her “firmness” in the face of evil temptation.¹³² Her case repeatedly returns to an assertion that both she and Adam are independently “endued/... with like defence” and therefore equally

¹³⁰ *PL* 9.279-81

¹³¹ *PL* 9.342-68

¹³² *PL* 9.279

complete as individuals.¹³³ Adam, on the other hand, is driven to discourage separation. He argues that “from the influence of [Eve’s] looks” he becomes “[m]ore wise, more watchful, stronger” than when they are separate, and thus that it is only when they are together that he can be his best self.¹³⁴ When he ultimately acquiesces to Eve’s desire, it is because he imagines a command will only widen the rift born of their argument: “Go, for thy stay, not free, absents thee more”.¹³⁵ Adam and Eve want different things; the two divergent drives of independence and unity bespeak not only a difference in character, but a difference in narrative. For Adam and Eve are distinct *subjects* that each embodies one half of the quintessential “subjective narrative” or “narrative of self”; they are motivated by two sides of the same narrative structure that governs the discourse on the self.

In making this claim, I am aided by Jacques Lacan’s “Mirror Stage” theory, which lays the groundwork for a narrative subjectivity. The Mirror Stage describes the formation of “the I... in a primordial form, before it is objectified in the dialectic of identification with the other, and before language restores to it... its function as subject”.¹³⁶ The infant organism, presented with an image of itself, “brings back an instantaneous aspect of the image” and recognizes itself in its reflection; as such, the Mirror Stage constitutes a moment of “identification,” by which a “transformation” occurs in the nascent subject that is the consequence of assuming an image.¹³⁷ Most importantly, this identification is itself an act of *catachresis*: it is a mistaken assumption of the image of self for the self, and to that end, Lacan notes that the Mirror Stage naturally “situates the agency of the ego... in a fictional direction, which will always remain irreducible for the individual alone, or rather, which will only rejoin the coming-into-being... of the subject asymptotically”.¹³⁸ The perfection of the image in the instance of the Mirror Stage— what Lacan terms the “Ideal-I”— is ultimately revealed to be in dialectical opposition to what is the locus of subjectivity in the “I,” insofar as the “coherent” self (“Ideal-I”) in the image cannot be

¹³³ *PL* 9,324-5

¹³⁴ *PL* 9,309-11

¹³⁵ *PL* 9,372

¹³⁶ Lacan, Jacques. “The mirror stage as formative of the function of the I as revealed in psychoanalytic experience.” *Écrits: A Selection*. Translated by Alan Sheridan, W. W. Norton & Company, 1977. p. 2.

¹³⁷ Lacan 2

¹³⁸ Lacan 2

synonymous with the infant (“I”) in the infans stage. The desire (a shorthand for the “agency of the ego”) is therefore oriented in a direction fundamentally removed from the present self.

Subjectivity is therefore expressed as a *narrative* fueled by a desire for the actualization of “self” in the form of the “Ideal-I.” It is experienced as a *logical* progression from the archē of self-recognition toward the telos of the “Ideal-I” through the satisfaction of personal desire. Lacan himself emphasizes the narrativity: “This development is experienced as a temporal dialectic that decisively projects the formation of the individual into history. The mirror stage is a *drama* whose internal thrust is precipitated from insufficiency to anticipation”.¹³⁹ For this reason, we may consider subjectivity itself to be the narrative of primal desire, and also the most primal narrative of desire. And quite crucially, that desire manifests itself most visibly in the drive of self-actualization, or better yet, self-desire. Because the “I” is defined in opposition to and at a distance from the image of the “Ideal-I,” the thrust that pushes the self to bring the two together is designed to bring about an image of self. And insofar as the narrative structure ends at “anticipation,” it never truly *ends*.

Lacan’s theory implies both that subjectivity has a basic narrativity to it, and that subjectivity, like any narrative, exerts a paradigmatic and guiding influence on those that fall under its spell. Lacanian subjectivity is undeniably narrative in both structure and function, and is precisely what we find mirrored in the subjective development of Adam and Eve in *Paradise Lost*. Since I mean to argue that there is a distinct flavor of primary narcissism in their respective subjective thrusts, it is best to begin with Eve. There is no better figure to illustrate narcissism than Milton’s Eve: a figure that may well be the most striking exploration of subjectivity in the entire poem.

Eve is central to everything that happens in Act Three, especially in a psychoanalytic sense, because she is a figuration of *desire*: she is attended at all times by a halo of “graces” that “from about her shot darts of desire/ Into all eyes to wish her still in sight”.¹⁴⁰ Desire is her aura, her natural exhalation, and Milton himself notes that even angels would be excused for succumbing to her charms: “if ever, then,/ Then had the sons of God excuse t’ have been/ Enamoured at that sight”.¹⁴¹ Yet, Eve is not only a

¹³⁹ Lacan 4, emphasis added

¹⁴⁰ *PL* 8.62-3

¹⁴¹ *PL* 5.446-8

figuration of desire, but also a case study in the narcissism of subjective desire: she harbors a private vanity that is not extinguished even in the wake of Adam's pre-nuptial courtship and winsome logic. Her first and greatest satisfaction lies in her own reflection, which fittingly serves as her own "Mirror Stage" moment.

It is a scene whose levity and comedy effectively mask its narrative importance. The newborn Eve spies a "shape within the wat'ry gleam.../ Bending to look" back at her, and mirroring her gestures; she is "pleased" by it, and admits that she might have "fixed [her] eyes till now and pined with vain desire/ Had not a Voice warned" her that what she saw was herself.¹⁴² It would appear that this *voix acousmatique* inaugurates her identity in the same instant that it emphasizes that identity's ephemerality and unreality: "What there thou seest, fair creature, is thyself:/ With thee it came and goes".¹⁴³ Yet, the phrase Eve uses— "vain desire"— has a double signification that suggests she understands herself before the voice gifts her that identity. "Vain desire" is not only a futile desire, but also a desire of *vanity*, a desire born of excessive self-adoration and self-elevation. Eve therefore subtly mentions that her encounter with the reflection constitutes a moment of *self*-identification even before her identity is given to her, and thus a moment of self-precipitation as well.

Eve's self-awareness— the birth of subjectivity in her— predates Adam's naming her, and in this sense especially, she is distinct from the rest of those creatures that rank below Adam in the divine hierarchy. The animals are incapable of self-discovery in any form, but they can be understood once Adam gives them names that distinguishes them from each other. Indeed, "naming" carries with it the power of comprehension: "I named them as they passed and understood/ Their nature".¹⁴⁴ Eve, however, is capable of self-knowledge and understanding without Adam's help. Prior to being understood as this creature called "Woman," Eve understands her identity when she encounters her reflection in the lake. An independent will is born of this precocious understanding— a will that is oriented toward an image of self and will later conflict with the unity toward which Adam aspires.

¹⁴² *PL* 4.461-7

¹⁴³ *PL* 4.468-9

¹⁴⁴ *PL* 8.352-3

For it is promptly clear that this Mirror Stage begets a stubborn self-desire that problematizes even her first encounter with Adam, whom she finds “less fair,/ less winning soft, less amiably mild/ Than that smooth wat’ry image”.¹⁴⁵ Adam tells Raphael that his “pleaded reason” conquers her narcissistic desire (of which he is blissfully unaware¹⁴⁶), but it is very clear that even the best faculty of reason means little and does little for Eve.¹⁴⁷ As discussed in the previous chapter, Eve is not amenable to Adam’s rationalizations: his optimistic analysis of her dream cannot help her from shedding tears. The Eve of Book Nine testifies that just like his logical consolation falls short of its aim, his logical courtship is equally ineffective, because it cannot efface the self-love in her heart. The Eve of this chapter is at her most shocking, her most diabolical when her own insecurity about her relation to her self-image becomes a rhetorical tool in her debate with Adam:

His fraud is then thy fear, which plain infers
Thy equal fear that my firm faith and love
Can by his fraud be shaken or seduced!—
Thoughts which, how found they harbor in thy breast,
Adam, misthought of her to thee so dear¹⁴⁸

Certainly, the passage is clear evidence of her desire to be independent of Adam’s protection, but the final line of the passage is especially telling. It refers to a suddenly-distant “her,” rather than press forward with the earlier grammatical “me,” and thus seems to refer to Eve-as-image rather than the Eve present in the scene. The insult to her firmness, therefore, seems to exacerbate the basic narrative insecurity that stems from the Mirror Stage identification. Under fire from Adam, Eve feels distant from the image of herself she holds dear, which apparently is the true figure Adam “harbors in his breast”; she becomes acutely aware of the cruel distinction between self-perception and self-image, and thus begins to obsessively defend herself before Adam’s line of reasoning. The thrust of her subjective narrative drives her to rhetorical and argumentative extremes toward the realization of her cherished self-image; she sets out to *prove* to Adam that she and her Ideal-I are one and the same. Her sensitivity exemplifies the “aggressivity” the subject “releases in any relation to the other, *even in a relation involving the most*

¹⁴⁵ PL 4.478-80

¹⁴⁶ PL 8.500-7

¹⁴⁷ PL 8.510

¹⁴⁸ PL 9.285-9

Samartian of aid".¹⁴⁹ For although Adam speaks to Eve's benefit his language is ineffective because it touches the deepest and most tender of all subjective nerves.

That Eve's temptation capitalizes on this insecurity is therefore to be expected. Both in the dream and in actuality, her fall comes after a promise of transformation into this mystical "Goddess humane" that represents a divinity that does not alienate the subjective desire but rather *completes* it.¹⁵⁰ For "humane" must be understood as meaning both "gracious" and "human" at once, and as such, this concept of a "Goddess humane" retains the "human" aspect of Eve that is her subjectivity. It is an ascension, and not a metamorphosis. The temptation is therefore predicated on the content of Eve's subjective narrative, and Milton's version of the Fall is not, as in the Bible, a freak accident, but a carefully orchestrated externalization of what is fundamentally an internal conversation between the self and its shapely, attractive demons. Satan simply provides a succinct articulation of what Eve has wanted all along, but even then, when she moves to taste the forbidden fruit, she first lays aside Satan's reasoning and creates her own.¹⁵¹ J. Max Patrick makes the case that Eve "did not take the fruit as a direct result of [Satan's] eloquence and reasoning but was sufficiently in control of herself to ignore most of his case and to take time to provide her own reasons for her decision".¹⁵²

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?¹⁵³

In this reasoning, too, we find a reflection of Eve's drive to "cure" her inadequacy and actualize the best version of herself. Indeed, to let Eve Fall otherwise— tempted and not driven— would be to deny her completeness as a character and her legitimacy as a prelapsarian human figure.

¹⁴⁹ Lacan 6, emphasis added

¹⁵⁰ *PL* 9.732

¹⁵¹ *PL* 9.745-79

¹⁵² Patrick, J. Max. "A Reconsideration of the Fall of Eve." *Études Anglaises*, vol. 28, 1975. p. 19.

¹⁵³ *PL* 9.773-9

The subjective narrative—the Mirror Stage “drama”—therefore explains Eve’s transgression without relying on divine machinery. It not only provides the requisite fallibility and desire that makes the innocent Eve liable to sin, but also ensures that when she falls, it is through her own rationale and free choice. Of course, Eve does not Fall alone: Adam is there to sin with her, and very obviously we are tempted to read his transgression as an act of romantic, heroic self-sacrifice—the furthest thing from the narcissism and self-desire of subjective narrative. Yet, let us remember that Eve herself is a crystallization of self-desire in Adam, as is made clear when he requests that she be made. Adam wins God over on his point that humanity, in its self-perceived imperfection, is in need of “social communication” and “collateral love, and dearest amity” to *en masse* approximate the perfection of God.¹⁵⁴ His laudable logical footwork invokes a set of family values that justifies prelapsarian sexuality as a purposive—and not merely self-concerned—desire. But although God accepts Adam’s reasoning and recontextualizes Eve’s absence as a “trial only brought/ To see how [he] could’st judge of fit and meet,” things change considerably when Adam meets Eve for the first time.¹⁵⁵ Though reason is used to bring about her manufacture, that reason and that reasoning have little to do with what satisfaction Adam derives from her:

Bone of my bone, flesh of my flesh, my self
 Before me: Woman is her name, of Man
 Extracted. For this cause he shall forgo
 Father and mother and to his wife adhere
 And they shall be one flesh, one heart, one soul¹⁵⁶

Adam’s unconscious exclamation—which he “could not forbear aloud”¹⁵⁷—brings to mind the “flutter of jubilant activity” Lacan associates with the Mirror Stage infant.¹⁵⁸ Indeed, Adam has his own Mirror Stage moment of self-identification in his meeting with Eve: she makes him aware that he is of a race called “human,” which before her consisted of only one being and could not rightly be called a “race.” The earlier logic of propagation and multiplication is quite literally “forgone” here, transformed into the unity of “one flesh, one heart, one soul”; the ideas of family and “collateral love and dearest

¹⁵⁴ *PL* 8.426-9

¹⁵⁵ *PL* 8.447-8

¹⁵⁶ *PL* 8.495-9

¹⁵⁷ *PL* 8.490

¹⁵⁸ Lacan 1

amity” are exchanged for a departure from one’s parents.¹⁵⁹ Eve is therefore not defined as the means to an end that will help humanity as a forthcoming race approximate the perfection of God, but rather as a reflection of self, and furthermore of “self” itself as a dialectic of desire. The concept of “woman” is born when Adam “found not . . . what [he] wanted still” among God’s creations, where the modern denotation of “want” as both a lack and a desire is curiously suited to Milton’s suggestive episode.¹⁶⁰ That Adam should ultimately admit that his reason fails in the presence of Eve should therefore come as no surprise, for while his reasoning may have been pure before he met Eve, after the Mirror Stage encounter, it is turned into a subjective desire and has little to do with objective rationality.

Consequently, the encounter with Eve fixes subjective desire in the mold of the image, and gives the object of his previously vague and ill-defined desire a name and purpose. The carnal nature of the drive is preserved, but it is notably transformed from a dialectic of futurism and deferral— a means to an end— to one of immediacy and startling unity. The “one flesh, one heart, one soul” unity toward which Adam’s desire is oriented reflects the asymptotic fantasy of Lacan’s Mirror Stage, insofar as the object-subject synthesis described cannot be realized.¹⁶¹ Let us consider, however, that Adam’s desire is in fact a *nostalgic* one: Adam desires to *reclaim* that flesh and that self that was lost to him when Eve was created, to once again return to a oneness that, in truth, never really existed. For Eve was unthought and without form prior to being made of Adam’s flesh, but Adam regardless felt the lack of her. There was and is no point at which Adam and Eve were unified as “one flesh, one heart, one soul”; rather, Eve always-already figures a “lost object,” a being whose presence can only be registered in relation to radical loss and nostalgia.

There is, therefore, a “separation anxiety” that is bound up in Adam’s pleasure with Eve. His love for her manifests as a fear or paranoia that she will be separated from him beyond the separation he senses when first he sees her, which itself is misrecognized for joy at having come so close to the fantastical lost object of his desire: the piece of himself he always lacked is suddenly anthropomorphized and placed before him, and he is overjoyed to know that it has a name. Consider, for example, that while Eve pulls

¹⁵⁹ *PL* 8.426

¹⁶⁰ *PL* 8.355

¹⁶¹ *PL* 8.499

away in Book Nine in order to assert her monadic independence, Adam exhibits a fear of the dyadic situation aggravated. Addressing her as “[s]ole Eve, associate soul,” he advises her to stay close, first by invoking divine design, then by warning her of Satan’s threat in as diplomatic a way as possible.¹⁶² The pun on “sole/soul” suggests again that Adam perceives that he and Eve are supposed to be of one soul, perpetually in danger of being driven further apart than they already are.

The ask— not an imperative— he makes is to “leave not the faithful side / That gave thee being”.¹⁶³ John C. Ulreich notes that this in itself— that Eve is bound to her “creator” in Adam— should be sufficient to validate Adam’s argument, but he does not arrive at this until after much deliberation “from Eve’s false premise rather than concretely from his own feelings”.¹⁶⁴ This delay, per Ulreich, is symptomatic of “a breach in Adam’s own nature as his physical and passionate self rebels against his rational and spiritual”; it is an indication that the argument between Adam and Eve is in a sense a subjective dialectic that has been externalized for our view.¹⁶⁵ Adam is arguing against a part of himself, and as such is keen to offer “healing words” that will legitimize that self’s claims and avoid offending its sensibilities.¹⁶⁶ The distorting influence of his fear prioritizes appeasement and reconciliation over rationality and truth, even if the latter would better help him avoid realizing his fears. Even when he seems amenable to Eve’s desire for independence, that concession betrays his discomfort:

... But if much converse perhaps
Thee satiate, to short absence I could yield,
For solitude is sometimes is best society
And short retirement urges sweet return¹⁶⁷

Even as he suggests that solitude may sometimes be worthwhile, he doubles down on his own view and praises the return and reunification. He is unable to think separation without needing to diffuse its tension with a guarantee of return, and thus his acquiescence too illustrates the dyadic anxiety that underlies his subjectivity. It is only natural that this anxiety weakens and ultimately defeats his position—

¹⁶² *PL* 9.227

¹⁶³ *PL* 9.265-6

¹⁶⁴ Ulreich, John C. “Sufficient to Have Stood”: Adam’s Responsibility in Book IX.” *Milton Quarterly*, vol. 5, 1971. p. 39.

¹⁶⁵ Ulreich 39

¹⁶⁶ *PL* 9.290

¹⁶⁷ *PL* 9.247-50

the strength of will inevitably triumphs over the temerity of fear. He tells Eve, “Go, for thy stay, not free, absents thee more,” and seems again to prioritize protecting Eve’s perfection over his own authority, in an ill-conceived effort to avoid the challenge of a psychological or emotional “absence”.¹⁶⁸ Tragically, Adam meets his fears on the very path he takes to avoid them, since by agreeing “to Eve’s pretense that they are two separate individuals rather than a union of flesh and spirit, Adam submits to her and sacrifices their mutual welfare to his self-love”.¹⁶⁹ The return for which he waits— weaving a wreath of flowers for his beloved, of course— is not the one he expects, but just as in his earlier arguments, his internal monologue that breaks “inward silence” suggests his fear of further fragmentation:¹⁷⁰

Should God create another Eve and I
Another rib afford, yet loss of thee
Would never from my heart...
Bone of my bone thou art and from thy state
Mine never shall be parted, bliss or woe!¹⁷¹

The monologue refers again to the process of fragmentation by which Eve was made. Adam considers that it may be possible for God to create another Eve, and indeed he is not wrong to think so— it stands to reason that his obedience would be rewarded handsomely. But, the new Eve would come at the cost of “another rib” and further fragmentation, and even this would not efface the “loss of [the original]” from his “heart.” Interestingly, it is not the original Eve herself whose memory Adam will mourn, but rather the memory of her *loss*. This wrinkle raises questions as to which “loss” Adam refers: the loss of Eve or the loss of the *rib* that is redoubled in the loss of Eve. After all, the original Eve is the first “rib” that makes any subsequent bone “another,” and thus the loss of Eve must in some sense register to him as a loss of a part of himself. He cannot help but see in her the rib he lost, the price of wholeness and self-sufficiency his body paid when he needed companionship, and any subsequent Eve can only be seen as yet “another rib” afforded. To transgress with Eve, therefore, is an act of *self-preservation*:

How can I live without thee...
... No! No! *I feel*
The link of nature draw me, flesh of flesh,
Bone of my bone thou art and from thy state

¹⁶⁸ PL 9.372

¹⁶⁹ Ulreich 39

¹⁷⁰ PL 9.895

¹⁷¹ PL 9.911-916

Mine never shall be parted, bliss or woe¹⁷²

Couched in this logic of self-effacement is a deeper realization of self-affirmation. We should not be surprised that it is Adam's choice to fall because he sees in the object of his sacrifice nothing short of his own self. Eve is "flesh of flesh," the "bone of his bone"; the dichotomy "thy state" and "my state," as established here, refers in essence to two "selves" of Adam. What reads as self-sacrifice is in actuality a radical act of self-preservation and denotes a desire to perish along with the lost object to avoid further fragmentation.

The point is that while Eve's subjective narrative illustrates the willful and assertive side of the Mirror Stage drama, Adam's illustrates its obverse: the anxious flight away from the "fragmented body-image" of the primordial "I".¹⁷³ The narrative structure, after all, is constituted by a "succession of phantasies that extends from a fragmented body-image to a form of its totality," and there are two ways of moving along the timeline of this narrative, each illustrated by half of the Edenic "subject".¹⁷⁴ Eve's aggressive motion toward self-sufficiency is perhaps in line with the central "thrust" of the drama, but insofar as that thrust cannot be satisfied, Adam's fearful passivity figures the inevitable consequence of a "fall" back into insufficiency, a fear implicated in his confession to Raphael:

Or nature failed in me and left some part
Not proof enough such object to sustain
Or from my side subducting took perhaps
More than enough, at least on her bestowed
Too much of ornament¹⁷⁵

Adam's reasoning is that either he is inherently defective or that God took more than he needed to from Adam in making Eve; in either case, Eve inspires a feeling of insufficiency in her husband. Lacan writes that the victim of this corollary narrative is plagued by visions of "organs represented in exoscopy, growing wings and taking up arms for intestinal persecutions": is Eve not, in Adam's perception, one such "organ" grown independent and gone rogue by virtue of his incapacity to control his own body and manage his own self?¹⁷⁶ Lacan attributes these emotions and leanings to neonates, and surely, Adam and

¹⁷² *PL* 9.908-16, emphasis added

¹⁷³ Lacan 4

¹⁷⁴ Lacan 4

¹⁷⁵ *PL* 8.534-8

¹⁷⁶ Lacan 4

Eve *are* neonates: they can hardly be considered to have crossed the 18-month threshold Lacan sets for the end of Mirror Stage activity. Their subjective narratives, therefore, are fresh and sharp, and guised with all the subtlety and tact one typically associates with infants.

In summary, Adam and Eve each exhibit half of the basic subjective narrative outlined in “The Mirror Stage,” and together constitute a composite illustration of subjectivity at work. Eve is motivated mostly by a motion toward a vision of self-actualization founded on the perfection of self-as-image; and Adam is motivated by fear of further fragmentation of his “body” and a consequent affirmation of his ineptitude, inferiority and insufficiency in the face of self-as-image. Eve runs toward her self-image, perceiving it as a thing within her reach; Adam struggles to hold on to his, perceiving it as something traumatically outside his own being. Of course, both narratives find representation in both characters: it is important to recognize that Eve’s insecurity does bubble forth as a rhetorical weapon in her duel with Adam, and Adam’s choice should well be considered an active step toward union with the image. This is because both narratives similarly work toward a unity of “I” with “Ideal-I,” even if they are opposed in trajectory and semantics. They are two sides of the same subjective coin, and cannot be read or considered without invoking the other.

Milton therefore uses subjective narrative to explain the *why* of the Fall. Both Adam and Eve commit transgression out of commitment to their subjective narratives: for Eve, the fruit promises ascension in line with self-actualization, and for Adam, the fruit is the only avenue left by which he may remain with his severed “organ” and avoid further fragmentation. The insulated, Edenic, subjective narratives are what prompt and orchestrate the Fall, in spite of the divine machinations of foreknowledge and temptation that typically take credit for it. The human, subjective faults we find in Adam and Eve before the Fall are able to explain how the Fall is possible for innocent and upright prelapsarian humans, and inevitably predict why they occur. In *Paradise Lost*, we have little choice but to take *ownership* of the Fall, but while that justifies the punishment we receive, it also asserts that *Fallout*— or the narrative(s) that comprise the consequences of the Fall— belongs to us too.

Subjective Sandbox (4.2)

Adam and Eve Fall inevitably, but of their own volition, and when they do, the world itself indicates that things have changed: “Earth felt the wound and Nature from her seat/ Sighing through all her works gave signs of woe/ That all was lost”.¹⁷⁷ The Fall registers internally in the loss of innocence, but also externally— the world itself loses its innocence. It falls into a chaos and disorder that is crucially similar to the internal life of Adam and Eve, for, inside and outside, the Fall is, as Anthony Low puts it, a “fall into subjectivity.”¹⁷⁸ The subjective narrative *metastasizes* from the internal and grafts itself onto the now-postlapsarian world. The objects of the external realm become points of access for an inescapable subjectivity, such that the boundary between the external and internal is erased and the world takes on the character and spirit of the fallen mind. Primal sin deepens and widens the subjective gulf such that “there is no way for the individual to escape from the endless abyss of subjectivity, into which all the efforts of his mind to escape only plunge and entangle him further”.¹⁷⁹ Fallen characters therefore project their inward condition onto the world around them, and thusly live in a world that reflects the condition of the self; they are able to use external objects to enter a discourse on the self— what Low calls “the obsessive habit of anguished soliloquizing” that leads to “an inward, spiraling fall into ever-expanding depths of terror, loss and loneliness”.¹⁸⁰ In this way, subjectivity becomes an all-encompassing narrative structure in the wake of the Fall.

Satan is the first to exhibit this penchant for transference and illustrate how it relates to the condition of being *fallen*. The Niphates soliloquy uses the Sun as a point of entry into a long subjective exploration:

... to thee I call
 But with no friendly voice and add thy name,
 O Sun, to tell thee how I hate thy beams
 That bring to my remembrance from what state
 I fell, how glorious once above thy sphere
 Till pride and worse ambition threw me down,

¹⁷⁷ PL 9.782-4

¹⁷⁸ Low, Anthony. “The Fall into Subjectivity: Milton’s ‘Paradise Within’ and ‘Abyss of Fears and Horrors’.” *Reading the Renaissance: Ideas and Idioms from Shakespeare to Milton*. Edited by Marc Berley, Duquesne University Press, 2003. p. 216.

¹⁷⁹ Low 212

¹⁸⁰ Low 208

Warring in Heav'n against Heav'n's matchless King¹⁸¹

Satan addresses the sun, but only insofar as it illuminates parts of his own history and his subjective turmoil. After the moment of the address, the Sun vanishes from Satan's soliloquy as he turns his attention wholly to what the Sun *represents* or *signifies*: the reality of his subjective situation. His speech is an internal monologue— perhaps a bit too coherent to be properly termed a “stream of consciousness”— that uses hypothetical situations and logical deductions to further reveal his real emotions and the truth of his self. We find too that it is not only the Heavenly that reminds Satan of his position, but the Hellish and the Edenic as well: in the same passage, he laments that the “diadem and scepter high advanced” he possesses in Hell signifies only that he is “supreme in misery” in his subjective language.¹⁸² Similarly, his address to the Garden of Eden in Book Nine returns promptly to a realization of self:

With what delight could I have walked thee round
 (If I could joy in aught) sweet interchange
 Of hill and valley, rivers, woods and plains,
 Now land, now sea and shores with forest crowned,
 Rocks, dens and caves! But I in none of these
 Find place or refuge and the more I see
 Pleasures about me so much more I feel
 Torment within me as from the hateful siege
 Of contraries: all good to me becomes
 Bane, and in Heav'n much worse would be my state!¹⁸³

The “terrestrial heav'n danced round by other heav'ns,” a “seat worthier of gods” addressed as “thee” is a point of entry into the inner “torment” Satan is powerless to escape.¹⁸⁴ Satan sees the beauty of the terrain, but also sees *through* the beauty of the terrain into the subjective memorial that awaits him at every turn; his address therefore formalizes the postlapsarian *translucency* of the external world that reflects the inner state of the subjective narrative.

Adam and Eve find themselves in a similar position after they Fall. Much like the “mutt'ring thunder” that “sad drops/ Wept at the completing of the mortal sin,” Adam and Eve, too, discover that

¹⁸¹ PL 4.35-41

¹⁸² PL 4.90-2

¹⁸³ PL 9.114-23

¹⁸⁴ PL 9.100-2

their world is suddenly populated with striking reminders of subjective experience.¹⁸⁵ Adam's Satan-esque soliloquy in Book Ten develops this expansion of subjectivity by means of pathetic fallacy. One notes that the "discord" in Eden, in which "beast... with beast gan war and fowl with fowl/ And fish with fish," affectively reflects the "troubled sea of passion" which roils in the postlapsarian Adam.¹⁸⁶ Similarly, he moans, "All that I eat or drink or shall beget/ Is propagated curse".¹⁸⁷ Nature seems to reflect the subject's regret—indeed, it seems saturated with it. Moreover, the phrase "shall beget" suggests that Adam's subjectivity expands not only into an external space, but also into an external time. He is not wrong to think that his progeny will suffer for his crime, but crucially he relates this hypothetical future back to himself:

Who of all ages to succeed but, feeling
The evil on him brought by me, will curse
My head: "ill fare our ancestor impure,
For this we may thank Adam."
... So besides
Mine own that bide upon me, all from me
Shall with a fierce reflux on me redound,
*On me as on their natural center light*¹⁸⁸

Adam's subjective woe cannot be contained in the present space and the present moment; it naturally ventures forth from his consciousness and invades even an unknown and distant future, such that time and space are both bound to the state of the subject. A similar transference occurs in Eve upon hearing that Michael is come to "send" her and Adam "from the garden forth to till/ The ground whence [they were] taken, fitter soil".¹⁸⁹ Her address to the flowers of Eden recalls something of her own situation: she too was "bred up with tender hand/ From... first op'ning bud" and given her name and purpose in the Garden.¹⁹⁰ That she wonders "who now shall rear... to the sun or rank/...tribes and water from th'ambrosial fount" reflects her own fear of being abandoned to the forces of nature without higher guidance or nurturing protection.¹⁹¹ She sees in the flowers her own plight, her own subjective fear, and

¹⁸⁵ PL 9.1002-3

¹⁸⁶ PL 10.707-18

¹⁸⁷ PL 10.728-9

¹⁸⁸ PL 10.733-740, emphasis added

¹⁸⁹ PL 11.261-2

¹⁹⁰ PL 11.276-7

¹⁹¹ PL 11.278-9

thus her subjectivity is imposed onto the world around her. Both Adam and Eve find that “conscience” has “driv’n” them into an “abyss of fears/ And horrors... out of which/ [they] find no way, from deep to deeper plunged”.¹⁹²

Indeed, there is a sense of “substance” and “space” to postlapsarian subjectivity, such that in the wake of transgression, it imposes its shape and state onto the topography around the subject; it recreates that topography in its image, because the self is also revealed to be topographical. The reader will note that this is, in essence, what the poem has been arguing all along. From Satan’s very early proclamation that “[t]he mind is its own place, and in itself/ Can make a Heaven of Hell, a Hell of Heaven,” the poem has encouraged us to embrace the self as the “truer” topography; it has urged us to consider the spiritual landscape as more legitimate than the physical one.¹⁹³ It does not matter that Satan escapes his physical Hell, because his own self is a Hell from which he cannot escape: “Which way I fly is Hell, myself am Hell”.¹⁹⁴ And the ultimate suggestion is that Adam and Eve also “fall into subjectivity,” into the narrative depths of their own selves, which expand ever deeper and ever more confusingly into logic that always gravitates back to the problem of the self.¹⁹⁵ This is why, Low suggests, that “internalization may lead... down into hell”¹⁹⁶: the Fall ensures that “[t]here is no way to transcend the I-centered world of the self, of language, of the perceived phenomena, to encounter the underlying substrate of reality, unless reality pierces the barrier from the other side and intrudes itself upon the self”.¹⁹⁷ We will, in the next chapter, question whether “reality” need necessarily break through the subjective “barrier” in order to pull the subject out of subjective topography, but for now let us simply end this line of inquiry with Low’s important observation that the postlapsarian subjective sandbox is a prison on two legs, a moveable beast.

¹⁹² *PL* 10..842-4

¹⁹³ *PL* 1.254-5

¹⁹⁴ *PL* 4.75

¹⁹⁵ *PL* 4.75

¹⁹⁶ Low 208

¹⁹⁷ Low 212

Conclusion (4.3)

In this way, subjective narrative not only prompts and implies ownership of the Fall, but also consumes the world around it. Through the transgression of the Fall, subjectivity expands to envelop the natural world and transform it into a great mirror for the subjective dialectic. It engenders what Teskey calls a modern paradigm by which “we live not in nature but in what we have made”.¹⁹⁸ The Fall, as an action of human design, and enables the emergence of a cultural envelope in which humanity can exist in self-immersion; God’s Creation is critically *rewritten* and *reread* by subjective narrativity to reflect the architecture and condition of the human psyche.

The Fall will go down in the poem’s revised history as the first truly human, truly modern act. For within the Creation of God— *nature*— humanity finds a means of establishing a cultural envelope in which to exist. Therefore, we may also equate postlapsarian subjectivity with the psychological dimension of *Fallout*. The postlapsarian world is a space which reflects the interiority of the subject; it is “modern” in that it centers the world around the human by making the human the very locus of physical topography and geography, whether that topography be that of damnation or that of salvation. All consequences of the Fall take place in a landscape that is as “fallen” as the minds of its inhabitants: history itself conforms to the ups and downs of human narrative.

It is appropriate, then, that this act should symbolically represent a turn away from divinity and the premodern paradigm, and a fulfillment of that cutting prophecy God made in Book Three. We are become, through subjectivity, “ingrates,” who see all that God and his ilk have done to help us reach our destined Fall, who recognize all the help and effort coming from the Divine narrative, and ignore it to do it all ourselves.¹⁹⁹ In the Fall, at least, we reclaim the reins of history for ourselves.

¹⁹⁸ Teskey 7-8

¹⁹⁹ *PL* 3.97

V

Fallout and Revolution

So memory pulls us forward, so prophecy is only brilliant memory— there will be a garden where all of us as one child will sleep in our mother Eve, hooped in her ribs and staved by her spine.²⁰⁰

Marilynne Robinson

Whether this narrative paradigm of subjectivity constitutes a retreat inward into subjectivity or an explosion outward of the subject is perhaps not entirely answerable in the confines of the text. It is probably a combination of both, whereby the proliferation of subjective markers into the external world enables a deep foray into an internal chasm, an “abyss of fears/ And horrors”.²⁰¹ Furthermore, the question may not particularly relevant to the larger point Milton seems to be making. Regardless of semantics, the poet pushes a paradigm in which the self provides the necessary backdrop and foundation to make a supernatural, otherworldly conflict possible. In the words of Balachandra Rajan, the “very cosmography of the poem and its massed oppositions of imagery and concept strengthen the sense of man as the middle ground and battleground” of the divine conflict.²⁰² The conflict’s ostentatious and pompous stakes of “good” and “evil” are made believable only when human lives are there to give them body and meaning— otherwise, the Divine narrative would amount to little more than an entertaining tale, an amusing diversion.

Milton’s message, therefore, is one that concerns the place of the human being in Christianity. The subjective paradigm offered is one that encourages us to view Christianity— and perhaps religion more broadly— as a story of human history as it periodically intersects with the divine, whatever “divine” may actually represent. We are to understand that the human being is the central figure in this story— not God, who has no voice in this world without the obedience of humanity; not Satan and his hordes, whose names are “blotted out and razed/ . . . from the Books of Life” until “the sons of Eve/ Got them new

²⁰⁰ Robinson, Marilynne. *Housekeeping*. Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1980. p. 192.

²⁰¹ *PL* 10.823-4

²⁰² Rajan, Balachandra. “Paradise Lost’: The Hill of History.” *Huntington Library Quarterly*, vol. 31, no. 1, 1967. p. 44.

names”;²⁰³ and not even the covenant human beings make with these parties, which are meaningless but in relation to the progress of human society and the development of human law.

Religion— the aforementioned history of humanity in which gods are bit players— is what marks the end of Milton’s proposed narration on “man’s first disobedience”:

... They forthwith to the place
 Repairing where He judged them prostrate fell
 Before Him reverent and both confessed
 Humbly their faults and pardon begged, with tears
 Watering the ground and with their sighs the air
 Frequenting, sent from hearts contrite in sign
 Of sorrow unfeigned and humiliation meek²⁰⁴

This scene of prostration and prayer, of the pursuit of forgiveness, is the last immediate consequence or *Fallout* of “man’s first disobedience.” It is a moment in which the parallels between Adam and Eve and their progeny— the readers— are nearly transparent. For the scene encapsulates the essential model of Christian narrative: by sending a prayer to the now-distant heavens and begging pardon, Christian didacticism is fulfilled, and the sinner begins to learn from his or her mistakes. Milton’s audience is intimately familiar with this, the “proper” response to sin that shall ultimately restore the moral peace to the individual that is lost in transgression, because this is the Christian method. This is organized religion: to sit in a sanctified place and throw oneself into repentance and prayer to a God who may or may not answer. To end here would be to end with a note of familiarity, albeit a familiarity that has been significantly complicated by a no-holds-barred program of deconstruction, a subversive re-contextualization of the common archē, and a pointed assertion of narrative subjectivity— but still, for the most part, familiar. It is, after all, a view backed by a long history of Christian piety, and therefore, to end here would mean that the poem’s modernity would not leave the bounds of the text. It would end the poem with the possibility of redemption— in other words, human destiny— still in the hands of God.

The important thing, however, is that Milton does not end with this scene, and indeed chooses to move forward in such a way as to spread his modernity out into the social narratives that govern our world. Milton’s new narrative paradigm has only just been born— until he projects it out into the continuum of history and sees that it will stand and walk on its own, he cannot truly “complete” his

²⁰³ *PL* 1.362-5

²⁰⁴ *PL* 10.1098-1104

narrative mission. It is to this end that the historical revelation of Books 11 and 12 appear: to extend Milton's modernity out into the extra-textual world and to familiarize us with *modern* readings of history and prophecy. The last two books entail a critical history that captures the essence of Fallout as it appears in the title of this project: they consider how a modernized archē is made manifest in its consequent historical narrative and how the ultimate Telos of that archē is modern, too.

At the center of this history is, of course, the teloi to the Fall's archē: *redemption*. Adam and Eve's hopeful prayer and repentance at the end of Book Ten is designed to light the redemptive path, and this is precisely why the final books aim to give the reader a composite understanding of how both the Fall and the Salvation foreground and center on the human narrative. By way of conclusion, then, let us consider the implications of the final two books of the poem and the radical shift in narrative tone they effect. Let us conclude with Milton's own, built-in conclusion, and meditate more broadly on the Fallout of Milton's modernity as it echoes through history and prophecy.

A brief organizational note: as Thomas H. Blackburn argues, there are in fact three distinct "paradises" at play in the amalgamated "Miltonic history." These three paradises demarcate "a beginning, middle, and end" in the grand history we glean from reading the poem, and each is distinct in that they are tied to the temporal zones in which they arise.²⁰⁵ Leaving aside the "irrecoverably lost paradise of Eden" and its innocence which corresponds with the beginning of Milton's history, the poem presents us with two different kinds of redemption (the reinstatement or reclamation of paradise).²⁰⁶ One is an *internal* redemption, a "paradise within... happier far"²⁰⁷ than the lost pleasures of Eden, and the other is an *external* redemption in God's favorable judgment at the end of time, whereby "the Earth/ Shall all be Paradise, far happier place/ Than... Eden".²⁰⁸ I will briefly illustrate that the historical montage that concludes the poem in Books 11 and 12 subject both of these "redemptions" to a modernization that plays up humanity's hand in their making.

²⁰⁵ Blackburn, Thomas H. "Paradises Lost and Found: The Meaning and Function of the 'Paradise Within' in *Paradise Lost*." *Milton Studies*, vol. 5, 1973. p. 192.

²⁰⁶ Blackburn 191

²⁰⁷ *PL* 12.587

²⁰⁸ *PL* 12.463-5

This illustration, however, is not entirely concerned with the particular episodes Milton presents in Books 11 and 12. The poet's modernity does not conduct its work on the content of biblical history as much as it encourages us to re-contextualize it; his edits and changes occur at the margins and in relation to the overall framing of the composite history as a hermeneutic and teleological narrative. To that end, our discussion will also be chiefly focused on the presentation of Milton's history and will be given over to a *formal* analysis of how the Christian timeline is modernized through a self-invested interpretation of history and an assertion of prophecy as a human destiny. The concluding portion of this thesis will therefore briefly consider how Milton's modernity shapes the redemptive process in historical and prophetic narratives.

The "Paradise Within": The Hermeneutics of History (5.1)

The better part of the final two books are devoted to a broad exposé on Biblical history as it stands in the wake of his narrative revolution; the poet ends his great work with, in the words of Kenneth J. Knoespel, a confrontation with "history as a hermeneutical practice".²⁰⁹ It is clear that Milton presents this hermeneutical history of Books 11 and 12 as "a part of Adam's story" and related to the "evolution of his consciousness".²¹⁰ From the outset, the history Michael gives Adam is meant to inculcate certain values in the individual. It is narrated as a means of illuminating something of relevance to the development of Adam as a human being:

...I am sent
 To show thee what shall come in future days
 To thee, and to thy offspring: good with bad
 Expect to hear; supernal grace contending
 With sinfulness of men; *thereby to learn*
True patience, and to temper joy with fear
 And pious sorrow; equally inured
 By moderation either state to bear,
 Prosperous or adverse...²¹¹

As Rajan suggests, Michael's foreword implies that the "arena" of divine "combat is now the mind," and that history has become "the collective result of the individual struggle for moral

²⁰⁹ Knoespel, Kenneth J. "Milton and the Hermeneutics of Time: Seventeenth-Century Chronologies and the Science of History." *Studies in the Literary Imagination*, vol. 22, 1989. p. 18.

²¹⁰ Prince, F. T. "On the Last Two Books of *Paradise Lost*." *Milton's Epic Poetry*. Edited by C. A. Patrides, Penguin, 1967. p. 238.

²¹¹ *PL* 11.356-64, emphasis added

transformation".²¹² Indeed, the history retains its sense of the individual at front and center even as it aspires to chronicle the collective. For the first part of this history is presented as an intensely personal and subjective one: the first revelation (Book 11) is experienced as a pure vision that cuts directly to Adam's "visual nerve" and the "inmost seat of mental sight".²¹³ What he witnesses in Book 11 is tied directly to his own life and his experience of crucial historical events that lead up to the flood, at which point the mode of revelation is returned to language because Adam's "mortal sight [will] fail" and he will be unable to continue *experiencing* the narrative of history.²¹⁴ Therefore, the document of history is presented as deeply personal until such time as the "person" no longer exists; it is shown to be bound tightly to the subjective experience that bears witness to it.

Yet, even when the revelatory mode changes, one finds that the hermeneutic aspects of the revelation are kept alive. In contrast to the earlier narration in Books 5 and 6 that chronicled the Divine narrative, the revelation of history is frequently punctuated by Adam's responses, which in turn heighten our sense of the scene as one of tutorial—needless to say, Adam refers to Michael as "teacher".²¹⁵ These interruptions pose questions that illuminate the reality of human life in the wake of the Fall. They are often emotive and rhetorical—"have I now seen death? Is this the way/ I must return to native dust?"—but nevertheless, they lead forth to moral and mental growth.²¹⁶ Adam's questions on death, for example, settle into a proclamation of forbearance:

Henceforth I fly not death nor would prolong
 Life much, bent rather how I may be quit
 Fairest and easiest of this cumbrous charge
 Which I must keep till my appointed day
 Of rendering up, and patiently attend
 My dissolution²¹⁷

There are many such moments like these when Adam's personal relations to historical narrative crystallize into wisdom on how life is to be lived after the Fall. Adam's repeated questioning and

²¹² Rajan, "The Hill of History" 44-5

²¹³ *PL* 11.415-8

²¹⁴ *PL* 12.9

²¹⁵ *PL* 11.450

²¹⁶ *PL* 12.462-3

²¹⁷ *PL* 11.547-52

deduction suggest that historical narrative is at its most animated and its most hermeneutic when it is shown to be full of didactic moments that prompt introspection and maturation. This is particularly clear in his response to the Tower of Babel episode at 12.43-63:

... thus Adam fatherly displeased:
 O execrable son so to aspire
 Above his brethren, to himself assuming
 Authority usurped from God not giv'n
 ... man over men
 He made not lord, such title to himself
 Reserving, human left from human free²¹⁸

Adam learns from the episode precisely what Satan failed to learn in the main narration: that there is no hope or sustenance for those who would assert their authority over their own kind, and that such individuals are doomed to waste away. His individual wisdom and growth results from a running interpretation of history, which places human nature and development at the forefront of its critical thrust. In this way, we find that, in modern fashion, a hermeneutic history centralizes the individual who reads it, and helps that individual to reform and actualize personal improvement.

Furthermore, it is through the reflection upon biblical history that one also finds that “man has gained by the Fall more than he has lost”.²¹⁹ The Fall is a *felix culpa* because it enables the individual to undergo “a growth from childish innocence to moral maturity”; the former state is blissful because of design, but the latter is blissful because of choice.²²⁰ This is perhaps *why* the “paradise within” is “happier far” than what is left behind in Eden. What joy humanity loses in the act of primal sin was designed and forged by God as, it would seem, an incentive *not* to transgress, or to strongly encourage—perhaps even *tempt*—obedience. God himself alludes to this in his first critique of the Fall: “Whose fault?/ Whose but his own? Ingrate! He had of Me/ All he could have”.²²¹

The definition of “maturation” varies from source to source, but “independence” is almost universally implicated in maturity. In this sense, the maturation of Adam and Eve as individuals and as human beings requires that they leave home and create their own paradise, that they lessen their

²¹⁸ *PL* 12.63-78

²¹⁹ Blackburn 193

²²⁰ Blackburn 193

²²¹ *PL* 3.96-8

dependence on their parent by outgrowing the privilege in which they were born. Michael advises the distraught Eve not to “set thy heart/ Thus over-fond on that which is not thine”; the suggestion is that the Garden is an “inheritance” obtained from God that rightfully belongs only to its creator.²²² The “paradise within,” however, is indeed the product of original human “additions” to God’s creation:

This having learned thou hast attained the sum
Of wisdom...
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...
... Then wilt thou not be loath
To leave this Paradise but shalt possess
A paradise within thee, happier far²²³

The revelation represents but the last “inheritance” Adam receives from his progenitor, and while it indeed is a sizable gift of “the sum of wisdom,” through which “all nature’s works/ Or works of God” are known, the “paradise within” may only be cultivated through the application of human effort. Adam must *add* to the knowledge of creation deeds of faith, virtue, patience, temperance and love in order to lay claim to an internal, subjective paradise; moreover, these efforts will culminate in a paradise that is *superior* to the one he forfeits in primal sin. The lost Paradise is one of nature, but the intermediary paradise of the soul-at-peace is a cultural phenomenon that cannot be found in nature: it can only be realized through one’s own humanity and in one’s own humanity. It comes, it would seem, from an *original contribution* to what already exists.

In this way, we find that even if the Fall registers as a “fall into subjectivity,” the subjective narrative is still the space in which redemption may be born.²²⁴ To recall our previous discussion on Anthony Low’s “The Fall into Subjectivity,” Low suggested that only an “external rescue” could facilitate an escape from fallen subjectivity.²²⁵ Yet, he himself seems to suggest otherwise on the very next page:

The experience of guilt can spiral downward into an abyss of damnation or it can point upward from the abyss toward the possibility of renewal, by means of examination of conscience, conviction of sin,

²²² PL 11.288-9

²²³ PL 12.575-87

²²⁴ Low 216

²²⁵ Low 212

contrition, repentance and the painful mental processes that lead to conversion, regeneration and the paradise within.²²⁶

The pathway to renewal is a narrative one, but more importantly, one that entails a series of “painful *mental* processes.” The subject himself has the capacity to walk the narrative path to salvation in the “paradise within,” to landscape the internal topography into a paradisaal one through an arduous process of critical introspection. History is the name of that narrative process by which introspection can result in self-purification, and indeed, the poem’s own historiography may well be seen as a metatextual imitation of this hermeneutic practice. As Louis L. Martz suggests in *The Paradise Within*, various details and personal touches in the poem are meant “to remind us, intimately, that this poem is an action of thoughts with a central, controlling intelligence that moves with inward eyes toward a recovery of Paradise”.²²⁷ Martz goes on to argue that “the promised redemption consists primarily in the renewal of man’s inner powers: those powers of the soul by which the bard has just pursued his triumphant journey of the mind toward Paradise”.²²⁸ It is only fitting, then, that the “paradise within” should be “happier far” than what Adam and Eve lose in the Paradise of God’s Creation, because it is a self-made self-restoration, a redemption as satisfying as the sweat of one’s brow.

Thus, through the framing of historical narrative as an interpretive exercise meant to further Adam’s psychological development, Milton advances a paradigm in which historical narrative as a whole is deeply tied to maturation of the individual subject, who is able to *read* history and procure wisdom both personal and general. It is interesting that while Adam’s wisdom will of course be applicable to humanity as a whole, they sourced from witnessing the mistakes of humanity as a whole and realized on a very individual level. As a result, Milton establishes a curious and complex relationship with historical narrative in which it is always alive and “readable” for the individuals that will help create it; it is a paradigm that aligns very neatly with the way in which historical study is practiced today, and also captures the essence of *why* we continue to study history: to learn for ourselves how to better manage the realities of human life, and improve our situation going forward.

²²⁶ Low 213

²²⁷ Martz, Louis L. *The Paradise Within*. Yale University Press, 1964. p. 106.

²²⁸ Martz 166

The Name(s) of Jesus: Prophecy to the Letter (5.2)

What remains is the question of collective redemption, which is not accomplished one-by-one but rather all at once in the Son's willing sacrifice to redeem the fallen humanity. At its end, Milton's modernized history flows into a prophecy of the Telos that was shelved much earlier in this thesis. It is as Prince suggests: "*Paradise Lost* is prophetic as well as historical; it takes us from eternity to eternity, from the eternity before the universe was created to the eternity after it will be dissolved".²²⁹ This dissolution is represented in Milton's eschatology, which centers on redemption as it comes from the sacrifice of whom I shall simply call "Christ." This redemption is not the result of an individual, exegetic relationship with history (although it can still be contained within an intimate and interpretive history); rather, it is positioned as a body of prophetic knowledge, but one that, as we shall see, still evinces the poet's modernity.

The modernity of this prophecy comes down to an important question: namely, the *name* of Christ in *Paradise Lost*. The name "Jesus" only appears once in the entire poem, at 10.183, in relation to Eve's sentence for transgression. He is instead most commonly referred to as either "the Son" in Heaven and Hell, or as "the Seed" on Earth and in conversation with humanity. The terminological problem is a serious one: the former labels Christ a divine identity, "the Son of God," whereas the latter labels him a human being, born of human stock— quite literally the "Son of Mary, second Eve".²³⁰ It is evident that the result of this determination will also drastically change our perception of which party— divine or humane— is responsible for actualizing the final redemption of humanity.

Though we know Christ to be a divine entity at his core, the fact remains that in the view of Milton's prophetic history, he is almost assuredly a human one; at the very least, his most famous act— orchestrating the redemption— is registered in human terms. This is because Milton makes a stubborn association between "the Seed" and the final redemption. Through this incarnation of Christ, we are given a clear affirmation of the redeemer's essential humanity, for the "Seed" is universally of human

²²⁹ Prince 235

²³⁰ *PL* 10.183

affiliation.²³¹ Both Adam and Eve alike emerge from their respective revelations— Adam in consciousness, Eve in dream— with the same basic understanding of Christ as a human redeemer:

O prophet of glad tidings, finisher
Of utmost hope! Now clear I understand
What oft my steadiest thoughts have searched in vain,
Why our great expectation should be called
The Seed of woman²³²

Eve says much the same to Adam without prompting when he returns from atop the hill of the revelation: “though all by me is lost,/ Such favor I unworthy am vouchsafed,/ By me the promised Seed shall all restore”.²³³ In both cases, the focus of the understanding is the identification of Christ as a human child, as the “Seed of woman.” Christ may well be a liminal figure in the broad annals of Christian doctrine, but in *Paradise Lost*, the “Seed” is not ambiguous in the slightest. The only nod the text makes toward the divinity of Christ in the final two books is when Michael prophesies that, in the wake of Satan’s ultimate defeat and imprisonment, the “Seed” will “resume/ His seat at God’s right hand”.²³⁴ Even in this admission, however, the couched assumption is that as the “Seed,” Christ temporarily forfeits and forgoes his connection to divinity and his place in Heaven, and merely “resumes” that post after his human work is done. At the very least, this what the Son proposes when he volunteers his sacrifice in Book 3:

Behold Me then, Me for him, life for life
I offer. On Me let thine anger fall.
Account Me Man. I for his sake will leave
Thy bosom and this glory next to Thee
Freely put off and for him lastly die
Well pleased²³⁵

Perhaps this should be considered the first true moment of “modernity” in *Paradise Lost*, wherein the individual will makes a choice to turn away from divinity in order to author a decidedly human destiny. The conceptual “birth” of Christ and his sacrifice— the very crux of Christianity— is therefore construed as a shockingly modern movement away from the centrality of God. In the moment that he

²³¹ Variations include the “Woman’s seed,” “Abraham and his seed,” etc. See *PL* 11.116 and 12.273, respectively.

²³² *PL* 12.375

²³³ *PL* 12.621-3

²³⁴ *PL* 12.456-7

²³⁵ *PL* 3.236-41

becomes Christ, the Son also becomes, for all intents and purposes, a human being, and it is precisely that status as a human being that connects the Christ of *Paradise Lost* to the Christ of *Paradise Regained*— who even in the earlier poem is called the “second Adam”— and perhaps even to the Christ of the Bible, too.²³⁶

Paradise Lost on its own, of course, cannot solve the ambiguous affiliation of Christ in Christian doctrine: he remains, for the most part, the child of a collaborative effort between divinity and humanity who effects an end to both the Divine and Edenic narratives in one single gesture. Nevertheless, the poem does its part to remind us as to the importance of Christ’s acutely human sacrifice. Had he been construed as a divine savior, the will of humanity toward redemption would have been absolutely meaningless: why should we bother to reform if it is not in human power to be saved? It is rather that the Christian paradigm of morality and the Christian code of conduct find their strength in the capacity of the human being to recognize its own faults and make the all-important *choice* to repent and resolve to improve. Christ, as a human being, makes this choice, and leads the rest of his race by example. Surprisingly, this is a current indigenous to Christian thought. Milton simply uses the narratives of his time in his great poem to bring it back to light; he uses prophecy and eschatology to reaffirm humanity’s hand in producing and motivating the ultimate Telos of Christianity.

Conclusion (5.3)

The poem’s final lines shelve these narratives of history and prophecy and return to the poem’s “present.” They offer us one last crystallization of human life in modernity as a modern Adam and modern Eve depart from Eden and begin their narrative journey *outside* of the poem in which they were born:

The world was all before them, where to choose
Their place of rest, and Providence their guide.
They hand in hand, with wand’ring steps and slow
Through Eden took their solitary way²³⁷

²³⁶ *PL* 11.383

²³⁷ *PL* 12.646-9

The “place of rest,” the final destination, is a matter of choice, wherein Providence may serve as only a “guide.” But the poem ends with an image of Adam and Eve “hand in hand... wand’ring,” taking a “solitary” way through Eden. The guide of Providence is shown to be ineffective, perhaps even absent, from their quest— for why else would they be “wandering” through the wilderness, with only themselves for company? The poem’s last scene, therefore, seems to suggest that the only way forward is to “wander” alongside our fellow humans, “hand in hand” as equals and partners in the effort to realize our own redemption. The path *will* culminate in redemption— first internally, and then collectively, but more importantly, the seeds of both redemptions are present in Adam and Eve, who are projected out of the text and into our own world. The pathos of the scene ensures that our minds stay with the solitary couple as they depart, or more properly, that the solitary couple stays with us as we emerge out of the text.

In this way, the final portion of *Paradise Lost* projects the modernity founded in the main body of the poem into narratives fundamentally outside of its stated scope: namely, the narratives of our past (history) and our future (prophecy). The final two books therefore constitute a continuation of the poem’s broader modern currents, and allows the text to quickly insert its modernity into narratives that its readers face outside of the text itself; they figure the poet’s last use of narrative play to effect his poem’s revolutionary intent. The goal of this project has been to illustrate how this narrative technique is precisely what makes the poem’s modern revolution possible— since this has been explained, let us then return to the question of *why* the poem’s narrative language is necessary to begin with. Marshall Grossman reminds us that narrative is important to the constitution of self and society alike:

The construction of narrative is an essential activity of the human mind. Because the articulation of experience into story is the primary process through which individual and collective subjects disclose themselves, the study of the individual resolves in the psychoanalytic process into the study of personal narrative, and the study of culture resolves into the writing of history or collective narrative.²³⁸

In both the case of the individual and society as a whole, the narrative process provides us with a means of constructing and studying the self and culture. Both self and culture are precipitates of narrativization: in writing these stories of ourselves, of our society— histories personal and histories social— we come into possession of stable but pliable structures of “self” and “society.” These stories give us comfortable footholds on the sheer face of our world, and indeed give meaning and body to the

²³⁸ Grossman, Marshall. *The Story of All Things: Writing the Self in Renaissance Narrative Poetry*. Duke University Press, 1998. p. 34.

most comforting of all words: *context*. Narratives construct bodies of knowledge, transmit them and make them accessible to more than just scholars and thinkers. Ideological propagation and paradigm shifts alike trickle down most effectively from stories, as is evinced by the traditional structure and function of myths and fables.

Since the beginning of human civilization, stories have been used to create ideological empires. It is little wonder, then, why Milton's poem exudes the aura of narrative experimentation. The poet, as a well learned individual, most likely understood that the modern revolution could not be a physical one or a political one. What limited success it had in armed conflict was unpopular and ultimately lost in the Restoration of 1660, alongside the widespread destruction of Milton's more discourse-oriented works in the *Defensio* and the *Eikonoklastes*. No: modernity was too radical an idea to be presented to the public in a theoretical form. The modern revolution had to be a *narrative* revolution; only such a revolution could give the public a story to contemplate, a story that would guide them gently but decidedly toward an embrace of modernity. Using a well-known story in the Fall of Adam and Eve would make for a subtle but extremely effective modernization of society. For by focusing his efforts on the origin of human history, Milton was able to recreate the world of Fallout— of history, society, the collective conscious and the future alike— as a modern world.

Therefore, *Paradise Lost* and texts of its kind do not simply reflect the modernization of human civilization— they contribute to it. They help to create it. As the inheritors of this modernity, we must therefore look to the poem and similar texts as the foundations of a modern mythology, as the pioneering pieces of our “mythology of modernity.” These stories exist in the collective consciousness and are shared day in and day out to whomever will listen; they explain how this world came to be even as they exist within it. To that end, perhaps the real question readers of *Paradise Lost* must answer is whether or not the poem's modernity— and through it, our own— is the modernity we want to live in. For if it turns out that we tire of this modernity, and that we seek another way to contextualize ourselves in the chaos of our world, it might be time for us to take a page from Milton's book and pen the next narrative revolution.

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