

“Among Unequals What Society”: *Paradise Lost* and the Forms of Intimacy

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The poem of course invites multiple perspectives. — Barbara Kiefer Lewalski

There is . . . only one true interpretation of *Paradise Lost*. — Stanley Fish

Its *primum mobile* has a hole in the top, for getting in and out. — John Carey

Explaining the One and the many never did run smooth. In poetics as in metaphysics, representations of plurality proceeding from, participating in, or returning to a unifying Principle often place us between competing forces—a unified, absolute, ineffable Source and a fecund, various creation—that require trajectories of understanding more oblique than those of ascending ladders and spiritual circuits.¹ *Paradise Lost* broods over this relation thematically and thematizes it formally. If for some readers the epic achieves a rare harmony, affirming “change, variety, movement, the mark of vitality and joy” through “an all-embracing order which proceeds from God,” for others the prospect of an “illimitable universe” within a “perfection of form” only restates the problem whenever we try to specify that perfection.²

The problem is reflected in equivocations about form itself, which promises an ascent from multiplicity to archetype while serving, for Milton and others, as the ground of individuation, “the source of all

¹ A classical example is Plato’s *Parmenides*, where ideas about the One and Forms are subjected to a series of tortuous, dialectical puzzles.

² Joseph H. Summers, *The Muse’s Method: An Introduction to “Paradise Lost”* (Binghamton, N.Y.: Center for Medieval and Early Renaissance Studies, 1981), 71, 75, 95, 86.

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difference": "Singular things, or individuals . . . have their own singular and proper forms"; "the soul of Socrates is the proper form of Socrates" (*Art of Logic*, in *CPW*, 8:233-4).³ The expressive potency of this bivalent metaphysic will assume crushing ethical force when Adam feels that he must choose between the promised sublimation up Raphael's scale of nature and the concrete specificity, and irreplaceability, of Eve. Some of the most valuable attempts to sort out the poem's challenges have traced its massive yet meticulous patterns—local syntaxes, narrative framings and sequences, perspectival shifts, analogies, parodies, prefigurations, allusive myths, tropes, modes, genres—all of them shaping and reshaping complementary, conflicting, and embedded relations.⁴ These formalisms, however, are never independent of a critic's ethical investments, which shape and are shaped by assumptions about Milton's cultural context and by a history of prior readings. The intersection of ethics and form has found expression in a fundamental critical debate: whether the poem directs us to higher unities, even a monistic Form to end all forms, or to a "form of the unfinished," a "narrative design [that] builds up a texture of overlapping viewpoints" and "incongruent discourses": "dynamic," "open-ended," and "indeterminate."⁵ This debate becomes most explicit

³ Prose quotations follow *Complete Prose Works*, ed. Don M. Wolfe, 8 vols. (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 1953-82), hereafter cited as *CPW*; and poetic quotations, *Complete Poems and Major Prose*, ed. Merritt Y. Hughes (New York: Odyssey, 1957). For Milton's "metaphysic of form" and its role in the centuries-old attempt to reconcile Plato and Aristotle, see Michael Lieb, *The Sineus of Ulysses: Form and Convention in Milton's Works* (Pittsburgh, Pa.: Duquesne University Press, 1989), 9-20.

⁴ See Barbara Kiefer Lewalski, *"Paradise Lost" and the Rhetoric of Literary Forms* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1985).

⁵ Stanley Fish is still the most explicit "ethical monist." Pluralist statements are quoted from Balachandra Rajan, *The Form of the Unfinished: English Poetics from Spenser to Pound* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1985); James Grantham Turner, *One Flesh: Paradisal Marriage and Sexual Relations in the Age of Milton* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1987), 299; Joseph Wittreich, "Inspir'd with Contradiction: Mapping Gender Discourses in *Paradise Lost*," in *Literary Milton: Text, Pretext, Context*, ed. Diana Treviño Benet and Michael Lieb (Pittsburgh, Pa.: Duquesne University Press, 1994), 135; and

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whenever the desire to privilege the outcome finds itself at odds with the human drama leading to it, a drama that seems to work against even as it celebrates its iconic promises. Milton repeatedly crosses unfolding doctrine with disruptive contingencies, a dynamic he uses to shape the relation of Adam and Eve. Imagined from above to be a constant, variously embodied and anatomized, this relation proves, from the point of view of those living it—readers as well as protagonists—to be dynamic, contradictory, radically in transition.

In this essay I am concerned with the ways in which Milton sets in motion the poem's conflicting formal and ethical senses by testing intimacy and its constitutive role in human identity. Represented as both the finishing touch and the complicating factor of a circular cosmos, humanity lives in an elliptical world with two foci, male and female. Indispensable to Milton and the poem is the discreteness of particular selves, minds, and agencies, a formal plurality seeking harmonious interrelation and first enacted in Edenic marriage. The difficulty of this search stems from several widely discussed causes, among them Milton's personal crises, the culture of early modern individualism, and the Genesis narrative itself, in which the closure of ritual opens to "the wayward paths of human freedom, the quirks and contradictions of men and women seen as moral agents and complex centers of motive and feeling."⁶ Milton represents these quirks and contradictions, I argue, through the drama of human identity seeking to complete itself simultaneously in two directions, vertically and horizontally. What is ideally a complementary task shaped by hierarchical and chiasmic relations is confronted throughout the poem by the density of lived, ethical experience. This density is felt in several ways, not the least of which is the problematic and volatile nature of horizontal connection. While the poem takes Adam as its primary focus, it insists on

John P. Rumrich, *Milton Unbound: Controversy and Reinterpretation* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), *passim*. On the tension between conclusive, teleological form and the openness and contingency of history see David Quint, *Epic and Empire: Politics and Generic Form from Virgil to Milton* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1993), 268–324, esp. 301–8. The terms *monist* and *pluralist* are volatile; see John Rogers's linking of material monism to ethical pluralism in *The Matter of Revolution: Science, Poetry, and Politics in the Age of Milton* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1996).

⁶ Robert Alter, *The Art of Biblical Narrative* (New York: Basic, 1981), 26–7.

Eve's presence and agency as alternately harmonious and disorienting, yet always essential. To regard her distinctive subjectivity as invented *only* to serve a larger, asymmetrical agenda (as some have done) is to deny the force of Milton's placement of her in the larger drama, at once outside and within prescribed agenda. She is a second, Archimedean point that allows intimacy to redefine even as it ministers to the self. The consequences of this paradox are felt throughout the poem, as guiding assumptions gather complications in their very repetition: hierarchy jostles with egalitarianism, symmetry with asymmetry, precision with imprecision, and promises of formal completion with discoveries of incompleteness.

When Raphael imparts to Adam whatever it may "avail [him] to know" (argument of book 5), the curriculum includes Adam's birth. Genesis offers a ritualized account—"And God said . . . And God made . . . And God said"—in which man is the last, special moment. Raphael accentuates this specialness by summarizing the first five days of creation as if it had reached formal completion before human presence:

Now Heav'n in all her Glory shone, and roll'd
Her motions, as the great first-Mover's hand
First wheel'd thir course; Earth in her rich attire
Consummate lovely smil'd; Air, Water, Earth,
By Fowl, Fish, Beast, was flown, was swum, was walkt
Frequent. (7.499-504)

The big wheel turns, and the correlative verse interweaving medium, creature, and motion also turns in decorous compliance with the Artificer's intention.⁷ Consummate loveliness, however, proves incomplete:

There wanted yet the Master work, the end
Of all yet done; a Creature who not prone
And Brute as other Creatures, but endu'd
With Sanctity of Reason, might erect
His Stature, and with Front serene
Govern the rest, self-knowing, and from thence

⁷ Along (and on) these lines see Christopher B. Ricks, *Milton's Grand Style* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1963), 33-4.

Magnanimous to correspond with Heav'n,
 But grateful to acknowledge whence his good
 Descends. (7.505-13)

Raphael serenely aligns potentially conflicting anthropologies. The prospectus of a self-knowing creature both a part of and apart from other things recalls the creation narrative that opens Pico's *Oration*: wanting a witness to value a creation already full on its own terms, God pauses, then produces a marvel of boundless intellectual vigor that the young Milton would have recognized: "Let not your mind rest content to be bounded and cabined by the limits which compass the earth, but let it wander beyond the confines of the world" (*Prolusion* 3, in *CPW*, 1:247; cf. *Pro.* 7). But the angel has come to warn Adam, not to praise him, and he calls to Adam "to adore / And worship God supreme" (7.514-5), reminding this masterwork, the end of all else, of his own end: free and rational consent to hierarchy, proper limit, and devotion.

Adam's very shape is to the manner born, his upright stance, as medieval humanists would read it, its symbol. Great yet grateful, governor and subject, he is worthy of Raphael's grand teleology, whose promise includes Eve but which, significantly, seems scarcely addressed to her: "One Almighty is, from whom / All things proceed, and up to him return. . . . Your bodies may at last turn all to spirit . . . If ye be found obedient" (5.469-500). Eve's complicating presence has already emerged in book 4 and will return with Adam's autobiographical narrative in book 8, but even without her, consummate form shows a tendency to open toward contingency. Adam joyously accepts the Hierarchy's direction up the "scale of Nature" yet seizes on his "if": incredulous at the idea of ingratitude, he is also fascinated by its hint of anomaly, confessing his "desire" to hear a "full relation, which must needs be strange" (5.507-14, 550-8). The request in turn provokes Raphael's odd hesitation—"perhaps / Not lawful to reveal? yet for thy good / This is dispens't" (5.569-71)—a fleeting glimpse of a theoretically impossible conflict of goods, the unexpected consequence of God's command to the dutiful, "sociable spirit" to speak with Adam "as friend with friend" (5.221, 229). The didactic and affective end heals all when Adam, after Raphael's instruction, proclaims himself "fully . . . satisfied," "freed from intricacies, taught to live / The easiest way" (8.180-3).

But again fullness and ease prove to be neither as Adam's supplementary autobiography, offered as his own social gesture, ends by competing with as well as completing his tutor's message. As much as Adam embraces Raphael's directives, his perspective originates with a life that Raphael still barely grasps, evident in the angel's easy alternation between man as singular and double:

Let us make now Man in our image, Man
 In our similitude, and let them rule
 * * * * *
 . . . he form'd thee, *Adam*, thee O Man
 Dust of the ground . . .
 . . . in his own Image hee
 Created thee . . .
 * * * * *
 Male he created thee, but thy consort
 Female for Race. (7.519-30)

Raphael's brief postscript on sexual difference (if looked at broadly) is a sympathetic one, an extension of his creation narrative in which a cosmic, feminine principle multiplies agency throughout the universe (7.276, 454).⁸ But he is oblivious, despite blushing claims to the contrary (8.618-29), to the complications of human intimacy and happiness.

Milton, by contrast, writes these complications into the first moments of Adam's autobiography, which is shaped by a sense of being a part of and apart from the rest of creation. He wakes in "Balmy Sweat. . . about me round . . . all things smiled, / With fragrance and with joy my heart o'erflowed." From the "liquid lapse" without to his "supple joints" within, a fluid syntax represents his perceptual body as permeable, flowed into by and overflowing with "fragrance and . . . joy" (8.255-70). Connectedness underwrites his existence. But even as a pious inference—"How came I thus, how here? / Not of myself; by

⁸For the ethics of fecundity see Rumrich, *Milton Unbound*; and Rogers. In a radically different reading Mary Nyquist regards Raphael's interweaving of the Priestly and Yahwist accounts in Genesis as part of a deliberate, patriarchal project ("The Genesis of Gendered Subjectivity in Milton's Divorce Tracts and in *Paradise Lost*," in *Re-membering Milton: Essays on the Texts and Traditions*, ed. Mary Nyquist and Margaret W. Ferguson [New York: Methuen, 1987], 115-7).

some great Maker then" (8.277–8)—locates him within the poem's moral design as an overt counterpoint to Satan's fantasy of self-generation (5.857–64), Adam's question discovers his isolation: nothing in nature responds. The power to name things (8.271–3) separates him from them, and having discovered self-reflexiveness, he retreats to a green shade: "Pensive I sat me down" (8.283–7), his syntax implying a cognitive self-division. He will soon be offered greater abundance and a more explicit connection to his Author, but at the cost of further "manifest[ing] / His single imperfection" (8.422–3). The discovery is more disorienting than Raphael's warning that Adam is "perfet, not immutable" (5.524), because it reveals not a freely embraced obligation but an internal oscillation of fullness and incompleteness, connection and isolation.⁹

Loneliness was not necessary to teach Adam obedience. As he recalls his postnatal interview with the Presence Divine, he was well instructed both in the blessing of abundance and in the threat of death, woe, and sorrow. But what looks like a series of rewards probes at an already intuited lack. Cumulative hints of "innumerable" offspring, "thy Race," and then birds and beasts (8.297, 339, 350) force an awareness that "in these / I found not what methought I wanted still" (8.354–5). While Alastair Fowler rightly notes an anticipation and "grim reminder" of Noah in Adam's review of creatures "two and two" (Gen. 7.9), this array also harks back to the darkest phase of Milton's pastoral elegy "Epitaphium Damonis," where the facile gregariousness of beasts reveals human isolation to itself.¹⁰ Even amid Edenic plenitude and filial gratitude, Adam longs for a relation unlike his prostration at divine feet or the animals' stooping to him and, in a bold departure from Genesis 2.18, is forced to argue at length:

⁹ Milton's preoccupation with loneliness and its remedies—friendship, marriage, piety, social and political engagement—is often noted. For a suggestive if polemical approach see David Aers and Bob Hodge, "'Rational Burning': Milton on Sex and Marriage," in *Literature, Language, and Society in England, 1580–1680*, by David Aers, Bob Hodge, and Gunther Kress (Dublin: Gill and Macmillan; Totowa, N.J.: Barnes and Noble, 1981), 122–51.

¹⁰ *The Poems of John Milton*, ed. John Carey and Alastair Fowler (Harlow: Longmans, 1968), 415.

In solitude

What happiness, or who can enjoy alone,
Or all enjoying, what contentment find?
(8.364-6)

The debate proves to be a systems' check, following the newborn Adam's self-administered physical exam (8.267-9) with the outside resistance needed to test mental agility: "Thus far to try thee, *Adam* . . . / To see how thou couldst judge of fit and meet" (8.437-48). While divine wisdom all along "knew it not good for man to be alone," Adam's voicing his own need effects the next stage of self-consciousness: rising from self-ignorance (8.270-1), he distinguishes himself from "living creatures" below (8.370) and divine self-sufficiency above. Independent reasoning discovers its objective, hierarchical place (7.511). But the test also strains convergence. God's "sublime risk," remarks Charles Monroe Coffin, lies not only in creating this "degree of autonomy" but also in encouraging Adam's need for "connection with something other than his Creator." God declares, "Whom thou sought'st I am," yet Adam soon seeks something else. This is not cupidinous weakness; it is a sign that "the relation with God is not coercive, but generous."¹¹ As Milton himself comments on Genesis 2.18: "Hitherto all things that have bin nam'd, were approv'd of God to be very good: lonelines is the first thing which Gods eye nam'd not good. . . . And heer *alone* is meant alone without woman; otherwise *Adam* had the company of God himself" (*Tetrachordon*, in *CPW*, 2:595). Milton cannot have forgotten that God, in the preceding line of Genesis, made a different first exception (eating from a certain tree). But he puts on a close footing, an almost equiprimordial status, Adam's two necessary connections: with his Creator and with a human companion. If the former by definition gives being and value to all else, it still does not satisfy the specific need fulfilled by the latter.

These two models—vertical obedience and a horizontal give-and-take—will come into conflict, because Adam, like the God in whose image he is made, also takes risks. By arguing for companionship

¹¹ Coffin, "Creation and the Self in *Paradise Lost*," *ELH* 29 (1962): 1-18. Coffin's striking characterization of the poem's multiple subjectivities and agencies, indebted to a line of thought extending through Ernst Cassirer and others, anticipates much recent Milton criticism.

against his maker's feigned resistance—especially a maker who has just warned in no uncertain terms how quickly a loving God can become an angry one—an urgent but anxious Adam ventures a self-assertion that he hopes is (and that proves to be) allowable but that he fears is “presumptuous” (8.367; cf. 8.356).¹² And while the creation of Eve increases Adam's indebtedness, it also introduces a new vector: not the dependency of the part on the whole but a less certain interdependency of parts, the problematic drive by human beings for completion in each other.

If, as Milton claims in *Tetrachordon*, the form of marriage is definable despite its elusiveness, then its pure, Edenic origin ought to manifest a still clearer concurrence of defining causes, joining mutual delight and pious devotion.¹³ Readers across a wide political spectrum have turned to Milton's explicit worrying over these matters to treat Adam and Eve's relation to each other and their God as a precise and systematic hierarchy of obligations. The “most salient formal features” of their marriage reveal the “maddening and motivated precision” of a “stridently masculinist” ideology, writes Mary Nyquist; Eve's creation *for* Adam, “to remedy his loneliness,” renders her a “‘gift’ from one patriarch to another.” Issuing from the needful male soul, marriage is produced as male privilege. “Co-authored by Adam and the ‘Presence Divine,’ who work it out together,” the “very form of the colloquy” establishes Adam's desire as “rational” and so legitimized, his “clever[ness]” rewarded by “the deity's formal presentation to him of his bride.” “Precisely because these speeches are construed as a verbal exchange that is basically contractual,” Milton produces a “veiled but

¹² Adam, of course, tempers complaint with pious deference and in retrospect attributes the debate to “freedom . . . permissive” (8.434–5). Barbara Kiefer Lewalski suggests that some kind of presumption is crucial to Adam's intellectual growth through trial and error (“Innocence and Experience in Milton's Eden,” in *New Essays on “Paradise Lost,”* ed. Thomas Kranidas [Berkeley: University of California Press, 1969], 106–8), while Quint stresses the danger of Adam's creaturely insecurities (281–308).

¹³ Seeking “to define exactly what marriage [*sic*] is,” Milton concedes that in “relations and institutions . . . the *Form* by which the thing is what it is, is oft so slender and undistinguishable, that it would soon confuse, were it not sustain'd by the efficient and final causes” (*Tetrachordon*, in *CPW*, 2:608).

systematic insistence on the contractual form of the first institution [marriage], a Protestantism pressed into the service of a historically specific form of individualism" ("Gendered Subjectivity," 117–8, 114–5). By turns overt and veiled, these forms demand rigorous interrogation. So, for example, if the discovery of loneliness seems to impel Adam's presumption, it is really patriarchy, "communicated formally, by the extraordinary emphasis placed on Adam's subjectivity." If Eve is a complexly drawn figure whose narrative appears before Adam's, this too is complicit in systematic oppression. Adam wants another self, and so one is invented for him, her apparent autonomy and interiority serving as his possession (119).¹⁴

This is the hardest-edged of Nyquist's probing essays on Milton, and, though strenuously polemical, it is rightly suspicious about the uses to which "companionate" marriage may be put, especially in the divorce tracts, where Milton's primary interest is with the husband, his fulfillment and his remedy. The language of mutuality is vulnerable to a grammar of inequality. Yet Nyquist's detailed analysis is so determined to make inquiry an inquisition that its view of formalism becomes an antimonist's monism, a project of scrutinizing local figures, "intricately plotted" exegetical priorities, and broad "narrative ordering of events" to reveal Milton as "English literature's paradigmatic patriarch." The poem's pluralist energies can only be conspiratorial, never self-contesting or productive in multiplying sympathies and perspectives ("Gendered Subjectivity," 101).¹⁵

Even with his focus on Adam, however, Milton writes his account of Eve's creation as a scene not of shrewd contractualism but of disorientation and transformation. He collapsed "dazzl'd and spent, sunk

¹⁴ See also Janet E. Halley, "Female Autonomy in Milton's Sexual Poetics," in *Milton and the Idea of Woman*, ed. Julia M. Walker (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1988), 230–53.

¹⁵ In this essay Nyquist's approach is influenced by her political goal, which is to interrogate not only Milton and his culture but also the "liberal-humanist tradition" of academe, including liberal feminists who have not exposed Milton with sufficient rigor. Elsewhere she grants Milton's texts, if not Milton himself, greater tolerance for conflicting meanings. For contrasting approaches cf. Wittreich on the way the epic's "narrative scrambling" arranges "interdependent elements in interpretation," sometimes conciliating and sometimes colliding, to display the "formed" nature of perspectival truths (143–4), and Terry Eagleton's more explicitly political claim that "the contentions within the very form of *Paradise Lost* . . . are surely a sign . . . of the ways in which literary texts, by dint of their formal or figural devices, tend to press

down," and witnessed his "rib, with cordial spirits warm, / And Life-blood streaming fresh," extracted and shaped (8.457-67):

what seem'd fair in all the World, seem'd now
Mean, or in her summ'd up, in her contain'd
And in her looks, which from that time infus'd
Sweetness into my heart, unfelt before.
(8.472-5)

Not only does the passage punningly connect Eve's physical procession to her emotional return ("cordial spirits . . . infus'd / Sweetness into my heart"), but it implies, even in the face of God's handiwork, an alternative logic. Adam and Eve help fashion each other, a conceit that Arnold Stein finds "troubling" for its echo of divine action for human affection: "The Eve who is part of him, whose creation he has shared in, seems . . . to be creating him in turn."¹⁶ Maurits Corneille Escher's print of two hands sketching each other is a modern version of the paradox; one more relevant to and contemporary with Milton is the 1654 double portrait of almost identical friends, the painters Nicholas de Platte-Montagne and Jean-Baptiste de Champaigne, each of whom holds or is positioned by an inscription crediting the other for having formed his image.¹⁷

The logic of reciprocal creation encourages Adam's dream of perfectible form through perfect mutuality. Adam's cry of recognition embeds the language of Genesis—"Bone of my bone, Flesh of my Flesh"—in the anagnorisis of a Plautine twin comedy: "I now see / . . . my Self / Before me" (8.494-6).¹⁸ The meeting of self and other is

into contradiction their own ideology, throwing its covert incoherence into embarrassing relief" ("The God That Failed," in Nyquist and Ferguson, 346). More generally, see the subtle and wide-ranging discussion of the resourcefulness of form in Susan J. Wolfson, *Formal Charges: The Shaping of Poetry in British Romanticism* (Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 1997), esp. 1-30.

¹⁶ Stein, *Answerable Style: Essays on "Paradise Lost"* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1953), 83. Stein notes a "dangerous" appropriation of the Genesis God "breath[ing] into [Adam's] nostrils the breath of life" to characterize Eve's influence (82).

¹⁷ See Pascal Bonafoux, *Portraits of the Artist: The Self-Portrait in Painting*, trans. (New York: Skira/Rizzoli, 1985), 64.

¹⁸ Cf. Melanie Klein on "the universal phantasy of having a twin" (a reference to Dorothy T. Burlingham, *Twins: A Study of Three Pairs of Identical Twins* [New York: International Universities Press, 1952]) as the "yearning for an unattainable perfect

ironically enacted in the ambiguous character of the erotic charge itself, interweaving narcissism with outward desire. If Adam stumbles over an "addition strange" in Eve's nightmare, he assumes their legibility to each other to anatomize their common dream psychology (5.95–121). His assumption is perhaps induced by his having determined that "Woman is her Name," another instance in which Adamic language names things through an "apprehension" of "thir Nature" (8.352–4, 496), and even more so by the Creator's introduction of Eve as "thy other self," recalling Milton's reading of Genesis 2.18, "I will make a help meet for him," as the promise of "*another self, a second self, a very self it self*" (*Tetrachordon*, in *CPW*, 2:600; see also Alter, 31). Extrapolated from Milton's lifelong concern with friendship, companionate marriage offers a heightened intersubjectivity. As Montaigne said elegiacally of his late friend, Etienne de La Boétie, "Not one of his actions could be presented to me . . . that I could not immediately find the motive for it," so Adam would dearly love to be able to say of the living Eve.¹⁹

Crucially, he never can. Twoness never merely replicates oneness, and the play of likeness and difference can be unpredictable, the divergence frustrating pure understanding at one moment and grounding another kind of likeness the next. Adam and Eve's first memories are a notorious instance. Eve bends to "another Sky" in a lake rather than look up as Adam did to the "ample sky" (4.449–76)—a difference easily polarized but less easily moralized. Modeling Eve's "vain desire" for her reflection on Ovid's Narcissus "vainly [*frustra*] seek[ing] to clasp a fleeting image,"²⁰ Milton makes important revisions: what had been a

internal state . . . the hope of achieving wholeness and complete understanding" ("On the Sense of Loneliness," in *Envy and Gratitude and Other Works, 1946–1963* [New York: Dell, 1977], 300–2).

¹⁹ "Of Friendship," in *The Complete Essays of Montaigne*, trans. Donald M. Frame (Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 1965), 140. For a theoretical approach to Milton's problematic transfer of terms for same- to other-sex relations see Louise Schleiner, "Pastoral Male Friendship and Miltonic Marriage: Textual Systems Transposed," *Literature Interpretation Theory* 2 (1990): 41–58. For "companionate marriage" in general see Margo Todd, *Christian Humanism and the Puritan Social Order* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987); and Valerie Wayne, introduction to Edmund Tilney, *The Flower of Friendship: A Renaissance Dialogue Contesting Marriage*, ed. Valerie Wayne (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1992). See also n. 22 below.

²⁰ *Metamorphoses*, trans. Frank Justus Miller, 3d ed., rev. G. P. Goold, vols. 3–4 of *Ovid in Six Volumes* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1977–84), 3.432.

third-person account becomes a first-person memory, and the Ovidian narrator's futile warning to his fictive character becomes a divine intervention. Milton's scene is of a hauntingly imaginative (if inexperienced) subjectivity corrected and instructed. But while Eve may lack Adam's immediate instincts (though he, too, is susceptible to early "wand'ring" [cf. 8.312]), her error is as much an accident of physics as the sign of self-absorption, a circumstantial misfiring of genuine ethical feeling. Formed as objectively irresistible (5.446–8, 8.60–3), she unwittingly crosses her reflection. Even then her fascination, unlike Narcissus's, is protracted less by her beauty (she is more startled than charmed) than by seeing in the illusion, and in her response to it, a capacity for "answering looks / Of sympathy and love" (4.464–5). Though she will need further prompting, she sees herself from the start as other, even as Adam would see his other as himself, their bilateral longings reflected symmetrically across the poem in books 4 and 7 of the first, ten-book version of the epic. It is a symmetry, in other words, that does several things at once: highlight a gap between them, link both to the darker potentialities of narcissism, yet also underlie the formal congruence the pair displays in song and prayers "said unanimous" (4.736).²¹

The chiasmus of pleasing variety in *Tetrachordon*, "resembling unlikeness and unlike resemblance" (*CPW*, 2:595), is put under stress in the epic, opening the way to a host of instabilities plaguing the friendship tradition itself. As in classical and Renaissance thought, the relation of alter egos emerges as both socially fundamental and improbably rare, emotionally and intellectually fulfilling yet dangerously fragile and elegiac.²² In his autobiography Adam recalls waking

²¹ Diane Kelsey McColley surveys conflicting positions about this episode and reads it as educative (*Milton's Eve* [Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1983], 74–85). For psychoanalytic views of Adam and Eve's narcissistic impulses see William Kerrigan, *The Sacred Complex: On the Psychogenesis of "Paradise Lost"* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1983), 70–1; James W. Earl, "Eve's Narcissism," *Milton Quarterly* 19 (1985): 13–6; and Marshall Grossman, "Servile/Sterile/Style: Milton and the Question of Woman," in Walker, 148–68.

²² For paradoxes in friendship traditions, especially the ideal of perfect friendship, see Barry L. Weller, "The Rhetoric of Friendship in Montaigne's *Essais*," *New Literary History* 9 (1977–78): 503–23; Ullrich Langer, *Perfect Friendship: Studies in Literature and Moral Philosophy from Boccaccio to Corneille* (Geneva: Droz, 1994); and Jacques Derrida, *Politics of Friendship*, trans. George Collins (London: Verso, 1997).

three times, first to life, then to the Garden of Eden, and then to Eve. But progressive focus nets a surprise, for the third time he rises to find his happiness gone:

She disappear'd, and left me dark, I wak'd
To find her, or for ever to deplore
Her loss. (8.478-80)

The loss of Eve has been compared to Milton's bereavement at the end of sonnet 23 ("I wak'd, she fled, and day brought back my night") and may be Milton's way of repeating in order to undo the heartbreak of that earlier poem. But his narrative also produces an opposite effect, prefacing Adam's wedded bliss with the proleptic pathos of the widower. Forced at birth to experience the defect of loneliness, even to define his species in terms of its need for remedy, Adam finds an elegiac shadow cast over the birth of the mutuality he has yet to enjoy. The moment inverts Freud's *fort-da* game: not a willed, symbolic mastery of absence, the recuperation of formal wholeness, but a demonstration of the a priori alienability of whatever is closest to the heart.

This alienability and the consequent threat of irremediable fragmentation and loss will be recalled at the Fall; here it explains Adam's vehemence when Eve returns: "I overjoy'd could not forbear aloud" (8.490). Adam's impulsiveness displays a risky, human devotion extended, oddly enough, by his anticipation of Genesis 2.24: "For this cause he [man] shall forgo / Father and Mother, and to his Wife adhere" (8.497-8). The poem's context renders his outcry both orthodox and ominous; it has little personal relevance to the autochthonous Adam, whose only father and mother are his Creator and the fecund earth (9.273, 10.778), but it passes without a discouraging word from Father or narrator, neither of whom should have missed the foreshadowing of Adam's fatal adherence to Eve.²³

²³ In *De Doctrina Christiana* Milton explains the passage only in terms of the origin of families, then turns to questions of polygamy (CPW, 6:355). He may imagine the passage as a didactic liberty taken by Moses (cf. his explanation of the Sabbath in the same chapter), but *Paradise Lost* makes the most of its strangeness as an emotional outburst. Adam's boisterousness before the inexperienced Eve may have as much to do with her reluctance ("less winning soft, less amiably mild" [4.479]) as does the possibility of her residual narcissism.

Milton's formal manipulations, large and small, stress the awkwardness as well as the joy of the moment. Their nuptial is now a twice-told tale, and their perspectives are about to overlap (and significantly contradict each other) for the first time. We know from Eve's account in book 4 that she found Adam "less fair . . . / Than that smooth wat'ry image" (4.478–80):

back I turn'd,
 Thou following cri'd'st aloud, Return fair Eve
 Whom fli'st thou?, whom thou fli'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 thee claim
 My other half: with that thy gentle hand
 Seiz'd mine, I yielded, and from that time see
 How beauty is excell'd by manly grace
 And wisdom, which alone is truly fair.
 (4.480–91)

Eve's retrospect may be good-humored in its new sophistication, but it is still complicated by a swirl of ambivalence, evident in the sheer number of sensuous and hauntingly echoic lines devoted to a moment "oft remember[ed]" (4.449). As she returns in thought to that dreamlike error, she joins her resisting nostalgia to Adam's passionate calls to return to him, a drama of divergence and return Milton enhances through repetition ("I turn'd," "Return"), chiasmus ("Whom fli'st thou?, whom thou fli'st"), and Adam's rare and poignant rhyme of "art" and "heart."

Furthermore, Eve's memory of his "claim" (his "gentle hand / Seiz'd mine") alertly notices Adam's own ambivalence as he is forced to assume a hierarchical stance, his gesture less the sign of serene mastery, and still less of violent appropriation, than of self-division. The narrator does his part by echoing his simile for Satan (at this moment) like a tiger stalking "two *gentle* Fawns at play," hoping to "*seize* them both" (4.402; my emphasis). Adam's version told to Raphael in book 8, by contrast, overrides the complex, emotional contingencies of Eve's by stacking a series of mediating, allegorical agents:

Yet innocence and virgin modesty,
 Her virtue, and the conscience of her worth,
 That would be wooed, and not unsought be won,
 Not obvious, not obtrusive, but retired,
 The more desirable, or to say all,
 Nature herself though pure of sinful thought,
 Wrought in her so, that seeing me, she turned.
 (8.501-7)

Adam's turning away from Eve's explanation is as striking as Eve's turning away from him, less as male co-optation or a desire to shield Eve from angelic disapproval than as the sign of Adam's laboring to preserve a reiterated ideal: that they are about to become "one flesh, one heart, one soul" (8.499). Eve, inexplicably to him, has turned away *after* hearing it pronounced: "She heard me thus . . . Yet . . . she turn'd" (8.500-7; my emphasis). The two accounts reveal Adam's tragicomic pathos, his stunned disbelief as he trails after her, struggling to stage their mutual recognition by exclaiming yet again that she is his flesh and bone (4.481-5). Even the terms of submission with which Eve brackets her narrative may unsettle him: "thou / Like consort to thyself canst nowhere find"; "beauty is excell'd by manly grace / And wisdom, which alone is truly fair" (4.447-8, 490-1). The formal compromise of Adam's account shows him still at work even after her compliance:

I followed her, she what was honor knew,
 And with obsequious majesty approved
 My pleaded reason. (8.508-10)

Adam wants to imagine her acquiescence as a victory for their united knowledge and reason, not merely for his authority, and his syntax distributes power chiastically: her "obsequious majesty" balancing his "pleaded reason." But *pleaded* suggests more than rational, legal argument. We also hear his emotional alarm, voiced as begging or imploring.

Adam's chiasmus would bridge the gap that inevitably confronts one whose companion is "an individual solace dear," the double sense of *individual* casting her as inseparable from and independent of him.²⁴ But the problem recurs as Adam attempts to end his autobiog-

²⁴ The double sense of *individual* has been noted by several critics, to various ends. See Stein, *Answerable Style*, 110; and Halley, 248.

raphy with a hymn to cosmic harmony linking him, his spouse, and all creation. Sensuous nature gives “sign” to nuptial sensuality to celebrate (and draw a decorous screen around) the first human act of sexual intercourse. But when Adam tries to use rhetorical closure to image perfection—“Thus I have told thee all my State, and brought / My Story to the sum of earthly bliss”—the formal completion implied by *all* and *sum* yields to a postscript about a “commotion strange” quite unlike other delights that “[work] in the mind no change” (8.525):

but here
Far otherwise, transported I behold,
Transported touch; here passion first I felt,
Commotion strange, in all enjoyments else
Superior and unmov'd, here only weak
Against the charm of Beauty's powerful glance.
Or Nature fail'd in mee, 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 bestow'd
Too much of Ornament, in outward show
Elaborate, of inward less exact.
For well I understand in the prime end
Of Nature her th'inferior . . .

. . . 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, virtuouest, discreetest, best;
All higher knowledge in her presence falls
Degraded, Wisdom in discourse with her
Loses discount'nanc't, and like folly shows;
Authority and Reason on her wait,
As one intended first, not after made
Occasionally; and to consummate all,
Greatness of mind and nobleness thir seat
Build in her loveliest, and create an awe
About her, as a guard Angelic plac't.

(8.528–59)

The finishing touch complicates everything, glorifying and destabilizing (“all things else . . . but here / Far otherwise” [8.524, 537–8]), and while Adam demurs with a strategic *seems* (8.547, 550), his caution pre-

serves rather than neutralizes a line of thought tending to extremes, evident in the dangerous conjecture of nature's mismanagement.²⁵ The fantasy of reversible priority ("As one intended first, not after made / Occasionally") recasts as disorientation the evenhanded concession of *Tetrachordon* ("The wiser should govern the lesse wise, whether male or female" [*CPW*, 2:589]). It is the mark of an equivocation, present throughout the poem and Milton's culture at large, between egalitarian and hierarchical gender relations, concentrated in a mind amazed both by itself and by another. In Adam, James Grantham Turner argues, orthodox hierarchy collides with "the presence of his fellow-human," an "autonomous and fully human counterpart to himself," exciting an admiration at once passionate and aesthetic (273-4).²⁶

Adam is sometimes said to have asked for an equal love only to have hierarchy thrust upon him. But when Milton has him answer his own key question—"Among unequals what society / Can sort, what harmony or true delight?"—with a plea for companionship, "Which must be mutual, in proportion due / Giv'n and receiv'd" (8.383-6), he echoes Aristotle's treatment of unequal friendship (including marital amity as well as other instances) as "render[ing] what is in proportion to their superiority or inferiority."²⁷ The point is not to accuse Adam of bad faith or complicity but to note that Milton exploits an

²⁵ For these instances of *seems* see John Reichert, "Against His Better Knowledge": A Case for Adam," *ELH* 48 (1981): esp. 86-7.

²⁶ See also Turner, chap. 7; cf. Henry Staten, *Eros in Mourning: Homer to Lacan* (Baltimore, Md.: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1995), esp. 114-23. Even Milton's best critics once smoothed over Adam's confused excitement for the sake of more manageable harmonies; see, e.g., Summers's discussion of Adam "formulat[ing] precisely" his need for Eve in the course of quoting two contradictory passages (95-7): Adam and Eve as "not equal" (4.296) and Adam's plea for a companion not unequal (8.383-4)—an inconsistency noted two hundred years ago by Mary Wollstonecraft. Though I focus on Adam's dilemma, a similar problem touches Eve, most explicitly in her need to experience her autonomy before the Fall and in her grim reprise of the egalitarian-subordination equivocation as rivalrous emulation when she falls. For the simultaneity of conflicting attitudes see Keith Wrightson, *English Society, 1580-1680* (New Brunswick, N.J.: Rutgers University Press, 1982), 90-104; and Mary Beth Rose, *The Expense of Spirit: Love and Sexuality in English Renaissance Drama* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1988), 12-42.

²⁷ *Nicomachean Ethics*, 8.7, 8.13, in *The Complete Works of Aristotle*, ed. Jonathan Barnes, 2 vols. (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1984), 2:1831, 1837.

ambivalence in his own mind to dramatize an uncertainty in Adam's, at odds with his sure self-placement between God and beasts. Adam's surprisingly ungenerous conjecture about Eve's disproportion, "too much of Ornament, in outward show / Elaborate, of inward less exact," may predict the hard choral misogyny of *Samson Agonistes* (1025–30) or his own after the Fall. Here, however, his oscillation between misogyny and idolatry—that Eve is "inward less exact" and that she is "in herself complete"—marks two forms of depersonalization exposing Adam's difficulty when confronting an other he dearly wants to understand and enjoy as symmetrical with himself. His description of her—"to consummate all, / Greatness of mind and nobleness thir seat / Build in her loveliest"—would match Raphael's terms for him as "the end / Of all yet done," "magnanimous to correspond with Heav'n" (7.505–6, 511). But Adam's culminating praise reveals a disquieting unknowability even in the face of his assurance that he can judge rightly her "mind / And inward Faculties" (8.541–2). The angelic guard about her recalls a favorite Miltonic trope about virtue's resistance to pollution, but in the context of knowledge falling before her, the passage portrays the beloved as shielded not only from stain but from the lover's full comprehension.

Adam is not expressing a skepticism of other minds, but the scene does stage Milton's concern about multiple interiorities. As Adam "disclose[s] / What inward thence I feel" (8.607–8) to an increasingly distanced angelic auditor, he also negotiates the limits of the first human, intersubjective relation and discovers, with some discomfort, that the clear light of reason cannot fully illuminate even (and especially) this intense commitment. Raphael's rebuke about proper weight and relative values ironically parallels this dilemma in its blunt disproportion to Adam's terms.²⁸ We are also entitled to suspect some wishful thinking

²⁸ Reactions to Raphael's remarks range from endorsement to outrage. Most apt, I think, is the ambivalence expressed by Turner, who finds Raphael "properly severe" on some matters but "appalling" on human passion: "A gulf . . . opens between man and angel, and it is by no means certain who has the 'true authority'" (277, 280). See also Joan S. Bennett's increased sympathy and concession to difference when revising her criticism of Adam's failure to heed Raphael: "Adam, who experiences a complex human relationship with the 'other,' which the angel does not share, is not able to follow through with a rationally 'contracted brow' like Raphael" (*Reviving Liberty: Radical Christian Humanism in Milton's Great Poems* [Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard

as the "half abash't" Adam defends his undying ideal of "union of Mind, or in us both one Soul" (7.604). But it is through this dramatization of moral earnestness, hurt feelings, and emotional need that Milton probes two of his own most cherished formal and ethical assumptions: that the self can be a "true Poem," "a composition, and patterne of the best and honourablest things" (*Apology for Smectymnuus*, in *CPW*, 1:890), and that such perfection ought to ensure its natural congruence with a virtuous other. The divorce tracts bitterly attribute the inaccessibility of the female other to her hollowness, perversity, or evil, seething at one who "hangs off in an unclosing disproportion" (*Doctrine and Discipline*, in *CPW*, 2:246). But in the epic Milton is able to imagine a self compelled beyond its own narcissistic perfectionism by a "commotion strange," an alterity within that makes possible genuine novelty, the love for another without.²⁹ Milton himself relies on this dynamic through the Muse, an otherness inspiring "things unattempted yet in Prose or Rhyme" (1.16); it becomes human in the otherness of Eve, infusing Adam with "sweetness into [his] heart, unfelt before," deeply felt and endlessly renewable because it mingles fullness with incompleteness. Milton in his prose may have laughed off the Aristophanic hermaphrodite in Plato's *Symposium*, but he is drawn at the end of that work to Diotima's myth, which he finds agreeing with Genesis: even as Diotima portrayed Love as "the Sonne of *Penury*, begot of *Plenty*," so for Moses "*Love* was the Son of *Lonelines*, begot . . . by that sociable & helpfull aptitude which God implanted between man and woman toward each other" (*Doctrine and Discipline*, in *CPW*, 2:252). The genealogy of Love joins capacity with need, a divine gift that makes intimacy possible with a human craving that makes it essential.

The endless crossing of that gap has been imagined in several ways, by Milton as well as his readers: the formal "harmony . . . of sympathetic diversity"; the self-renewing excitement of "sweet reluctant

University Press, 1989], 114). My italics indicate Bennett's revision; the original merely notes Adam's failure when he "does not follow through" ("Go": Milton's Antinomianism and the Separation Scene in *Paradise Lost*, Book 9," *PMLA* 98 [1983]: 400).

²⁹ For a subtle meditation on this paradox see Derek Attridge, "Innovation, Literature, Ethics: Relating to the Other," *PMLA* 114 (1999): 20-31.

amorous delay"; and, more darkly, the resistance necessary to manifest power and rivalry.³⁰ Yet all are founded on a distinction between humans and the angels who are "united as one individual Soul" (5.610), dancing

mazes intricate,
Eccentric, intervolved, yet regular
Then most, when most irregular they seem.
(5.622-4)

Irreducibly "eccentric," human individuals cannot transcend their "unity defective," but they can endeavor, through love, to make defect perfection.

This dynamic also drives the tragic reversal, which Milton shapes in terms of a difference whose widening intensifies the need to cross it. The shift in direction is highlighted by juxtaposition: a final, celebratory diapason, harmonizing creatures discursive and nondiscursive (9.197-9), that ends as discourses turn against each other in the "separation scene." A plot contrivance constructed to provoke an interpretive crisis, the scene demands an answer to Adam's question "What could I more?" (9.1170).

Critics' answers often assume that Adam should have forbidden Eve's separate gardening, then find a doctrinal reason why her freedom would remain uncompromised. Joan S. Bennett, in an important reconstruction of Milton's antinomianism, argues that what is at stake is obedience within a temporal context, a progressive exercise of the inner light. Drawing on Aristotle's *phronesis*, she reminds us that moral knowledge is not a specific detail or *techne* but an orientation and potential realized in rational free choice. Moreover, according to Hans Georg Gadamer's reading of Aristotle, this potential is realized between self and other: "The reasoner is 'united by a specific bond with the other, . . . thinks with the other and undergoes the situation

³⁰ John P. Rumrich, *Matter of Glory: A New Preface to "Paradise Lost"* (Pittsburgh, Pa.: University of Pittsburgh Press, 1987), 103-7; William Kerrigan and Gordon Braden, *The Idea of the Renaissance* (Baltimore, Md.: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1989), 191-218; Catherine Belsey, *John Milton: Language, Gender, Power* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1988), 64.

with [the other].” Adam ought to have persisted in correcting Eve until she finally saw the light. Instead, “want[ing] so fervently to be wanted by her,” he forgets his role as “governor,” failing Eve through permissiveness rather than liberating her through the right reason that only he, as yet, grasps (222 n. 14, 113-4).³¹

Bennett is sensitive to the way that “theoretical system building” needs to read the poetry that “work[s] through, and understand[s] . . . human experiences,” but her study comes close at this point to violating its own caveat. Eve has not come to Adam about an unnecessary project; she perceives an objective problem in an Eden where fecundity runneth over, and she offers her own creative solution. Nor is it evident that Adam’s “axiomatic reasoning shows his quicker logical ability, closer to the angels,” while Eve’s “more tedious method of syllogism” shows her “not sharp enough” to grasp consequences. Their argumentative styles differ, but Adam’s recitation of axioms, like his allegorizing to explain Eve’s first turning away, does not mean that he *thinks* axiomatically or that he more closely approximates angelic intuition. Bennett, assuming that all contradiction in the poem must be “reconciled into a consistent hierarchy,” relies on emphatic subordination: “Surely, Adam’s human questionings and reasonings must be as tedious and exasperating for [Raphael] to bend his intuitive reason to as Eve’s imperfect understanding and discursive reasoning are for Adam’s quicker, axiomatic mind” (32, 110-7).³² An Adam who might find Eve “tedious” yet desirable seems un-Miltonic (see 8.386-9). Adam’s deepest hope has always been not to be the head of his wife (1 Cor. 11.3; *Paradise Lost*, 8.574) but to achieve reciprocity:

³¹ Dennis Richard Danielson argues that Adam should have forbidden her to go, “because a command does not compel obedience” (*Milton’s Good God: A Study in Literary Theodicy* [Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1982], 127). Bennett, by contrast, follows Gadamer on Aristotle, as presented by Richard J. Bernstein. Bernstein further notes Gadamer’s emphasis on “the centrality of friendship” in the *Ethics* (*Beyond Objectivism and Relativism: Science, Hermeneutics, and Praxis* [Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1983], 147), an emphasis crucial to the role *phronesis* plays in Bennett’s argument. For a valuable, contextual approach to the enigma of wifely freedom and subordination, see Constance Jordan, “The Household and the State: Transformations in the Representation of an Analogy from Aristotle to James I,” *Modern Language Quarterly* 54 (1993): 307-26.

³² Lewalski also emphasizes progressive knowledge but finds more room for presumption, trial and error, and the real challenge of the Garden’s overgrowth (“Innocence and Experience”).

I from the influence of thy looks receive
 Access in every virtue . . .

 Why shouldst not thou like sense within thee feel
 When I am present? . . .

 . . . tender love enjoins,
 That I should mind thee oft, and mind thou me.
 (9.309–58)

Furthermore, their tutorials have always been at her pleasure, not for her deficiency; she absents herself from the astronomy dialogue, not incapable “of what was high: such pleasure she reserv’d, / Adam relating” (8.49–51). Though Eve will prove (after the fact) to have been overconfident, the dramatic form of their debate deploys crucial concerns of love, freedom, and virtue as the contents of differently motivated, competing subjectivities.³³ If Eve is reckless, Adam is anxious—understandably and justifiably so, given their stalking foe, but he is somewhat removed from objective right reason as he projects a paradise more akin to the epic narrator’s defensive sphere, “with dangers compast round” (7.27), than to abundant creation drawn with golden compasses.

Milton suggests, rather, that it is Adam’s moral intelligence, his developing grasp of his own mixed motives, that leads him to comply. Protracting the argument might eventually produce a scene of uncoerced instruction, but dramatically the debate has gone three rounds, with the temperature of Eve’s Areopagitan argument still rising. Persuasion would be a long time coming, and closure might resemble too closely the companionate marriage counseled by one of Tilney’s speakers in *The Flower of Friendship*: a wise man “little and little must gently . . . steale away [his wife’s] private will, and appetite, so that of two bodies there may be made one onely hart” (112). “Thy stay, not free, absents

³³ Dramatic modes pervade the poem, but their psychological effects here attract special attention. Arnold Stein notes Adam’s inability to read “‘what inward thence’ Eve may be feeling” (*The Art of Presence: The Poet and “Paradise Lost”* [Berkeley: University of California Press, 1977], 115), and Mary Nyquist sees a shift from ritual to dramatic mode producing “a radically new form of mimesis” by which Adam and Eve appear “psychologically layered, complexly interiorized” (“Reading the Fall: Discourse and Drama in *Paradise Lost*,” *English Literary Renaissance* 14 [1984]: 206, 211).

thee more" (9.372): the uncertainty that motivated Adam's first, gentle seizing of Eve's hand now dictates that he risk her withdrawal of it.

When the pair rejoin, it is across the widest gap ever separating humans: the pre- and postlapsarian. Adam's insistence on crossing to Eve forces to the surface the potential subversiveness of all companionate traditions.³⁴ As Renaissance writers understood, friendship, the supposedly originating cell of social organization, may also harbor an exclusive intimacy or "alternative moral universe" disastrous for broader duties and obligations.³⁵ But Milton perplexes judgment through the enormity of the moment. Despite the insistence of some that Adam should have divorced Eve or run from her in holy terror—inviting us to chorus, ruefully or righteously, "too true"—his refusal to become a pastoral elegist or survivor of lost intimacy (a state Milton well knew, and one he made sure Adam experienced early) evokes a sympathy that no more exposes our fallen sentimentality than it tests a difficult honesty: our admission that Adam's choice is one we might *not* have made. We might well have shrunk under the threat of incalculable Paternal wrath and slunk (to use that Miltonic word) behind the shelter of piety, hoping that if heartfelt motives could not excuse Adam's disobedience, ignoble ones would not be held against us. Milton forces the question with a formal and thematic counterpoint: the

³⁴ Many blame Adam for not thinking of the proper alternative. But if William Empson overstates Adam's case for mistrusting God (*Milton's God* [Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981], 189), he gets closer to the moment than Fish's advice that "he can live without her as he has before" and assurance that "it is not inconceivable that the Almighty should find a way both to fulfil justice and to show mercy" (*Surprised by Sin: The Reader in "Paradise Lost,"* 2d ed. [Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1998], 263, 269–70). God so promises at 3.132, but his meaning provokes heated debate in heaven (cf. Lieb, *Sineus of Ulysses*, 76–97), and the solution fills the intuitive angels with wonder—even doubt about the Father's reaction—when the Son introduces it (3.271–3).

³⁵ The phrase is taken from Judith N. Shklar, *Redeeming American Political Thought*, ed. Stanley Hoffmann and Dennis F. Thompson (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998), 14. A striking Renaissance example is Montaigne on the friend of Gracchus, who confessed that he would have burned his city's temples had Gracchus so commanded, because "they were friends more than citizens, friends more than friends or enemies of their country . . . committed . . . absolutely to each other" (139–40). Cf. Augustine's view that Adam overvalued his social bond with Eve, a standard gloss on Adam's choice since C. S. Lewis, *A Preface to "Paradise Lost"* (1942; London: Oxford University Press, 1960), 68.

Son's offer of self-sacrifice in book 3. Anne Ferry rightly notes the difference: "His choice is to die *with* Eve, not for her."³⁶ But Adam's choice is no unholy parody: it scarcely suffers in comparison to the stunned angelic silence when God calls for volunteers in book 3. None "durst upon his own head draw / The deadly forfeiture," none willing to assume mortality. Only the Son dares, but in confidence of (or while seeking reassurance about) a victorious outcome (3.246–50).

Adam's tragic sacrifice is more than a mitigating circumstance; even as it enacts a sin more culpable than Eve's, it sets the tone for their reconciliation. Locked in a perverse symmetry of "mutual accusation," they receive the intervention of the Son, but their reconciliation is not achieved by divine fiat. After the Son reascends, we witness the struggle of two variable, human eccentricities that, for all their obsessive self-concern, find their way back to each other. Adam's self-lacerating soliloquy (10.720–844), coursing through "evasions vain . . . through Mazes," generates self-pity but also moral lucidity—a longing to die for rather than merely to die with (10.819–21). No less crucial is the Muse he names: "O Conscience." Darkening what God promised would be man's internal "guide" and "umpire" into an "abyss of fears / And horrors" (3.194–7, 10.842), Milton echoes Lutheran and Calvinist anxiety. More specifically, he alludes to Hamlet's death-obsessed soliloquy, which ends "Thus conscience does make cowards of us all," referring to consciousness as well as moral conscience, a complex, individual interiority. Shakespeare's context clarifies Milton's use of *Hamlet*. Hamlet's soliloquy ends as Ophelia approaches her estranged lover and endures a misogynistic tirade. Adam's ends with the approach of Eve, whose longing to restore their intimacy must endure his misogyny. By revealing herself as a congruent tangle of self-questioning and willing self-sacrifice ("Mee mee only just object of his ire" [10.936]), she (unlike Ophelia) can become an active force that "break[s] the hard shell of Adam's self-centeredness," a connection originating in, and reaching for, "human depth."³⁷

³⁶ Ferry, *Milton's Epic Voice: The Narrator in "Paradise Lost"* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1963), 60.

³⁷ Anthony Yu argues that Milton avoids any "immediate efficacy" of the Son's appearance on their misery and postpones mention of prevenient grace in order to open a space for human agency ("Life in the Garden: Freedom and the Image of

Eve's initiative despite Adam's rage not only highlights her agency but restores mutuality. Her offer of self-sacrifice is only indirectly an *imitatio Christi*; dramatically it repeats and matches Adam's choice, at which she cried:

O glorious trial of exceeding Love,
 Illustrious evidence, *example high!*
Ingaging me to emulate.
 (9.961-3; my emphasis)

However misguided or self-regarding her praise or his choice, Adam's is the only example of self-sacrifice she has ever known.³⁸ And it is what she now emulates, redeeming the insecure rivalry intimated at her fall (9.817-25) as an ethical impulse. The two, who began their lives by reciprocally shaping each other, return to form amid the wreckage.

Paradise Lost views our first disobedience as both making redemption necessary and showing us worthy of it, and it involves us in this view by insisting simultaneously on the interior and the exterior of events. Balachandra Rajan and others have proposed a "two-poem theory," a doubleness of form that generates a multiplicity of continually renegotiated readings. Similar approaches find Milton's urgent moral concerns requiring a "Christian negative capability," a "dialogic" form whose

God in *Paradise Lost*," *Journal of Religion* 60 [1980]: 271). Of course, the Holy Spirit may even now manifest God's "motions in [man]" rather than man's own, "variable and vain / Self-left" (11.3, 92-3), but I find that Eve's proposal of double suicide requires too convenient a switching on and off of divine current. Opposing views are summarized by Yu and by Georgia B. Christopher, *Milton and the Science of the Saints* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1982), esp. 163-4 n. 25. See also Daniel W. Doerksen, "'Let There Be Peace': Eve as Redemptive Peacemaker in *Paradise Lost*, Book X," *Milton Quarterly* 31 (1997): 124-30. Kerrigan and Braden ingeniously propose that Eve plays therapist by mimicking Adam's despair (216-8).

³⁸ Most condemnations of Adam's act (except for those of a few hard-liners) concede the partial rightness of A. J. A. Waldock's emotional response ("*Paradise Lost*" and *Its Critics* [Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1947], 47), then dismiss it for higher ends. I do not think that dismissal is necessary if one keeps the paradoxical function of Adam's example in mind. I take the narrator's comment (9.990-9) to be as concerned with warding off facile sanctimony as it is with chastising sentimentality. See also Waldock's reply to the charges of Adam's "uxoriousness": "In his love, as in anyone's love, there are many strains" (47).

search for truth proceeds without leaping to “transcendental solutions.”³⁹ Such views are, as we have already seen, antithetical to monist arguments, but each mode also draws its peculiar energy from the other. I conclude, therefore, by glancing at one more monist—one ultimately committed to the formalism (and ethics) of a singular overview.

The ingenuity and influence of Fish’s *Surprised by Sin* have so often been celebrated and decried that there is little need for summary.⁴⁰ I am most struck by the rhetorical aggression with which the book internalizes poetic form as an event in “the reader’s” mind, teaching this singular figure the oneness of all value and casting ambiguity as a trap laid to expose his perversity. Fish deploys all-or-nothing arguments to inspire, even to ensure, controversy, for the critics who find the poem exceeding its “framework of . . . legalistic theology” can only prove his point. It is not the poem but “its readers [who] are ambiguous, and their ambiguities (crookednesses) are reflected in the interpretations they arrive at. There is, however, only one true interpretation of *Paradise Lost*” (272). As a term of deformation, *crookednesses* judges those who resist this truth as not merely sinful from a (supposedly) seventeenth-century perspective but sinful in fact. The pugnacity of Fish’s tone—as important, I think, as his rigorous (and rigorist) argument—returns in his performative 1998 preface, which fully indulges his taste for using mocking hyperbole and dichotomizing slogans to bait his

³⁹ Rajan cites Barker’s important and ambivalent essay (106). Cf. Quint on the “double plot” structured by opposing epic and romance modes (303); and Belsey on the poem as “two texts” (60). Other quotations are from Rumrich, *Milton Unbound*, 22; and Wittreich, 135. See also Michael Lieb, “‘Two of Far Nobler Shape’: Reading the Paradisal Text,” and Stephen M. Fallon, “Intention and Its Limits in *Paradise Lost*: The Case of Bellerophon,” in Benet and Lieb, 114–32, 161–79.

⁴⁰ Rumrich’s *Milton Unbound* offers the most trenchant critique; Fish’s new preface to *Surprised by Sin* makes the fullest (and most celebratory) defense. He rightly denies Rumrich’s charge of an “anticarnal bias” (xv) but exaggerates its importance for Rumrich’s larger aesthetic, ethical, and psychological objections. Fish’s fundamental reliance on Augustine’s distinction of *caritas* and *cupiditas*, while different from that of body and spirit, authorizes (and occasionally demands) “reductive” critical readings in both theological and aesthetic senses. Despite contrasts in method and subject, Fish’s assumptions are closer to those of D. W. Robertson Jr.’s *Preface to Chaucer: Studies in Medieval Perspectives* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1962), than to Lewis’s *Preface to “Paradise Lost,”* with which Fish’s book is often compared. Robertson, however, regards the truth value of hierarchical readings as historically bracketed.

critics for their liberal humanist or "proto-postmodern" Miltons (232, 272, xli, xliii).⁴¹

Fish's book is still engaging as a kind of weight machine, offering vigorous sets of resistance exercises to test ideas about unquestioned obedience. Its very remorselessness provides at least one angle on the Milton who would "form" or "pattern" a prose theology as a prosthetic memory or exoskeleton, a protection against uncertainty should he need to give an account of his beliefs (*De Doctrina Christiana*, in *CPW*, 6:128, 121). But for other concerns we need to leave the gym and go hiking. Fish has little to say about human intimacy other than to insist on the "hierarchical relationship" of Adam and Eve that is "the basis of their happiness" (224), or about why human freedom, happiness, and affection even matter other than to testify to our being "tethered" to our source (xxi). A disposition to find in the search for intelligibility occasions for exposure, humiliation, and discipline until reason learns to "police itself" has little to say about a Milton who is drawn to heretical ideas or who insists that God reveals the way "only to the individual faith of each man, and demands of us that any man who wishes to be saved should work out his beliefs for himself" (*De Doctrina Christiana*, in *CPW*, 6:118). Finally, despite an insistence that "all forms—except the ever-receding form of truth—hold out the temptation of idolatry" ("Driving the Letter," 249), Fish would sit astride the ever-receding apocalyptic truth, like Slim Pickens waving triumphantly at the end of *Dr. Strangelove*. The aftermath is not the promised plenitude transcending merely human artifacts (including the poem itself), a "unity, infused at every point with a single stable meaning," when we'll meet again and "God may be all in all" (1 Cor. 15:28). We are left, rather, with a substitute, critical artifact whose "deep" circularity and explana-

⁴¹ See also the conclusion of the 1998 preface to *Surprised by Sin*, which leaps from a defense of the "effort spent by God, by Milton, and by me clamping down on energies seeking to break free" to a peroration combining echoes of Aristotle's *Ethics* with the coerciveness of bumper-sticker evangelism (lxvi–lxvii). The self-consuming nature of Fish's own energy, however, may be gleaned from the fact that, while he once praised the "rich and varied" possibilities of institutional activity ("Driving from the Letter: Truth and Indeterminacy in Milton's *Areopagitica*," in Nyquist and Ferguson, 252), he now looks down displeased at the scurrying of academics, "busy and full of movement (and publications), . . . its randomness and openness to surprise finally (at least to me) dispiriting (pun intended)" (lxii).

tory power are still (Fish assures us) unsurpassed, still anticipating and discounting all objections "in advance" (lxv–lxvi). It avoids self-idolatry (and self-enclosure) by openly courting hostility, provoking the countering voices it needs to continue making its rounds.⁴²

Paradise Lost, by contrast, shows us an author who, for all his contentiousness, confronts with real hunger a various world teeming with others' thoughts and passions. The form of the poem is finally not circular, or, if it is, it has a hole in the top, as Carey says about its *primum mobile*, for getting in and out. It is a form to which readers keep returning, not for irrefutable arguments or periodic moral tune-ups but for continual rethinkings and reformations of the world all before them.

⁴² Quotations from Fish, *Surprised by Sin*, 224, xxi, 240; Fish, "Driving from the Letter," 249; Fish, *Surprised by Sin*, 354.

