

HELL, MAYBE IT'S YOU, ADAM:
THE MIMETICS OF TROUBLED IDENTIFICATIONS IN *PARADISE LOST*

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ABSTRACT

Adam, as does every male character in this text, is only listening to himself speak, not Eve. Indeed, Eve is merely a projection of Adam – a mirror, as it were, of his own thoughts and fears. Milton has placed many of these miscommunication mirrors throughout the text, and the celestial light of misunderstanding bounces continually in all directions. It is my contention that there is a trinity of triangles occurring in each instance of verbal exchange in *Paradise Lost* – a series of prisms of mirrors. Each instance of triangular mirroring is one of three types. There is, firstly, a recurrent mirroring that happens at the directly conversational level, involving three gendered subject positions: a masculine self, a feminized other, and God's textual law. We'll call this tripartite template the rhetorical mirroring. The images repeat, as this creates mirroring that occurs at another level, for the three characters who each play the same role in the tripartite scenario: God, Satan, and Adam. These three males each occupy the masculine position of the template, and share specific commonalities in their dispositions toward their respective others, as if they are all mirror images of one another. This we will call masculine mirroring. The third level of mirroring occurs existentially during the act of reading -- by setting up for the reader an identification with Adam, Milton therefore turns a mirror on the reader, and offers a text that works as a cipher. These three planes, the rhetorical mirror, the masculine mirror, and the narrative mirror, further make up a metatextual triangular prism. In a prismatic reading of the text, we can see how we project our own images and phantoms, but hopefully we'll also see how the true colors of that mysterious light that is our own is reflected back to us, revealing our own constituent hues.

*“For well I understand in the prime end / Of nature her (Eve) the inferior in the
mind / And inward faculties which most excel” – Adam (8.540-542).*

*“On whom we send, the weight of all and our last hope relies.”
-- Beelzebub (2.415-416).*

“This said, he formed thee, Adam, thee, O man” (7.24)

I.

Perhaps the paradise portrayed by Milton is, even before that iniquitous ingestion, not so perfect as it would seem. Beginning with the possibility of this conceit, this project takes notice of the hithertofore unrecognized rhetorical communication breakdowns that permeate *Paradise Lost*. On the surface of things, this is a story of a man and a woman who, for a short while, shared a perfect love; indeed, the term “pre-lapsarian” has come to signify a state of utopian bliss, free from any foul naggings of suffering or desire. But what Adam and Eve don’t realize – and following their lead, droves of scholars – is that, when words fall on deaf ears, paradise is lost already.¹

Adam, as does every male character in this text, is only listening to himself speak, not Eve. Indeed, Eve is merely a projection of Adam – a mirror, as it were, of his own thoughts and fears. Milton has placed many of these miscommunication mirrors throughout the text, and the celestial light of misunderstanding bounces continually in all directions. It is my contention that there is a trinity of triangles occurring in each instance of verbal exchange in *Paradise Lost* – a series of prisms of mirrors. Each instance of triangular mirroring is one of three types. There is, firstly, a recurrent mirroring that happens at the directly conversational level, involving three gendered

¹ The idea that Milton’s pre-lapsarian paradise wasn’t perfect is, of course, not a new one. For instance, as Christine Froula points out in her essay, “When Eve Reads Milton: Undoing the Canonical Economy,” there is a fundamentally feminist claim that Milton’s poetry “constructs its gods and its speech on the bedrock of woman’s silence” (178). Also, in his essay entitled “‘Man’s effeminate s(lack)ness:’ Androgyny and the Divided Unity of Adam and Eve,” James W. Stone argues that there is an “implicit imbalance between the sexes” in the poem, and that the two are “interdependent before the fall, unhappily so,” which “necessitates a move away from union and toward separate and divided sexes” (33). He bases his reasoning on the idea that Eve is, like God, complete in herself, while Adam desperately needs Eve for completion of his self which is “lacking.” But for the most part, Milton scholars take the archetypal narrative as foundationally one of cause and effect.

subject positions: a masculine self, a feminized other, and God's textual law. We'll call this tripartite template the rhetorical mirroring.

The images repeat, as this creates mirroring that occurs at another level, for the three characters who each play the same role in the tripartite scenario: God, Satan, and Adam. These three males each occupy the masculine position of the template, and share specific commonalities in their dispositions toward their respective others, as if they are all mirror images of one another. This we will call masculine mirroring.

The third level of mirroring occurs existentially during the act of reading -- by setting up for the reader an identification with Adam, Milton therefore turns a mirror on the reader, and offers a text that works as a cipher. These three planes, the rhetorical mirror, the masculine mirror, and the narrative mirror, further make up a metatextual triangular prism. In a prismatic reading of the text, we can see how we project our own images and phantoms, but hopefully we'll also see how the true colors of that mysterious light that is our own is reflected back to us, revealing our own constituent hues.

In her application of Lacanian Psychoanalysis, Claudia Champagne argues that "Adam's tragic mistake with Eve is that he tries to make her be his fantasy, instead of allowing her to be herself" (53). Indeed, "He never considers Eve's feelings, her sorrow if she must die alone; he is concerned only with his loss, his desolation if he must live alone" (56). So instead of truly seeing the other, she argues Adam sees a woman who is a creation of his own "Fancy" -- James W. Stone agrees, adding that the first man

may be said to be captivated narcissistically by the perfected image of himself that he sees reflected in Eve. Throughout the poem Eve is associated with images in the sense that she is an image of her maker, and

also because she, an image, is attracted to the image of her image reflected
in a liquid mirror. (36)

Communication is precarious, to say the least, in a “Paradise” that’s set up like a
funhouse of mirrors. Miscommunications and troubled identifications are also of
particular interest for Krista Ratcliffe in Rhetorical Listening: Identification, Gender,
Whiteness, whose theory of “rhetorical listening” provides important ways of exploring
the uneasy silences in places where communication breaks down. As per the author’s
mantra, ubiquitous throughout the book, we can think of “rhetorical listening” as a “trope
for interpretive invention and as a code of cross-cultural conduct” (1). She’s worried
about places where communication falters again and again between people who, for some
reason, see themselves as different from one another.² There are many such breakdowns
in *Paradise Lost*, which is why Eve (or whatever character occupies the female position
in what I’ll demonstrate is recurring in this tripartite template) has no voice. Elisabeth
Liebert, for instance, points out that Eve

lacks the opportunity to vocalize her needs, queries, or concerns; her
questions of being remain unarticulated, the subject of mute ‘wond’ring.’
Her tuition at the hands of God and Adam is not an exchange involving
question and answer, prompt and response in the pursuit of self-
knowledge but is rather the imposition of self-knowledge by those who
(presume to) know her better than she knows herself. (156)³

² Like, for instance, angels and humans -- or, perhaps, men and women.

³ Also lending an ear to the voice of Eve, Liebert’s essay, entitled “Rendering ‘More Equal’: Eve’s
Changing Discourse in *Paradise Lost*”, points out the ridiculously polemical nature of traditional critical
readings, and explores the ways in which “Milton’s treatment of Eve” is “evidence not only of latent
feminism but the consistent deconstruction of traditional patriarchy” by demonstrating her “duality
within the text” (152).

Ratcliffe builds her theory upon a foundation laid by another rhetorical theorist, Kenneth Burke, who posits that all language is inherently persuasive, and that before a successful persuasion can occur there must be a successful identification. Ratcliffe points out in her introduction that “if such persuasive functions are to succeed, identification must precede persuasion” (1). Identifications, however, can be tricky to achieve and are no easier to define. In the sense in which the term is used for these purposes, identification is, more or less, the extent to which a self will see her own reflection in an other, therefore fostering a stance of openness to, or acceptance of, that other. Put another way, though, an identification between two people creates a space; it creates what you could also call a locus of intersubjective possibility, and it is this locus that serves as the “place” where communication *is able* to occur.

Additionally in speaking of a “code of cross-cultural conduct,” Ratcliffe carves out an ethical imperative. Her stance is based simply on the premise that, since no one lives in a vacuum, we are all accountable for our ways of being in the world, and that those ways of being that we choose will necessarily affect others; she provides salient proof for this stance by offering concrete examples, including making one of herself, not afraid to admit her own struggles with troubled identifications. Deborah Interdonato agrees that such problems of communication exist in *Paradise Lost*, arguing that “Adam and Eve, not fully recognizing themselves as uncomfortable in gender-unequal roles, cannot listen to each other in good faith, that is, without imposing their own biases on the other” (103). I propose that, just as Milton listens to the female voice of Urania, the Heavenly One, the reader of *Paradise Lost* has the task of performing where Adam couldn’t: lending an ear to the feminine voice of Eve. For just such a journey into what

has hitherto been “nothingness,” attempting to give voice to the silences that echo across gender boundaries throughout the poem, Ratcliffe’s theory makes the perfect vessel.

Prior to the “official” fall, Book V begins with Adam awakening to find that something’s not right with Eve, her “tresses discomposed and glowing cheek / As through unquiet rest” (5.10-11). His soft whispers rouse her from her fitful slumber, and upon waking she relays to him the images of her troublesome dream; Satan, it seems, among other things, has told her about the night. For Adam and Eve (who, in accordance to God’s law, bed down for the night at the same early hour in order to rise with the sun in time to pray before work), the night is an entirely new concept. It’s not explicitly off limits, because only the fruit from the Tree of Knowledge is denied them, but this is still Eve’s first exposure to “The cool, the silent, save where silence yields / To the night-warbling bird that now awake / Tunes sweetest his love-labored song” (5.39-41).

But Adam is not interested in such “nonsense,” and that’s because, while he may be hearing Eve, or part of what she says, he isn’t really listening. After Eve is finished talking, the first words from Adam’s lips are the most telling of all, as he addresses his other, “Best image of myself” (5.95). Then, after he has declared that the dream is evil, he sternly states that dreams are nonsense in any case, and that, as per God’s law, as long as she doesn’t do anything wicked everything will be fine. She should go ahead and shake it off. He doesn’t even ask her any questions about her dream, or if she’s feeling ok. Instead, speaking to the best image of himself, he addresses his own interests, based on his own understanding of reality, failing to explore what may be going on with his partner. We will never truly know the meaning of the tears that didn’t get to fall because

Adam kissed them before they had the chance, “as the gracious signs of sweet remorse / And pious awe that feared to have offended” (5.134-135). At least, that is how Adam interprets them. He doesn’t really ask her how she feels, but rather, allows her to speak until she’s finished, and then, according to his own set of values, correspondent to the law, he relates the projected meaning he sees. If there were anything else going on with Eve, Adam – so focused on his own reflection – would surely be blind to it.

To better understand what occurs in said gaps of mis-communication in this text, this study listens to how they are rendered and identifies the patterns that emerge. Spread throughout the epic there are encounters where, in dealing with an other, a male character is metaphorically staring at himself in a mirror, acting as if he were alone in the universe. In these occurrences, there are always two gendered positions that the characters occupy: a masculine self and a feminized other (on whom the masculine self projects his own image). Finally, there is always a third component, the pressure of God’s Law. The Law (which, in this text, means “that which is fated to occur and to follow a set of contextual rules”), is important to the template because, in *Paradise Lost*, every character is always aware of the omniscient, omnipotent ruler, whose decrees place a constant coercive pressure of some sort upon everyone. These male characters react to this pressure by refusing to look past themselves, and the import of such autism is terrible because the female characters, such as Eve or Sin, or sometimes even Adam, are left alone in the universe.⁴ Just as Liebert points out, as The Commander draws Eve away from her own watery reflection at the scene of her creation,

⁴ If it seems strange that I have listed Adam, too, amongst the female players, I would point out that it is the subject positions themselves that are fixedly gendered, not the characters. Some of the characters shift positions throughout the poem, depending on the situation. Sometimes a male character will be cast in the

She lacks the opportunity to vocalize her needs, queries, or concerns; her questions of being remain unarticulated, the subject of mute ‘wond’ring.’ Her tuition at the hands of God and Adam is not an exchange involving question and answer, prompt and response in the pursuit of self-knowledge but is rather the imposition of self-knowledge by those who (presume to) know her better than she knows herself. (156)

In this case it is Eve, but such muteness is common to all the characters who mimetically occupy the position of feminized other in the triangular template – take for example Satan’s minions in Hell, Book II, during the war council at Pandemonium.

Clearly the power structure in Hell is an absolute monarchy, and yet the protean Prince of Darkness, no amateur thespian, stages a pseudo-democracy; having already decided that he will leave hell, himself, in search of God’s new creation to do that terrible deed, he calls forth his legions and carefully listens to the opinions of his minions, as if they were all weighing out the decision together. Addressing his army of others, Satan’s regal rhetoric shows that he is purposely playing up the idea of communal unity, “for none sure will claim in hell / Precedence,” (2.32-33) he assures them, and it’s based on the premise that he aims to deliver them from the sufferings of damnation. All the while, his actions indicate that he is the king, clearly living in his own world, downright autistically, and means to act in no one’s interest but his own. Any opportunity to speak or choose is, for his minions, simply illusory, because Satan’s self has everything under control; thus, he plays the masculine role in the triangular template of subject positions

feminine position viz. a male, such as Beelzebub to Satan, or Adam to God. Therefore, in this text the projector is gendered male and the projection is gendered female.

that recur throughout the poem, with his minions in the feminized position, and the Law (in this case of the unwinnable war) in the third.

During the “consultation,” before Beelzebub, the most perfect mirror of Satan, stands up to present the Devil’s plan, there emerges another triangle, as the silenced others who take a turn to speak are numbered three: Moloch, Belial, and Mammon. Each of them mirrors certain aspects of Satan (who sees only himself in them), and each occupies the feminine position of the template by taking a turn to speak (which the Prince of Darkness pretends to acknowledge, but doesn’t).

As Satan opens the floor to whomever would stand and say something, it is “Moloch, sceptered king” who first rises to advise, “the strongest and the fiercest spirit / That fought in Heaven, now fiercer by despair” (2.44-45). Immediately he presents an image of Satan, and does so in three distinct ways: firstly, as a phallic king who is stronger and fiercer than all others, driven to an even greater ferocity of despair. Indeed, “His trust was with the eternal to be deemed / Equal in strength, and rather than be less / Cared not to be at all; with that care lost / Went all his fear: of God, or hell, or worse / He recked not” (2.46-50). In addition to his royal state, Moloch is also, just like Satan, so prideful that he is unable to come to terms with the Law of God’s omnipotence and, also like Satan, rather than repent and accept God’s Law, would throw away all hope and face damnation, “driven out from bliss, condemned / In this abhorred deep to utter woe (2.86-87). Thus, prideful, belligerent Moloch, reflecting the Devil’s Samson-like valor on the battlefield and vengeful pugnacity, completes the triangular mirror of Satan when he hatefully proposes “open war” as the rightful course of action.

After Moloch completes his oration, there is another shift in the triangle when Belial takes his turn to speak and assumes the feminine position of the rhetorical template. Belial, although quite different from Moloch, mirrors Satan as well, but mirrors a different aspect of him as “a fairer person lost not Heaven (2.110).” Again, the speaker is one exalted amongst peers, just like Satan, but Belial also reflects Satan’s persuasive rhetorical talent as “He seemed / For dignity composed and high exploit, / But all was false and hollow though his tongue / Dropped manna and could make the worse appear / The better reason to perplex and dash / Maturest counsels” (2.110-115). Where Moloch reflects Satan’s more brutish, physical nature, Belial mirrors his dandy intellect as one that is gifted in rationality, but perverted, “for his thoughts were low, / To vice industrious but to nobler deeds / Timorous and slothful” (2.115-117). Gifted beyond all his peers in reason, silver-tongued, and only using his gifts to satisfy his baser carnal desires, Belial is the second silenced other to mirror Satan during the Stygian war council. It is no wonder that, since Belial, now fallen, has finally learned reverence for God’s law, and suggests that “since fate inevitable / Subdues” the damned the best course of action is “to endure,” self-interested Satan ignores his suggestion.

Finally Mammon, whose desirous interest in material wealth, and proud hatred of God, makes him a perfect mirror of another facet of Satan, rounds out this trinity. He makes a point that is completely lost on the Devil when he suggests that the only way to find peace is to seek it within the self. Beginning his speech, Mammon, unlike Moloch or Satan, points out God’s omnipotence and accepts His Law: God is all-powerful, thus all warring against Heaven is in vain. Having accepted the Law, and adding that nobody in hell really wants to worship God anyway – which is what they do in Heaven – he

offers this bit of wisdom: “Let us not then pursue / By force impossible, by leave
obtained / Unacceptable, though in Heaven, our state / Of splendid vassalage, but rather
seek, / Our own good from ourselves, and from our own / Live to ourselves” (2.249-254).

Mammon’s argument centers around self-sufficiency, as well as self-knowledge – two things that Satan lacks. If ever Satan needs to be listening when another is speaking, it is during this speech at the Stygian Council. But Satan listens not.

The next to stand is Beelzebub, “than whom, / Satan except, none higher sat” (2.299-300), and his purpose is simply to be the directly mimetic mouthpiece of Satan. Milton gives no physical description whatever of Mammon or Belial, but Beelzebub, who wore “princely council” on his countenance, like Satan himself, “Sage he stood / With Atlantean shoulders fit to bear / The weight of mightiest monarchies; his look / Drew audience and attention still as night / Or summer’s noontide air” (2.305-309). A clear mirror of Satan, upon standing, he also makes use of the Devil’s rhetoric of unity, as his address to the others echoes Satan’s and God’s: “Thrones and imperial powers, offspring of Heaven, / Ethereal virtues” (2.310-311). The great prince addresses the legions of others as princes themselves and, thus gaining their faithful allegiance, mimics the Devil’s readymade plan to attack God by perverting his innocent creation of late. They should direct their attention toward Earth, says he, as

Thus Beelzebub Pleaded his devilish counsel, first devised By Satan and
in part proposed: for whence, But from the author of all ill could spring
So deep a malice, to confound the race / Of mankind in one root (2.378-
383)?

As the Devil makes clear, the primary role of the triangular template is characterized by the power to make decisions that directly affect the other, unilaterally, that stems from a lack, of either willingness or ability, to communicate. Just following Satan's war council, in which he has issued his decree, the Devil sets out toward earth, but getting out of hell is not easy, and his lonesome flight becomes a ménage a trios when he reaches the threefold gate.⁵ On the one side, the portress, Sin "seemed a woman to the waist and fair, / But ended foul in many a scaly fold, / Voluminous and vast, a serpent armed / With mortal sting" (2.651-653). On the other, Death stands guard, a shapeless shadow, "Fierce as ten furies, terrible as hell / And shook a dreadful dart" (2.671-672). When the discourse begins, Satan offers an obvious, and therefore excellent, example of how the template of miscommunication works. He first casts Death in the feminine position, and Sin, who holds the key to the doors and has instructions from God to never open them, plays the administrator of law, when he addresses the other:

Whence and what art thou, excrable shape, That darest, though grim and terrible, advance Thy miscreated front athwart my way To yonder gates? Through them I mean to pass, That be assured, without leave asked of thee. (2.681-685)

This seems an obvious example, which is why it makes such a good one. Satan gives explicit orders to Death. But also, in so doing, Satan takes a look to see who he is dealing with and inquires as to the other's identity. Death's answer for Satan explains no such thing, but, rather, points back to Satan: "Art thou that traitor angel, art thou he / Who first broke peace in Heaven" (2.689-690)? Instead of answering the question directly,

⁵ Another interesting prism of threes emerges as Satan approaches the limits of his vile prison, when "At last appear / Hell bounds high reaching to the horrid roof / And thrice threefold the gates; three folds were brass, / Three iron, three of adamant rock" (2.643-646).

and acknowledging that he has his own identity, Death mirrors Satan back to himself. Indeed, Death is a “shapeless shadow,” exactly the opposite of an individual with an identity. Rather, he is an abstraction that Milton describes as “The other shape – If shape it might be called that shape had none” (2.666-667). Death is no “real” other, but a mirror for Satan, and he is mimetic of the devil in several ways. For the language Milton employs to describe Death is, rhetorically, quite like the language of the Devil, as “black it stood as night, / Fierce as ten furies, terrible as hell, / And shook a dreadful dart; what seemed his head / The likeness of a kingly crown had on” (2.670-673). The abstract shape even matched Satan in martial skill, for

so matched they stood, For never but once more was either like To meet
so great a foe; and now great deeds Had been achieved whereof all hell
had rung, Had not the snaky sorceress that sat Fast by hell gate and kept
the fatal key Risen and with hideous outcry rushed between. (2.720-726)

The Law intervenes to preclude such a battle when Sin steps between Satan and Death, and we know, of course, that fate already has it that the Devil has his way in this scenario and inevitably escapes Hell to begin his journey.

But the actors in these subject positions shift as Satan’s gaze turns from the mirror of Death to Sin; the portress now becomes the feminized other, and Death stands guard as the representative of the law. Now, Sin herself was not only born out of Satan’s head, but he fell in love with her because she looked like him. Interestingly, Stone points out that Satan’s self- mirroring with Sin is itself a mimesis of Adam’s with Eve:

Both Adam and Satan couple with fleshly images born pathologically of
themselves, and the results of both unions – Satan’s with Sin in Book 2,

Adam's with Eve – is death, a consequence for which the males are quick to blame the woman, projecting onto the latter their own sense of sexual disgust and guilt. (36)

At first, Satan does not recognize her, or rather, himself in her, so she reminds him that “full oft / Thyself in me thy perfect image viewing / Becam'st enamored, and such you thou took'st / With me in secret that my womb conceived / A growing burden” (2.764-767). Sin thus becomes a mirror for the mind and sensual desires of Satan, and it is with his own reflection that he falls in love. The bit of dialogue that follows, as Satan does finally escape from hell without even having to fight, demonstrates this as well. Again, as with the war council, at the gates of hell the master diplomat uses the rhetoric of unity, through the promises of salvation, to convince them that his journey is for the benefit of all. Regardless of the concerns voiced by Sin that, due to her position and the law, she simply cannot let the fiend pass, he employs his own rhetorical strategy and imposes his will successfully.

His taking delight in her sexually, in secret, begins to look like a portrait of his own sin of disregarding the other, and demonstrates the model of the triangular template: a masturbatory mirroring of self, under the pressure of God's supreme law. Adam and Eve have intercourse, but the sin of miscommunication is that any communication on Adam's part short-circuits; it is intercourse with himself only. In each instance of this triangular relation, a masculine-positioned self (Adam, Satan, God) fails to see or hear a feminine-positioned Other (Eve, minions, everyone in the universe), because, under the constant, coercive pressure of God's Law, he is able (or willing) only to see himself. This is a template with which any male reader could supposedly identify, and when we

read *Paradise Lost* with this understanding, and, like Adam, move to wipe Eve's tears, what are we doing but misreading? If the text is a cipher, if it is itself like a mirror, does that leave Eve suffering in silence with no access to an other of her own?⁶

These moments in *Paradise Lost*, in which it appears that communication is occurring, are in reality moments of miscommunication; this study is an analysis of the complexities and implications of those situations. I agree with Stanley Fish, that "Milton's concern with the ethical imperatives of political and social behavior would hardly allow him to write an epic which did not attempt to give his audience a basis for moral action" (1). In this epic, Milton constructs a tripartite exchange of power between male characters, God's textual law, and a feminized other, a play of mirrors, which makes the text like a mirror itself, and has a profound effect on the person who, reading the poem, peers in.⁷

II.

⁶ On the question of gendered readings of *Paradise Lost*, I agree with William Shullenberger that "[t]he tradition of strong women readers of Milton seems to indicate that the promise of authority and identity, the possible blessing of imaginative life, offered by the poetry, is not gender-bound" (69). In his essay, "Wrestling with the Angel: *Paradise Lost* and Feminist Criticism," he points out that, traditionally "Feminist critics have insisted on Milton's centrality as a writer for women to study, but the unquestioned assumption about that study is that it is bound to be anthithetical, as if the only woman's response to poetry with the kind of claims which Milton makes is to be a resisting reader, to anatomize the terror and refuse the amazement, to dismiss the possibility of blessing as if it could only be given to a son" (69). What a sad thing that would be. Christine Froula's contribution to this discussion, "When Eve Reads Milton," a brilliant challenge to cultural and canonical authority, reasons that "The cultural economy erected upon Eve's credence exists on condition that Eve can "read" the world one way, by making herself the mirror of the patriarchal authority of Adam, Milton's God, Milton himself, and Western culture that the voice tells her she is. Indeed the poem's master plot is designed precisely to discourage any 'Eve' from reading this authority in any other way" (329). Froula, however, suggests an "other way", that she calls a "Gnostic reading" – a "Gnostic 'Eve,' reading outside the bounds of that authority and not crediting the imagery that Milton would make a universal currency, disrupts that economy by a regard which makes visible what can work only so long as it remains hidden – the power moving Eve's conversion, that is, the power of Milton's God" (329).

⁷ In the Preface of his *Surprised by Sin: The Reader in Paradise Lost*, Stanley Fish believes that there is little disparity between Milton's intentions and those of "so many devotional writers, 'to discover in us our miserable and wretched estate through corruption of nature' and to 'shew how a man may come to a holy reformation and so happily recover himself'" (iii).

In the beginning, the narrative is infused with light from Heaven when Milton makes his prayerful invocation of the celestial Muse.⁸ In his book, The Muse's Method: An Introduction to Paradise Lost, Joseph H. Summers writes that "Milton tells us his belief that to write the poem he wished to write was beyond the ability of his own – or any other – unaided human imagination" (13). John Milton, a mere man, could not have attempted alone such a grand feat – "that with no middle flight intends to soar / Above th' *Aonian* Mount, while it pursues / Things unattempted yet in Prose or Rhyme" (1.15-17). Rather, he listens to, and sings in harmony with, a female voice. The name of this Muse, Urania, comes from the Greek word for "Heavenly One" – always pertaining to something "celestial." Thus, it is a Heavenly feminine voice that speaks to Milton, and *through* Milton to the reader of *Paradise Lost* – it's on the thirtieth line of book one that the narrative voice does a sort of shift, from what is distinctly coming from Milton to what is knowledge otherworldly, that he channels from above, praying thusly to the Muse: "Say first, for Heaven hides nothing from thy view, / Nor the deep tract of hell, say first what cause / Moved our grand parents in that happy state" (1.27-29). The tone in line thirty begins to go from one that asks to one that answers: "The infernal serpent, he it was" (1.30).

From here on out, that is to say, after line thirty, the otherworldly epic begins. You and I, as readers, surely find his explanations of ethereal things most extraordinary. The subject matter of "Paradise Lost" is no mundane and prosaic topic, but metaphysical

⁸ Who, incidentally, is gendered feminine. His "celestial patroness who deigns / Her nightly visitation unimplored / And dictates to me slumbering or inspires / Easy my unpremeditated verse" (9.21-24). Milton, himself, is able to create a beautiful masterpiece because he listens carefully to what he thinks is a female voice, but is arguably a projection of his own genius, rendered a form dictated by poetic law. In this case, Milton himself occupies the masculine position of the tripartite template, casting the Muse in the position of feminized other, with the Law of the story in the third.

and fantastic. This is part of a conceit of *Paradise Lost* that what makes the poem so fascinating is a chance to peek behind the veil that hides the most clandestine secrets of the universe. We are eager, Milton assumes, to know the preternatural goings on of angels in heaven, or the Devil down below.⁹ The template thus works metatextually as well, constructed with a supernatural speaker, an earthly listener, and God's ubiquitous Law. In this case, the muse is the otherworldly speaker, the reader is terrestrial listener, and the story stands as the law.

Milton cleverly sets up a mirror for this tripartite relationship between otherworldly speaker, eager terrestrial listener, and God's Law beginning in book five with another shift of narrative perspective. The Great Commander decides to communicate something to Adam, but as is always the case with God, he is certainly not going to go do it himself; God sends a messenger in his stead, a reflection of himself. In this case, it is the magnificently gorgeous Raphael,

A seraph winged. Six wings he wore to shade His lineaments divine: the pair that clad Each shoulder broad came mantling o'er his breast With regal ornament; the middle pair Girt like a starry zone his waist and round Skirted his loins and thighs with downy gold And colors dipped in Heaven. (5.277-284)

When Raphael relates to Adam of things empyreal, the man is riveted. After the angel has relayed the message prescribed by God, Adam's thirsty for more, and he implores the angel to continue. He can't get enough, it seems, and takes advantage of this rarefied

⁹ To clear up any confusions that may arise here, I do not mean to imply that we read *PL* with an eye to heaven because we necessarily believe any of the story to be real. Rather, I allude to the type of charitable, imaginative reading that approaches the poem with the same sense of curious awe. Still, we should not overlook that Milton was certainly aware that many readers do believe the story to be real.

opportunity by asking the winged seraph question after question concerning the entire story of the universe. Raphael obliges.

So, then for the next several books, the angel takes over the narrative duties and relaying the story to Adam, relays it to the reader. Raphael, however, begins telling the story from an earlier point than did Urania. Whereas the muse started off describing an already-fallen Satan, laying confounded on the lake of fire, Raphael begins at the beginning of beginnings, describing to Adam the origin of Satan's rebellion in Heaven. The point at which Raphael starts telling the story to Adam is, in terms of realist chronology, the beginning. But, once one begins reading, neither the tone, nor any nuances of the narrative voice have changed since the speaker was the muse. It could be easy for any reader to gloss over this narrative shift without noticing, and continue reading just as before with the first four and a half books. One feels as if the speaker is the original narrator and the listener is the reader, forgetting that Raphael has replaced the muse, and is speaking to Adam. In other words, the reader's relationship to the poem, to the voice of the muse, mirrors Adam's to Raphael. In this way, Milton has constructed an identification between the reader and Adam, and has placed the reader in Adam's position.

Adam, too, is interested in knowledge otherworldly. Thus, Raphael offers an account of Man's beginnings: "he formed thee, Adam / thee, O man, / Dust of the ground, and in thy nostrils breathed / The breath of life; in his own image he / Created thee" (7.524-527). Notice the perspective: thee, Adam – that's when God created *thee* (you). Here, Milton is attempting to affect a successful identification, on the part of the

male reader, with Adam.¹⁰ For, Raphael assures the reader, “Male he created thee, but thy consort / Female for race” (7.529-530). Adam is thus thee, dear reader, and thou art thus Adam.

This triangular relationship between ethereal messenger, Adam/thou (reader), and the Law, is a mirror image of the one in the first five books between the Heavenly Muse (a different ethereal messenger), thou and I, terrestrial listeners, and Law. Milton found a way, through the muse and the use of these shifting subject positions and mirrors, to write himself out of the equation and, fusing your perspective to Adam’s, offer a text that works as a cipher, thus placing the reader in the masculine position of the triangular template. The text of *Paradise Lost*, the harmonious song of Milton and his female “nightly visitor,” occupies the feminized position and, thirdly, the ubiquitous textual law.

¹⁰ Also, notice the identification between Adam and God; “in his own image he / Created thee.”

III.

There are three elements essential to the masculine position in the tripartite scenario – these elements sort of characterize the one playing that role: an absolute responsibility to the other¹¹; a use of unity rhetoric to enact a “mirror” identification, always based on the promise of salvation; and an identification is always false. Any communication is merely a masturbatory mirroring of the self in lieu of truly communicating with the other.

Satan, for instance, has an absolute responsibility, not only to the individual others that he encounters – Beelzebub, Sin, Death – but to *all* others involved. (This holds true for each of the three male players). Everywhere he goes, he meets spirits who are quick to remind him that everything bad in the universe was his fault; indeed, the initial fall that actually roused vain war in Heaven was born of Satan’s anger. It is the old rebel himself, if we are to believe this heavenly muse,

whose guile, Stirred up with envy and revenge, deceived The mother of mankind, what time his pride Had cast him out from Heaven with all his host Of rebel angels, by whose aid aspiring To set himself in glory above his peers (1.34-39) and “Against the throne and monarchy of God Raised impious war in Heaven and battle proud With vain attempt” (1.42-44).

The whole universe is messed up because of him, and everywhere he goes, it seems, someone reminds Satan of it.

On his way to paradise, Satan encounters Sin and Death at the gates of hell.

When he sees the other’s formless shape, “if shape it might be called that shape had none

¹¹ This absolute responsibility is twofold: it is always a responsibility to both an individual other, and a universal other; such as, for instance, with Adam. He is responsible to both Eve and all of humankind to follow.

/ Distinguishable in member, joint, or limb, / Or substance might be called that shadow
seemed” (2.666 -669). Satan’s quite reasonable yet boorish inquiry: “Whence and what
art thou, execrable shape, / That darest, though grim and terrible, advance / Thy
miscreated front athwart my way / To yonder gates” (2.681-684)? Death, however,
already *knew* who was approaching and addressed him in quite a different manner:

Art thou that traitor angel, art thou he Who first broke peach in Heaven
and faith, till then Unbroken, and in proud rebellious arms Drew after him
the third part of Heaven’s sons Conjured against the highest, for which
both thou And they, outcast from God, are here condemned To waste
eternal days in woe and pain? (1.689-695) ¹²

Satan’s notoriety extends all the way to nowhere, and precedes him wherever he roams;
no one in the universe is unaffected by his choices. These two, for instance, are doomed
to guard the door of hell for all eternity because of his vain war on the Heavenly throne.
One of them, Sin, is the Devil’s clandestine lover from his former life in Heaven, and the
other, Death, the hellish and deformed product of their twisted love.

After Satan’s inevitable success at the gates with Death and Sin, he makes his
journey through Nothingness and runs into not-characters like Chaos and Night. In a no-
place of absolute confusion, a rare moment occurs for Satan: he admits to himself that he
is lost (or, at least “half lost”) and decides to ask for directions. Satan introduces himself
to Chaos and Night, “I come no spy / With purpose to explore or to disturb / The secrets
of your realm” (2.970-972). To him Night replies: “I know thee, stranger, who thou art, /
That mighty leading angel, who of late / Made head against Heaven’s king, though

¹² I have no idea why these damn lines are surrounding some of my block quotes, nor can I figure out how to vanquish them.

overthrown” (2.990-992). I know you, Satan. You are the one who first caused everything.

Therefore, it is Satan who is responsible for commanding legions of angels, ready to snap to his every injunction. Says Beelzebub to his superior in Book I,

Leader of those armies bright, Which but the omnipotent none could have foiled, If once they hear that voice, their liveliest pledge ...they will soon resume New courage and revive, though now they lie Groveling and prostrate on yon lake of fire (1.272-279).

It's Satan's voice that they are all waiting to hear; legions of others will immediately come forward and dedicate their lives at a simple word from the Devil.

The same is, of course, true for God – the creator and commander of the universe. Satan, God, and Adam all mirror one another in this way; in their own respective domains, each is the lord of the others, who are ready to revere and obey their every word. (Whether or not it is necessary to prove, at length, God's absolute responsibility to others remains to be discovered; it seems tacit.) However, he shirks this responsibility time and time again, and passes it on to others, claiming that he has made men free. Still, he created all of the universe in the first place, and Adam makes a great point when he bewails the question of questions: “Did I request thee, maker, from my clay / To mold me man? Did I solicit thee / From darkness to promote me or here place / In this delicious garden” (10.743-746)? God's responsibility to the other mirrors Satan's and Adam's in that it functions on both the individual level, as well as on the universal; the difference, however, is that on the individual level God is always absent, unless he is speaking to a celestial being -- an image of himself. The Great Commander has no

problem showing up to speak to ethereal legions of cherubim in Heaven, but when he wants to communicate with a human he sends a proxy. In his dealings with the humans, God, speaking as always from “his secret cloud,” relies on celestial couriers to take his decrees to earth, like Raphael, or Michael, or Jesus.

The extent to which The Almighty’s responsibility reaches to others is depicted by a scene in Book VIII: Adam and Raphael, God’s mouthpiece, are still conversing in the garden, and the man is relaying to the angel his entire life story. When Adam comes to the part about Eve, he is so full of love for her that he sings praises hailing her beauty and her intelligence – “yet when I approach / Her loveliness so absolute she seems / And in herself complete, so well to know / Her own, that what she wills to do or say / Seems wisest, virtuousest, discreetest, best” (8.246-250). Some of the most lovely and romantic lyric poetry in the entire book is met with rebuke from God’s surrogate. Raphael warns Adam against forgetting the power hierarchy, reminding him that Eve is “Fair, no doubt, and worthy well / Thy cherishing, thy honoring, and thy love – not thy subjection” (8.568-570). God, therefore, sets the laws in place that establish Adam and Eve as different and unequal. This certainly does not relieve Adam of his responsibility to Eve, but likewise, God is not relieved of his responsibility to Adam, and everyone else. In this case, the Commander is accountable, not only to Adam, on an individual level, but to Eve and the rest of humanity to come.

Adam demonstrates such a responsibility to the other, as he is in the position of being, not only husband and lord to Eve, but first man to all humankind. Adam is a mirror image of Satan in this regard, as he is the originator of a fall, the outcome of which shall scar numberless others; and it’s all his fault. One of the main tenets of the more

orthodox sects of Christianity is that humans are born naturally sinful because of the “original sin” of Adam, the initial ancestor. His responsibility extends to Eve, and far beyond; he is responsible for all of mankind.

During Adam’s parley with Raphael, the man remembers his own creation when he gets an opportunity to tell the seraph his story. So spake the Almighty God to Adam, at the dawning of his life, in a dream: “This Paradise I give thee; count it thine / To till and keep and of the fruit to eat” (8.319).¹³ The Commander directly tells Adam that, as long as he doesn’t eat “of the tree whose operation brings / Knowledge of good and ill,” as long as he doesn’t disobey God’s law, he is lord and owner of all. Adam is the earthly mirror of God, in this case: all powerful, and all responsible.

Toward the end of the poem, Book XII, Adam is throwing a fit about the atrocities that he has just witnessed, compliments of the Great Commander and his messenger, Michael. As per God’s decree, the heavenly messenger shows Adam visions of the sinfulness in the world to come. Protests Adam, “O execrable son so to aspire / Above his brethren, to himself assuming Authority usurped from God, not given” (12.64-66). The angel explains to Adam that he’s right to object, as the visions that he showed him were indeed terrible, but “yet know withal, / Since thy original lapse, true liberty / Is lost” (12.82-84). It’s Adam’s fault, and Michael explains that future men will not be free, really, but rather that they will be chained, bound by the tyranny of their passions over their reason. True liberty always “with right reason dwells” (1.85), and later humans will live in bondage to their habits and desires because none dwells within them. They will be subject to their passions, and Adam willingly accepts responsibility for their hopeless

¹³ This must have been what DesCartes was thinking about when he named man the “master and proprietor of nature.”

subjection. Rues the first man, “all my evasions vain / And reasonings, though through mazes, lead me still / But to my own conviction: first and last / On me, me only, as the source and spring / Of all corruption” (10.829-834).

The second mimetic point of this triangle of reflections is that these three characters also share a common rhetorical strategy in dealing with the other; in each of the three cases, the masculine speaker attempts to affect an identification by using language that works to break down the barriers between self and other, hoping to create in the other a sense of unity. In addition, it is always in the interest of salvation – Satan, God, and Adam are all claiming to have the interests of the other in mind, all assuring the other that without them (Satan, God, Adam) they (the others) would be lost. Satan, for instance, promises his minions that he takes his lonesome journey to “seek deliverance” for all of hell’s legions, and “set [them] free / From out this dark and dismal house of pain” (2.822-823). Satan, as savior of the damned, mirrors the image of God, who offers deliverance to men (who were created in God’s image), through his son Jesus, who the deity also created as an image of his own divine self.

Volumes could be written on Satan’s use of such rhetoric. He always begins his dialogue by addressing the other with a name that could also describe himself; in Book I, Satan’s first speech act in the poem, Satan begins to Beelzebub: “If thou beest he – but O how fallen! How changed / From him, who in the happy realms of light / Clothed with transcendent brightness did outshine / Myriads though bright” (1.84-87). Satan points out that Beelzebub is a unique and special leader amongst the masses – that he is, in fact, like Satan. Not only does this flatter Beelzebub’s ego, but it draws him into the Devil’s rhetoric by proposing an identification. Satan goes on: “if he whom mutual league, /

United thoughts and counsels, equal hope / And hazard in the glorious enterprise, Joined with me once, now misery hath joined / In equal ruin” (1.87-91). The Prince of Hell thus builds this discourse with the other using the same rhetorical tools that he will continue to use throughout the poem, when he starts out their conversation by telling Beelzebub that the two of them are really one and the same.

This interaction, a mirror image of the other interactions that fit the triangular template, all throughout the epic, begins with a wakeful Satan and his sleeping companion.¹⁴ Satan rouses his partner with a sense of urgency, and immediately suggests an identification with the other by making use of that unity rhetoric: “Thou to me thy thoughts/ Was wont, I mine to thee was wont to impart; / Both waking we were one” (5.673-679). Satan is not prepared, however, to look past himself; he has his own interests in his sights. Offended by God’s new decree, he directs Beelzebub’s attention to that third part of the conversational triangle, God’s law, and expresses his disgust. In so doing, he rallies a sidekick. The Devil’s pretence for Beelzebub’s companionship is that Satan will offer him some sort of salvation; but in Satan’s selfish world, Beelzebub is only a pawn as the war is strictly personal between he and another mirror image of himself, God.

And the Devil’s heroic message for his demonic other is, of course, based on the idea that Satan is coming to his rescue. Late fallen, if we are to believe the heavenly muse, into utter confusion,

¹⁴ Now, sometimes this caveat – that the masculine positioned character is awake and the female asleep – is sometimes literal and sometimes figurative. Often, as with the current episode, or in Book V with Adam and Eve, it is simply literal. At other times, though, such as when God is addressing Adam, it is simply an awareness of something that the other doesn’t know. God knows, not only that Satan lurks, but that Satan will even succeed in causing Adam’s blunder. Thus, in contrast to God’s state of omni-awareness, Adam is peacefully sleeping, but not for long.

A dungeon horrible, on all sides round
As one great furnace flamed, yet
from those flames No light, but rather darkness visible
Served only to
discover sights of woe, Regions of sorrow, doleful shades, where peace
And rest can dwell, hope never comes. (1.61-66)

But, regardless of this law, that there is no place for hope in hell, a dungeon of despair, Satan offers his other exactly that. To Beelzebub, thus Satan: “What though the field be lost? / All is not lost” (1.105-106). Indeed, he continues, “We may with more successful hope resolve / To wage by force or guile eternal war, / Irreconcilable to our grand foe” (1.120-122). Satan sings hope into Beelzebub, and revives his spirit with the sound of his voice – Beelzebub, who Satan found “weltering” in confusion by his side, is thus saved, enlisted in the Devil’s vengeful army.

It is the same rhetorical trickery, the same promises of salvation that enabled that false deceiver to convince Lady Sin, portress and holder of the key to the gates of hell, to disobey God’s law and let him out. When Sin tells Satan flatly that he will not be able to pass through, he tells her to

know I come no enemy, but to set free
From out this dark and dismal
house of pain Both him and thee and all the heavenly host
Of spirits that in
our just pretenses armed Fell with us from on high; from them I go
This uncouth errand sole, and one for all
Myself expose, with lonely steps to
tread (2.821-828).

When she hears his words, the text suggests she is changed, with new hope born in her as she believes that he will save her: “Thou wilt bring me soon / To that new world of light and bliss among / The gods who live at ease, where I shall reign / At thy right hand

voluptuous, as beseems / Thy daughter and thy darling, without end” (2.866-870). In this encounter, as was apparently the case with their earlier ones, Satan ran into little trouble having his way with her. Once he conjurs an identification with Sin as her Fatherly mirror, she is glad to take “from her side the fatal key, / Sad instrument of all our woe” (2.871-872) and unfasten those infernal doors.

In this fashion, Satan mirrors God, the great legislator of the universe, who also employs a clever rhetorical strategy to build such identifications when he communicates.¹⁵ Take, for example, the speech that he gives in the company of his legions of heavenly angels in Book V, as described by Raphael to “you, Adam.” The Great Commander begins by addressing his listeners as “angels, progeny of light, / Thrones, dominations, pryncedoms, virtues, powers” (5.600-601). His identification with the group of angels who he is speaking to is easily enacted for God, and he pushes into the background the idea that he is king, bringing to the foreground the idea that, in Heaven, everyone is a king. It’s clever of him, and it mirrors the way that Satan and Adam set up identifications with their others. In this case, God is speaking to the only other who he approaches, besides Adam, and only then in the protective context of a dream, directly: celestial beings. And, of course, they are God’s servants, too – which is

¹⁵ Concerning God’s rhetoric, Stanley Fish makes an interesting point that, “[t]o those who are accustomed to think Milton’s God querulous or self-justifying, the suggestion that he does not talk to anyone in particular may seem curious. Technically, however, the tonal qualities usually ascribed to his voice are accidental, the result of what the reader reads *into* the speech rather than of what is there” (62). He goes on to argue that “the still clarity and white light of divine reality, represented (figured forth) in the atonal formality of God’s abstract discourse, is preferred to the colour and chaotic liveliness of earthly motions, represented in Satan’s ‘grand style’” (88). This is how, reasons Fish, Milton makes the text work as a cipher, setting up an unavoidable choice for the reader, between the two styles of God and Satan – “A delight in the fleshly (rhetorical) style indicates a preference for that which flatters the carnal self; in worshipping corporeal resemblances (of which rhetorical flourishes are the verbal extension) man worships the projected image of his own corrupted (darkened) understanding” (89).

to say, just like humans are – but the Almighty Creator addresses them as powerful princes, gods themselves.

The most obvious example of God’s clever ways of enacting identifications across cultural lines is, of course, his son; an image of himself that he created to save humankind. The creation of his son is necessary because, while God takes pity on man in his state of fallen depravity, and wishes to reach out to him, he’s surely not going to go himself. The Great Commander declares to his angelic companions that they should hear his “decree, which unrevoked shall stand” (166). God has erected an holy likeness of himself, Jesus, and demands that all worship him, and follow one simple order: “Under his great vicegerent reign abide / United as one individual soul / Forever happy” (5.609-611). But this “holy likeness” is not just an image of God, but also an image of Adam. Jesus, God’s newly cast reflection, will be able to go to the humans and bring salvation because Jesus is a man. Just like Satan and Adam, God offers salvation and uses a rhetoric of unity to build identifications in his dealings with the other.

Adam rounds out this rhetorical trinity, mirroring both God and Satan, when he addresses Eve, his feminized other. In Book V, for instance, waking her from her terribly fitful slumber, he calls to her, “Best image of myself” (5.95). Indeed, God created Eve in the image of Adam and when he looks to her it is his own image that he sees -- throughout all his interactions with his lover, he employs the same strategy to build identifications, designed to instill a sense of unity in Eve, overlooking completely any inherent differences that may exist between he and she. As inheritants of paradise, reasons the man, they are together as “one flesh.”

Indeed, Adam's identification with Eve is a strong one, and her subjection to him is thereby sealed. During their conversation in Book IV, in which Adam binds her to him and lays down the law, Eve explains her first experience with a mirror at the scene of her creation – but the face that she then gazed upon as she looked in was not Adam's.¹⁶ Indeed, it was not the face of any male character. Gazing into crystal clear waters, she tells,

A shape within the watery gleam appeared, Bending to look on me; I started back; It started back. But pleased I soon returned; Pleased it returned as soon with answering looks Of sympathy and love. There I had fixed Mine eyes till now and pined with vain desire Had not a voice thus warned me. (4.461-467)

Just beginning to grow acquainted with the image of her own self reflection, God's voice interrupts her meeting, filling her in on the law – that the Creator gave her existence *not* to be a companion to herself, but to Adam. The Almighty Commander is there to tell Eve that the face she beholds is her own, and that, regardless of her desire better know herself, she must turn away from her watery likeness and toward “he / Whose image thou art” (4.471-472).¹⁷ Eve tells Adam that she went straight away, taking heed to the orders of God, but that when she first caught glimpse of the man she thought him “less fair, / Less

¹⁶ Maggie Kilgour points out that the Ovidian subtext in Eve's creation scene, book 4, is “most often read through allegorical representations of Ovid that identify Narcissus” with “satanic self-love, selfishness, and egotism” (311). My study posits no such judgments on her character; rather, my reading of Eve's mirror scene at the pool is focused on Eve's identification with herself as an other – this is exactly the opposite of self-love. Elisabeth Liebert puts it best when she considers that “Although when she (Eve) initially sees Adam she rejects him as “less fair” than the image in the pool, initially it is not the beauty of the image that appeals to her but its ‘answering looks / Of sympathy and love’ (4.464-465)” (155).

¹⁷ There is an excellent discussion of this identification in Roberta C. Martin's psychoanalytic essay, “How Came I Thus: Adam and Eve in the Mirror of the Other”, who argues that God's “gift” to Adam “creates the potential for blurred ego boundaries in his promise that Adam will get his ‘likeness’ in an ‘other’ self” (4).

winning soft, less amiably mild, / Than that smooth watery image” (4.478-480).¹⁸ So she turned back, but only quite briefly because she heard the man’s voice calling to her:

Return, fair Eve, Whom fly’st thou? Whom thou fly’st, of him thou art,
His flesh, his bone; to give thee being I lent Out of my side to thee, nearest
my heart, Substantial life to have thee by my side Henceforth an
individual solace dear; Part of my soul I seek thee, and claim thee My
other half. (4.482-488)

Adam uses a rhetoric of oneness to interpellate Eve, calling her back from her desire to indulge in her own image, so that she can be his. So, although we get a scene in which Eve tries to relate to her own image – and thus assume the masculine position of identity – she’s relegated once again to the feminine position. Thus, she can only desire man’s power and we never learn if Eve ever knows herself.

According to Adam, in his zealous reverence for God’s law – in this case, that they don’t eat the fruit – his stewardship of the woman is for her own good. In Book IV, the “celestial patroness” narrates, describing a talk between our amorous ancestors in prelapsarian Paradise. Adam is explaining to Eve, his “Sole partner and sole part of all these joys,” about God’s law -- that they must not eat from the Tree of Knowledge. (4.411)

The man begins by establishing an identification with the woman, such that they are united as partners in paradise. “Part of my soul I seek thee, and thee claim / My other half” (4.487-488). He then gives her an order: “let us not think hard / One easy

¹⁸ Predominantly, for obvious reasons, critics have given attention to Eve’s “narcissism” when reading the scene of her creation, but I don’t like the term because of its negative connotations, associations with self-absorption and egotism. I prefer a less judgmental reading that posits Eve’s experience at the mirror an identification with herself, even before she knew it was her own image that she was beholding. Nonetheless, for an excellent commentary on such readings, see Maggie Kilgour’s “‘Thy perfect image viewing’: Poetic Creation and Ovid’s Narcissus in *Paradise Lost*.” Kilgour argues that “Milton uses Ovid’s story of Narcissus to show how Adam and Eve reflect each other as well as the divine source whose image they both are” (310).

prohibition, who enjoy / Free leave so large to all things else and choice / Unlimited of manifold delights” (4.432-444). If she agrees to stick with him, to obey one simple command, paradise is hers and she will be saved from the dangers of falling. And indeed, the identification works a strong effect upon Eve. They speak their final words before bed that night to God from the perspective of “we” – “Thy goodness infinite, both when we wake / And when we seek, as now, thy gift of sleep. / This said unanimous” (4.734-736). By the end of the conversation, Adam and Eve are “of one mind.” Of course, when Eve transgresses and seeks to know for herself the punishment is severe and the feminine position from hereon must not only lack a voice, but carry an unrelenting sense of guilt and shame forever.

The three central male characters – God, Satan, and Adam – who all mirror one another in their absolute responsibilities toward a specific other, as well as toward the universal other, use a similar brand of rhetoric, rooted in establishing a sense of unity and a promise of salvation, in order to achieve identifications. The identification is always false, however, because these fellows do not actually converse with their others, but rather engage with a self that they have projected onto the other. Rather than intercourse between the two, the masculine positioned-self is concerned only with a self-pleasuring act of getting one’s way while listening to oneself speak.

The autism of the Devil and the powerlessness of the feminine position is nowhere more evident than in his seduction of Eve. Wakeful Satan first approaches sleeping Eve the way that God first approaches a dormant Adam – in a dream. And, in Eve’s dream, the problem begins when that tricky old fiend mimics Adam’s voice and calls to her – tells her she should wake up, because “Now is the pleasant time, / The cool,

the silent” (5.38-39). Of course, Eve harkens to (what sounds like) the voice of her husband and gets up to go looking for him. But, says Eve to Adam, “I rose as at thy call but found thee not” (5.48).

In her search for the one who had called out to her – or the man that she thought she had heard – she comes upon a very bizarre, one-sided conversation between an angel and a plant. Having mimicked the voice of Adam to first rouse her from her sleep, that protean prince of darkness now takes the form of “One shaped and winged like one of those from Heaven,” with “dewy locks” that “distilled / Ambrosia” (5.55-57). Eve, relaying the contents of her dream to Adam, describes this image of a gorgeous angel beholding the Tree of Knowledge, who then takes the fruit and eats it. Straight away he begins singing its praises and speaking amorously to it; “O fruit divine, / Sweet of thyself, but much more sweet thus cropped, / Forbidden here, it seems, as only fit / For gods” (5.67-70). Satan, having first mimicked the voice of man to gain Eve’s attention, now copies the voice of an angel to sow in her the seeds of curiosity for the forbidden plant.

During his final encounter with Eve, Satan changes forms once again and approaches her in the guise of a serpent. First man, then angel, the old shape-shifter completes his “fraudulent temptation” of the innocent woman “with serpent tongue” (9.529-531). Clearly, all of Satan’s speech during his dialogues with Eve is strictly self-serving; she seems to believe what he is saying -- that, through greater knowledge, he is offering her greater happiness. Satan, of course, knows all along that no such thing is waiting in store for Eve. In fact, as per the law of the text, we already know that Satan’s

scheme is designed to make her fall from God's grace and, in so doing, share in his own fate: another silent companion to witness his own narcissism.

From behind his "secret cloud," God also fails to reach out beyond himself, and reflects the autistic self-pleasuring common to all three masculine mirrors. During the conversation in the garden between Adam and Raphael, God's surrogate speaker, they come to a point where the angel's heavenly soliloquy ends and Adam speaks for a bit. The man tells the angel all about his own story, his own moment of creation, and Raphael appears quite interested – he claims that he actually doesn't already know about this. Strange, it seems, that this archangel from Heaven, native of a place with an eternal view, knows nothing of man's creation. Encouraging Adam to continue, he reveals why he missed it, "Say therefore on, / For I that day was absent, as befell, / Bound on a voyage uncouth and obscure" (8.228-230). God sent angels all the way to the gates of hell in order to make sure that there was no one about whilst he worked on his new creation. But, says the humble seraph, "Not that they durst without his leave attempt, / But us he sends upon his high behests / For state, as sovereign king, and to inure / Our prompt obedience" (8.237-240.) In other words, it was all for show. God knew already that no one was coming, but he pretended that there was something to fear and sent his angels on this dangerous "voyage uncouth and obscure" (8.230).

All of God's intercourse is with himself only – he cannot establish anything but false identifications, for as the all powerful god of the universe, he is impossibly isolated. During the conversation between Adam and Raphael in Book VIII, the man describes his encounter with God at the time of his own creation. This particular identification, between the diety and the man, was shaky from the start because God appeared to Adam

in a dream. During their talk, the question of companionship arises; Adam feels lonely and God acts like he doesn't understand why. After all, he has already provided him animals as companions – according to God's calculations, the man shouldn't be lonely. But Adam seems to agree with Ratcliffe when he asks God, "Among unequals what society can sort, what harmony or true delight, which must in mutual, in proportion due given and received" (8.383-386). As usual, God answers man's question with a question, and God's inquiry to Adam is telling: "What think'st thou, then, of me and this my state? / Seem I to thee sufficiently possessed / Of happiness, or not, who am alone / From all eternity" (8.403-406)? The Great Commander's attitude shows that, any strong identification between a god and a human is impossible because he's self-sufficient, and thus has no desire or need to identify with anything or anyone else.

He demonstrates this isolation in his communication with Adam. Pre-lapse, God "warns" the man of the coming danger, as if Adam were free to avoid it, when in fact, he knows already by divine omniscience that the man is destined to fall. His purposes for sending the message to Adam are not to help him, but to "render man inexcusable." Thus, in truly narcissistic fashion, God can blame Adam for the fall he in fact scripts from heaven himself. Sending Raphael to do the talking, God says to the angel, "this let him know, Lest willfully transgressing he pretend / Surprisal, unadmonished, unforwarned" (5.243-245). It seems that God, having made man in his own image, knows that his discourse too will be godlike – that he will do something he wants to do while feigning other interests, and then hold a pretense of a conversation about it.

The one-sided, pre-lapsarian conversation between the man and the woman, one evening in Book IV, is a supreme example of what happens and what's at stake in using

this tripartite template of masculinity. In the midst of their discourse, Adam has just laid down the law for Eve, warning her of the Tree of Knowledge, when he tells the woman that it's time to go to bed. The beautiful lyric poetry that describes the dusk that greets this night in Eden is wonderfully seductive, mysterious:

Silence was pleased. Now glowed the firmament / With living Sapphires:
Hesperus that led / The starry host rode brightest, till the moon, / Rising in
clouded majesty, at length / Apparent queen, unveiled her peerless light /
And o'er the dark her silver mantle threw. (4.604-609)

Nature's beautiful dusky charms catch Eve's attention, and she asks Adam, wondering "But wherefore all night long shine these? For whom / This glorious sight, when sleep hath shut all eyes" (4.657-658). The bit of speech that follows, Adam's answer to her question, is interesting, for Adam basically tells her not to worry, because such sights are not for humans to see, as hand-in-hand he walks her toward the bed,

where they eased the putting off These troublesome disguises which we
wear, Straight side by side were laid, nor turned, I ween, Adam from his
fair spouse, nor Eve the rites Mysterious of connubial love refused.
(4.739-743)

Eve surely asked a good question, and perhaps if Adam had been listening, really listening to Eve, he may have allowed himself to be caught by the beauty of the night as well. Perhaps he too would have become curious and lingered; perhaps the two lovers could have stayed up together, exploring nocturnal Eden. What else there was to experience we'll never know because Adam, satisfying himself, is ready for sleep. Eve fulfills her duties and performs the evening rites, left wanting and in silence.

Epilogue

I must admit that there is an empty promise on page four –I said we were going to have a “listen to what is contained within the silences that echo across gender boundaries throughout the poem.” In the beginning, this was one of my hopes and ambitions, but while charting and identifying the nature of those silences, the essay didn’t reveal what they veiled. Perhaps I didn’t listen closely enough. Or, perhaps I was, like Adam, unable to see past my own projections. Most likely, though, is that we will simply never hear Eve’s voice because she is silenced in the poem; she is bound by Milton’s textual law. But by looking at these patterns of miscommunication we are able, not only to better understand what is going on with the three main characters, and identify the hush put on Eve, but see how gender is constructed by way of subject positions in a masculine forum of discourse, a very important topic for further study to readers of Milton. But greater still is my hope that seeing and acknowledging such behavioral patterns will enable us to change them. I must admit that, thinking back now, I can remember times when I was probably, like Adam, guilty of the sin of miscommunication – when I was so fixated on my own phantoms that I was probably not there for my other like I should have been. But, thanks to Milton’s mimetic poetry, the work of theorists like Ratcliffe, and the wonderful people with whom I am surrounded, I feel like I am better able to see myself – better able to see and respect the difference between myself and another. Thus, also like Adam, “Greatly instructed I shall hence depart. / Greatly in peace of thought, and have my fill / Of knowledge” (12.57-59). Although it may come at the cost of innocence, such knowledge is sure to strengthen us and make us better teachers, thinkers, readers, writers, lovers – better people. It’s worth remembering the final bit of angelic advice that, just

before leading him away from Paradise, Michael gives to Adam: “Only add / Deeds to thy knowledge answerable; add faith, / Add virtue, patience, temperance; add love, / By name to come called ‘charity,’ the soul / Of all the rest: then wilt thou not be loath / To leave this Paradise but shalt possess / A paradise within thee, happier far” (12.581-587).

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