

# A 'CURIOUS MIXTURE'

The Reader and Hierarchy

in

John Milton's

*Paradise Lost*

By

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**TITLE:** A 'Curious Mixture': The Reader and Hierarchy in John Milton's *Paradise Lost*

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## ABSTRACT

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This thesis has a two-fold purpose: to explore the criterion used by the reader to hierarchically arrange the epic's characters and to examine the discrepancy between the reader's preconceived and actual interpretations of the hierarchy within *Paradise Lost*. Since I believe that each reader experiencing the epic expects its characters to maintain certain attributes, the crux of my thesis will be to determine if the reader can reconcile his or her expectations about the nature of hierarchy with the actual hierarchy as presented in Milton's text. To better understand *Paradise Lost* in a way that has not hitherto been studied, I have developed a new perspective—the cognitive paradigm—which centers around the way in which readers structure their experiences. This approach encourages readers to re-structure their current interpretations of the epic's events when new information or schema is presented to them. Although Fish describes the poem's methods as a “programme of reader harassment” (1967: 4), I maintain that *Paradise Lost* invites its readers to embrace the opportunity to re-visit our old assumptions in order to fully experience the text.

Chapter One sets forth the dual task of outlining my area of interest and positing an alternative framework for which to analyze the text. Chapter Two focuses on exploring the different attributes of Adam and Eve to determine if the traditional hierarchical reading is supported, whereby Adam possesses superior qualities to his female counterpart. Chapter Three examines the divine and demonic entities of God and Satan and prompts us to consider how Milton's portrayal of these characters affects our understanding of the hierarchy. Chapter Four concludes with a brief overview and offers its readers future points to consider.

## DEDICATIONS

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My mentor, for helping me pursue “Things unattempted” (I. 16) with such patience; indeed “Well hast thou taught the way that might direct/ [My] knowledge” (V. 508-509)

My parents, for all those “thousand decencies that daily flow/ From all [your] words and actions” (VIII. 601-602)

A simple and sincere thank you.

**NN:** “[I]n whom my thoughts find all repose” (V. 28), your friendship has always been appreciated.

**SU:** The “Deep scars of Thunder [that were] intrencht” fused with your “courage never to submit or yield” (I. 601, 109) helped push me that much further... that and the prospect of a sunny beach! “Methinks I feel new strength within me rise” (X. 243)!

**GV:** When I was told to “Dream not of other Worlds,” I knew I had to awaken and find you “or for ever to deplore/ [Your] loss, and other pleasures all abjure” (VIII. 175, 478-480). Now, “Our State cannot be sever’d” for we shall remain “one Flesh, one Heart, one Soul” (IX. 958; VIII. 499), whether at a gala or in a swimming pool.

**RU:** Does it really matter “Whether the Sun... / Rise on the Earth, or Earth rise on the Sun” (VIII. 160-161)? Even if the Sun “Be Center to the World”, I will always attend, “Pleas’d with thy words no less than thou with mine” (VIII. 123, 247-248)... Can we both say “Walden” in unison?

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## CHAPTER ONE

### The Mental Pinnacle: Addressing the Miltonic Challenge

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“It ain’t so much the things we don’t know that get us into trouble. It’s the things we know that just ain’t so” — Artemus Ward, *Personality: Strategies and Issues*

Although *Paradise Lost* has been dismissed as a “monument to dead ideas” (Raleigh as quoted in Steadman 1968: 3), this sepulchral verdict falls short of justice and accuracy. *Paradise Lost* is an epic that remains in the canon of literary masterpieces precisely because its ideas are not written in stone: it can be continuously re-interpreted. Indeed, different aspects of the text continually urge the reader to contradictory responses, to reinterpretation. If, on the one hand, we choose to focus on what the narrative voice asserts, we are then left unsatisfied, wondering why the events transpired as they did. If, on the other hand, we choose to focus on our emotional responses to the characters and events in the epic, we then seem to be untrue to Christian doctrine. Milton’s epic, as Lewalski points out, is “preeminently a poem about knowing and choosing... for the reader” (1985: 3). By manipulating our responses to the text, *Paradise Lost* perpetually calls our assumptions into question. Though it is apparent that “we had best throw the book away if we really wish to remain pure” (Crosmann 58), the epic’s seductive tones invite us to bring some resolution to our discrepant responses. It is these discrepancies between the reader’s perception of the epic’s characters and the actual attributes of the epic’s characters which I am interested in<sup>1</sup>.

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<sup>1</sup> The terms “perception” and “actual” need clarification before I continue my discussion. In the context that I will be employing these terms, “perception” refers to an assumption which the reader maintains *before* engaging the text; “actual” refers to the attributes of a character that are evident to the reader *while* he or she is engaging the text. When the reader is confronted with attributes or events that are *different* from the assumptions that he or she arrives at *Paradise Lost* with, the reader is forced to examine his or her responses to the text. Thus, when I use the phrase “the reader’s *perception*”, I am actually referring to the reader’s expectations or presuppositions of Milton’s characters. Throughout my thesis, I will be proposing that the manner in which the characters are portrayed throughout the epic—the *actual* presentation of Milton’s characters—is inconsistent with how the readers expect Milton’s characters to act or behave. This inconsistency—the discrepancy between the reader’s perception of the characters and the actual characteristics evident in *Paradise Lost*—is the crux of my thesis.

The powers of reading and criticism are not diametrically opposed as some critics maintain (Fish 1967: 92, 143), but are one and the same. We are unable to really separate them; we can only criticize what we have read and as we read, we inevitably criticize—we interpret, judge, applaud or disapprove. Thus, the “act of reading is, in its very nature, interpretative, a making of decisions” (Crosman 3). *Paradise Lost* forces us as readers to make decisions about a multitude of subjects, especially about the idea of hierarchy. It has been pointed out by a plethora of critics that Eve is portrayed as an inferior being (Blessington 63-66; Lewis, Musacchio 79-82) and that Satan’s character can be interpreted heroically (Hamilton 17-25; Reid). Although other critics have certainly argued that Milton upset natural order within the epic’s structure, I wish to propose that the idea of hierarchy is severely questioned in *Paradise Lost* not so much through the story line of the epic as through the reader’s **reactions** to the events of the epic. The hierarchical framework that is being questioned asserts the premise that Adam is superior to Eve and that God’s divine attributes allow him to occupy “unequal’d” the highest position in the Elizabethan chain of being. I believe that the reader arrives at Milton’s text with a set of preconceived beliefs and assumptions, and these assumptions subtly force the reader to perceive and experience *Paradise Lost* in a particular manner. Many questionable—even erroneous—beliefs have cognitive origins and can be traced to imperfections in our capacities to process information and draw conclusions. We hold many beliefs that seem to be sensible conclusions, consistent with the available information or evidence, until a new perspective leads us to re-evaluate them. *Paradise Lost* is a work of genius because it both encourages us to accept convention in the form of hierarchy, and yet spurs us to protest against the accepted natural order of that same hierarchy.

The term “natural order” is, in itself, problematic. “Hierarchy” refers to a structural placing of items within a system to understand their relation to one another; an item that is ranked in the third position, for example, is considered superior to or above an item that is allocated to the fourth position within the hierarchy. But a barrage of questions arises in response to the presumed “natural order” implicitly intact within *Paradise Lost*, beginning with the term’s very definition. Who defines a “natural order” and, subsequently, who decides upon the arrangement of the items in such a natural

order? Why do we even have a desire to hierarchically arrange and rank the components? Does the “natural” in the term “natural order” mean that such a hierarchy is an inherent paradigm that we instinctively adhere to? Yet, what to most seventeenth-century readers was “natural” is to the modern reader merely traditional. Since the term “natural order” is so problematic, I will limit my usage of this term and instead employ the term “hierarchy” or “traditional hierarchy”. By doing so, I am hoping to signal to my readers that *Paradise Lost* interrogates hierarchy within its modern audience as much as within its contemporary audience. The content of the hierarchy may have changed, but the concept remains. Indeed, while seventeenth-century readers may have interpreted *Paradise Lost* according to hierarchical conventions prevalent in their society’s ideology, modern readers’ interpretations have generally been just as restricted because of our assumption that Milton’s text must be confined to supporting that structure, even though it is no longer part of our dominant ideology. Modern readers, familiar with the conventional hierarchical framework, have not generally attempted to question the *concept* of hierarchy in *Paradise Lost*; indeed, any productive discourse of hierarchy has been resisted by readers’ unwillingness to explore and challenge such traditional concepts, and yet I believe the questioning of the concept of hierarchy is essential to the activity of Milton’s epic.

As discussed earlier, a hierarchy refers to the arrangement of items, “characters” in the case of *Paradise Lost*, in a top-down fashion, using a common criterion. Although the term hierarchy is not as misleading as “natural order”, hierarchy nevertheless has its own problems, because of the possibility of alterations or ambiguities or misunderstandings in the criterion used to rank the members of the group. Characters are differentiated from one another on the basis of their distinctly individual qualities and their subsequent social roles. Differentiation, of course, does not automatically suggest that differences in personal qualities or roles are ranked as “superior” or “inferior”. As Heller notes, “positions may be differentiated from one another and yet not ranked relative to each other. For example, in our society, the position of the adolescent is generally not considered superior to the infant, merely different” (67). However, it is very difficult to maintain differentiation without ranking, particularly when *Paradise Lost* insists



we measure one character against another. According to this understanding of the term “hierarchy”, a hierarchy *is* definitely present in *Paradise Lost*. The hierarchy that Milton relies upon in *Paradise Lost* is apparently a conventional one; seventeenth-century readers arrived at Milton’s epic with the preconceived assumptions that God is ranked higher than Satan and that Adam is similarly ranked higher than Eve. Modern readers, if they do not arrive with these assumptions, are quickly directed toward them by the text. But the hierarchy is silently embedded within the text; Milton never directly comments on why the characters are arranged in the manner that they are, and a discrepancy between the actual hierarchical arrangement and the reader’s perception of the hierarchical arrangement results from the *criterion* used to hierarchically arrange the characters within the text. Each reader brings something unique to the text: his or her own personal assumptions and perceptions. Since each reader experiencing *Paradise Lost* must supply his or her own criterion for ranking God above Satan and Adam above Eve, multiple interpretations of the epic and its characters are possible. Is this an error on Milton’s part? Was his belief in the traditional hierarchy so ingrained that he could not foresee the slippage between his readers’ acceptance of hierarchy and their emotional responses to characters? Although it would be interesting to fully explore the extent of the disharmony between Milton’s and the reader’s responses to the epic, this would be an impossible feat to accomplish. Instead, I am transferring the emphasis from Milton’s interests and intentions (which are available to us at best from a distance) to how the reader’s perception of the characters causes the notion of hierarchy to be questioned. More specifically, if the reader has indeed used character attributes for his or her ranking criterion as many critics have believed (Carey, Stone, Gulden), how does the reader maintain the allegiance to implicit hierarchy in the face of such challenges? As Crosman points out, “the disparity between intention and execution becomes a disparity between reader’s expectations and reading experience” (13).

The reader arrives at Milton’s epic with his or her own perceptions about *how* the hierarchy has been arranged. The reader expects God to occupy the highest position within the structure and expects Adam to be ranked higher than his female counterpart. While there is no dispute that this is what actually is present in *Paradise Lost*— God is

indeed the highest and Adam's status is higher than his wife's station—the reader's assumptions about why such a hierarchical arrangement occurs in the epic are the focus of this thesis. The reader assumes that each character has certain attributes which directly result in his or her placement within the hierarchy. However, when different character attributes are revealed throughout the course of the epic, the reader must then examine how such unexpected attributes affect his or her understanding of the existing hierarchy. Thus, the reader's *perception* of the characters causes the concept of hierarchy to be questioned. It is the discrepancy between the reader's expectation of the characters' attributes and the actual attributes as portrayed by Milton that I am most interested in.

Many critics have assumed that *Paradise Lost* affirms the traditional concept of hierarchy. In the 1960s, critics primarily limited their discussions of the epic to in-depth character studies (Stein 1968; Steadman 1968; Broadbent, Burden 21-40; Carey). Although the critics of this decade explored the "intellectual background" (Steadman 1968: 8) of *Paradise Lost* using a multitude of literary approaches, almost all of these critics emphasized the problems of characterization; indeed, they were particularly interested in why God can or cannot be viewed as tyrannous and, parallel to this, why Satan can or cannot be viewed as having heroic qualities. Critics focused on the text's presentation of God and Satan, arguing that if God can, at some points in the epic, lack heroic qualities, can Milton's Devil then be portrayed in a heroic light during the unfolding of the events? Critics were mainly interested in exploring the differences between characters, especially between the divine and demonic entities. In his study of *Paradise Lost*, for example, Northrop Frye avers that there are four orders of existence in Milton's epic: divine order, angelic order, human order and demonic order. As he outlines in his work, *Five Essays*, Frye maintains that it is only the members pertaining to the divine order who have free will and can really act since "the quality of the divine act reveals itself in *Paradise Lost* as an act of creation, which becomes an act of recreation or redemption after the fall of man" (23). For the critics of this period, the angelic order serves as moral models for human action while the demonic order represents the antithesis of the angelic order.

In the 1970s, critics began focusing less on the differences between characters and instead concentrated on understanding the relationship between characters. Various critics such as Ryken, Weber, Crump, LeComte and Kastor have claimed that the issue of identifying the hero of the epic is tangential to the crux of the epic; Berry states that “no hero in the poem is clearly and unequivocally the hero because Milton devotes the most lines to him” (220) and Shawcross maintains that Satan is the hero “only if one believes that God is wrong in his treatment of the angels” (1969: 33). Through this process of comparison, contrast and judgement, critics recognized that the divine and non-divine characters alike require a re-interpretation of their attributes and values.

By the 1980s, with the growth of new approaches to literature, the focus of criticism shifted from the meaning of *Paradise Lost* to its status as a core text in our culture. To feminist critics such as Wittreich, McColley and Walker, the poem’s existence as a classical text is “an instance of the way in which other texts— especially those by women— have been ignored in favour of the great works” (Stocker 10). These critics argue that such texts are evaluated by masculine principles and aver that even the notion of hierarchy is an instance of male patriarchal attitudes. The focus during this decade was mainly on the epic being a manifestation of that patriarchal ideology which oppresses women. Corum noted that Eve is joined to Adam only at the expense of her own identity and Froula deconstructs patriarchy in the poem by “demonstrating how its power depends upon Eve’s belief” (335).

If the critical approach of the 1980s focused on creating a new gender paradigm, the 1990s movement was interested in maintaining a positive female perspective on Milton’s epic. Critics sought to appreciate the “complexity of the idea of women as it took shape in the work of Milton” (Walker 3) as well as to explore the idea of Eve as a source of sexuality and strength (McColley, Martin, Moore, Schwartz).

Although each of these approaches has its merits, they all tend to neglect the total structure of the epic and focus attention instead on isolated ideas or sections, missing the crux of the Miltonic challenge. I believe that the Miltonic challenge is to experience the textual richness of the epic poem using a hierarchical perspective. Just as Satan’s ambition is to rival God’s position by challenging the traditional monarchy, so is it

my ambition to challenge old assumptions and arrive at a better understanding of why readers attempt to resist the hierarchy proposed by Milton. This is precisely why *Paradise Lost* remains an intriguing text, despite the volumes of criticism it has received: it can constantly be re-evaluated and uses its own form and structure as the subject and measure of re-evaluation.

Most of the aforementioned critical viewpoints are rooted in “the disintegration of Milton’s universe and the consequent disintegration of his epic” (Steadman 1968: 9). Unable to react to the poem in its entirety or to understand the epic through the poet’s eyes, the modern sensibility reacts to the poem using a reductionist approach, looking only at isolated parts. Moreover, by concentrating only on the speeches of the characters, we have, in some ways, allowed our critical presuppositions to mislead us. We cannot, as Ferry suggests, “simply respond to the characters directly because in the poem, without the aid of the inspired narrator, we could neither see nor hear them” (15). Although Ferry argues that we, as readers, “can understand [Milton’s] world only as it is interpreted to us by the narrator” (115), she neglects to account for the ways in which the reader’s assumptions influence his or her understanding of *Paradise Lost*. The speeches of Milton’s characters combined with the accounts delivered to us by the epic’s narrator generate an incomplete reading experience. I believe that in order to truly experience the textual richness of Milton’s epic, the reader’s previously maintained beliefs must be explored. In his book, *Surprised by Sin*, Fish investigates the nature of the “reader” and begins to persuade us of the importance of the pattern of fault. However, as Crosman points out, Fish’s one grave weakness is that he “feels that he has to construct an elaborate argument about the ‘seventeenth century reader’ which soon becomes more prescriptive than the usual critical assumptions about Milton’s reader” (11). The traditional and orthodox approaches to this great epic are inadequate and outdated; indeed, it becomes necessary to question what is considered to be “natural” or assumed. Comparing the motives of the epic characters and understanding the nature of the characters force us to re-evaluate the criterion used in setting up the hierarchy. My critical aim is to reveal how a reader’s assumptions and responses clash and in doing so alter the hierarchical structures embedded implicitly within the text. In *Paradise Lost*, we must constantly investigate the

framework being used to assign interpretations to the lines of the text. Instead of assigning rank and status to the epic characters on the basis of attributes alone, the challenge is to devise a new classification system for the characters. By examining an aspect of *Paradise Lost* that has not hitherto been fully studied, I believe I am opening the doors for a potentially new critical paradigm: the cognitive framework.

Adapted from the cognitive field in psychology, the cognitive paradigm intends to explore *how* hierarchies are formed when interpreting textual details. This approach focuses on how readers structure their experiences, transforming environmental stimuli into applicable information. Human beings actively interpret new information into an organized network of already accumulated knowledge which is referred to as a “schemata” (Davison 16). If new information is not congruent with the current organizational system within one’s mind, the old network must then be re-structured to properly accommodate and process the information. If we force new information into outdated schemata, there will be a disparity between the new interpretation and the old assumptions, causing stress on the old schemata. If either the schemata or the new stimuli are not appropriately re-organized, the new stimuli will not be properly processed; indeed, one can very well lose or misplace future new information. Thus, if readers are either reluctant to be unsettled or are unwilling to examine the disparity between their preconceived account of the hierarchy and the actual hierarchy itself, they will be missing half the text, and as Johnson admits, the perusal of *Paradise Lost* will be “a duty rather than a pleasure” (64). The traditional schemata—the hierarchical organization of the characters with God at the top and Adam above Eve—must be compared with the events of the epic and the reader must be prepared to refine his perceptions so that “his understanding will be more proportionate to truth” (Fish 1980: 22). To date, no critical approach has been able to account for this discrepancy, although partial attempts have been made by critics working with particular segments of *Paradise Lost* (Croswan 5-16; Fish 1967: 9-29; Ferry, 14-19). By exploring how the reader’s concept of hierarchy is affected by the criterion he or she uses to hierarchically arrange the characters, a more complete understanding of Milton’s epic can be achieved by the reader. I believe that this

cognitive approach will serve as a useful framework for me to explore how hierarchy is questioned in *Paradise Lost*.

The following chapters are therefore “exploratory diggings” (Steadman 1968: 8) into the strata of ideas and motifs beneath the surface of the epic poem. Chapter Two focuses on differentiating Adam’s attributes from Eve’s in order to re-evaluate the criterion used to set up the existing hierarchy. In a traditional hierarchy, it has been assumed that the superior being must have superior qualities to the inferior being. If, as past critics have suggested, Adam is to be considered superior to his wife, he must consequently possess superior attributes and values to his female counterpart. I intend to disprove this theory, showing instead that Eve’s attributes can be deemed to be as impressive as Adam’s. Similarly, Chapter Three examines the divine and demonic natures of God and Satan. If we can successfully challenge the notion that God has unequivocally noble attributes and Satan has unequivocally ignoble attributes, such a reading will yield a different experience of the epic. I wish to illustrate the necessity of abandoning the old criterion that we have clung to when re-creating what hierarchy is. In its tones of sincerity and conviction, *Paradise Lost* retains the power to startle. Although Milton unquestionably conceived of poetry as having “an interior correspondence with the concealed truths of being”, it can also be argued that Milton clearly believed that his poetry “grasped within it the central nature of things that existed beyond the formulation of the discursive intellect” (Demaray 8, 21).

CHAPTER TWO  
One Flesh, Two Minds: Exploring the Degree of Difference in  
Adam and Eve's Characters

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“Women are not men’s equals in anything except responsibility. We are not their inferiors, either, or even their superiors. We are quite simply different races”—Phyllis McGinley, *The Promise of the Heart*

In the epic *Paradise Lost*, there exists an implicit imbalance between the sexes. Traditionally, Adam has been regarded as superior to Eve. Indeed, many critics (Weber 45-51, Bush 1945: 83-84; Coram) adopt the ethical approach to *Paradise Lost* and use the well-known principle of hierarchy as their moral principle, believing that Eve is Adam’s inferior because everything has its proper role and rank in the universe. Those critics who assume this slant tend to either “apply the concept of hierarchy microcosmically, whereupon the interpretation centers on the hierarchy of reason and passion, or they apply it macrocosmically, whereupon it centers on the creature’s adherence to his place in the chain of being” (Weber 45). Although the reader can arrive at the epic and find an implicit confirmation of the hierarchy embedded within the epic, I intend to focus on examining the several *criteria* used to set up the existing hierarchy. Since each of “Our First Parents” (IX. 234)<sup>2</sup> has his or her own distinct and separate qualities, the focus of this chapter will be to fully explore their attributes in an attempt to determine which qualities are deemed by the reader to be superior. Theoretically, according to the hierarchy implied within the text of the epic, Adam, the superior being should possess the superior—or at least the “better”—characteristics than his wife. It is my belief that, based on the criteria used to hierarchically arrange Adam above Eve, disharmony

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<sup>2</sup> All quotations from *Paradise Lost* are taken from the edition edited by Christopher Ricks (New York: Penguin Books Limited, 1968). There are, however, many versions available of Milton’s text, ranging from Robert Shepard’s non-poetic rendition to the Scolar Press Limited publication, entitled *Milton’s Paradise Lost: A Poem Written in Ten Books* (Menston, Great Britain: Scolar Press, 1972). With such a variety in the versions offered by editors, Milton’s epic has recently been studied from a grammatical perspective since “characterizations of Milton’s style have tended to be sweeping” (Emma 138). Punctuation is also a matter not necessarily divorced from the more creative aspects of a poet’s style. Indeed, as Treip states, “a study of Milton’s punctuation may well have something to tell us about his poetic intentions” (9). Although this topic is tangential to my thesis, it is important to note that the editors’ choices about punctuation, spelling and grammar influence a reader’s responses to and interpretations of the text itself.

between the reader's expectation of the hierarchy and the actual hierarchy is the inevitable result. Despite various critics' explicit delineation of spheres of responsibility and the idea that the "woman, as good wife, is merely the example of his [the husband's] ability to govern"<sup>3</sup> (Hutson 21), *Paradise Lost* not only shows a creative autonomy in the actions of Eve that reduces the power of such stereotypes, but also forces the reader to re-evaluate his or her assumptions about the hierarchy.

From the chronological beginning<sup>3</sup> of the narrative, Adam and Eve are introduced to the reader as equals. Initially, God has refrained from providing the first human with a companion. Unsatisfied with the companionship of nature alone, Adam argues his "single imperfection" and "unity defective" unless he is provided with someone with whom he can share "Collateral love" (VIII. 423, 425, 426). Adam's request for a partner does not reflect the commitment to hierarchy that will later be typical of him; indeed, the exercise of power seems far from Adam's mind as he envisions a partner who will dispel the pain of his solitude. Moreover, as Frank Kermode argues, Adam's request for a companion does not stem from a desire for sexual intercourse although "presumably he [Adam] knows of the distinction between male and female through his knowledge of animals" (1960: 104). Adam initially is innocent of the dictates of patriarchy, having a set of criteria which emphasizes sameness and equality rather than any hierarchical concerns. Although Adam speaks of begetting "[l]ike of his like" (VIII. 424), he does so only in terms of "Collateral love" and "dearest amity" (VIII. 426)—terms whose connotations are at best only potentially sexual (Kermode 1960: 106). When Adam asks God for "fellowship... fit to participate/All rational delight" (VIII. 389-391), he explains his need for an equal partner, not satisfied with the companionship of "Beasts alone" (VIII. 438) since "Among unequals what society/Can sort, what harmony or true delight?" (VIII. 383-384). As Diane McColley says, Adam's reference to "rational

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<sup>3</sup> In *Tetrachordon*, Milton offers this startling freedom: "a superior and more natural law comes in that the wiser should govern the less wise, whether male or female" (653). Hunter embellishes this statement of Milton's and strongly argues that the poet encouraged women to rule man (72). Although I am not adopting Hunter's argument, I do intend to explore the concept of superiority with respect to Adam and Eve's attributes.



delight” (VIII. 391) points to at least three things: “the delight of the mutual exercise of reason (‘meet conversation’); a delight grounded in reason (‘rightly tempered’); and delight in the kind of interaction made possible by ‘proportion due’ (ratio)” (289). The struggle to arrive at an understanding of the seemingly disproportionate relationship between Adam and Eve is first apparent in Adam’s mind. Although Adam’s request for a partner is couched in terms of sameness, the reader is aware that the companion which God supplies Adam with will be very different from Adam’s early assumptions.

Before God complies with Adam’s request for a partner, agreeing that it is “not good for Man to be alone” (VIII.445), the “glorious Maker” (IV. 292) banters with his creation about his unique position in the conceptual framework. God points out that he remains alone, not needing a replica of himself or an equal partner: “From all Eternity, for none I know/ Second to mee or like, equal much less” (VIII. 406-407). It has been suggested by Turner (217) that this statement implies that God intends to create a partner for Adam who is either second to him, or, at the very least, equal to him. Adam counters God’s statement, claiming that “Thou in thyself are perfect, and in thee/ Is no deficiencie found; not so is Man” (VIII. 415-416). Although God offers to create for Adam “[t]hy *likeness*, thy fit help, thy *other self*” (VIII. 450, italics added), he does not at this point mention that his future creation will rank any lower than his first human. The epic’s narrator admits to the equality between God’s human creations: God, who decreed that he will create Adam’s “likeness” and “other self” (VIII. 450) has successfully formed Eve whom the narrator introduces as “Manlike, but different sex” (VIII. 471). As Roberta Martin points out, Adam immediately identifies Eve as his female double; indeed, the Father’s response to Adam’s request “displaces divine narcissism in his promise that Adam will get ‘likeness’ in an ‘other self’” (50). As Martin continues her analysis, she points out that the “juxtaposition of the descriptive terms ‘other’ and ‘likeness’ suggests a linguistic— and a performative— ambiguity; the paradox either erodes the idea of a difference (otherness is undetermined), or erodes the idea of sameness (likeness is undetermined)” (51). Apart from the reference to their different anatomies, Adam and Eve are not distinguished from one another. Thus, in the chronological beginning of the human epic, the traditionally accepted hierarchy— man above woman— remains only

silently implied. The reader does not give much thought to the criterion used to establish the hierarchy since there exist no events thus far which cause him/her to question Adam's assumed superior traits.

As bearers of the divine image, Adam and Eve are both assigned dignified qualities. When Satan observes and defines Adam and Eve for his own purposes, the Devil's observations reflect the conventional expectations of his audience with some differences that will take root and grow:

Two of far nobler shape erect and tall,  
 Godlike erect, with native Honour clad  
 In naked Majesty seem'd Lords of all,  
 And worthy seem'd, for in their looks Divine  
 The image of their glorious Maker shone,  
 Truth, Wisdom, Sanctitude severe and pure,  
 Severe, but in true filial freedom plac'd;  
 Whence true authority in men;  
 (IV. 288-295)

The passage continues by developing images of Adam's authority and Eve's subjection, modified by his gentleness and her willingness as they pass in "Simplicity and spotless innocence... /hand in hand... the loveliest pair/ That ever since in love's embraces met" (IV. 318, 321-322). Adam possesses a highly developed reasoning function, as indicated by his "large Front" (IV. 300), "for contemplation... and valour form'd" (IV. 297). As outlined by van Nuis, Adam's particular strengths are "those which Jung associated with the 'animus'... Adam has organizational skills and leadership abilities and he appears decisive and asserts independence" (48). Eve, on the other hand, possesses "sweet attractive Grace" (IV. 298), seductive beauty and charm. She is, as van Nuis claims, "cast in the anima role of providing emotional support, physical nourishment and companionship" (49); Eve is Adam's "accomplisht helpmeet" and "Associate" (IV. 660; IX. 227). Thus, in this compartmentalized relationship, the exposed strengths of one partner in essence constitute the hidden side of the other. Although van Nuis continues his argument to suggest that "Adam and Eve's projections arrest each other's psychological development and growth" (54), I am interested only in understanding the differences between Adam's attributes and his female counterpart's.

The first mention of the skewed relationship between the happy couple is by the narrator who introduces Adam and Eve as “not equal, as their sex not equal seemd” (IV. 296). William Porter, however, avers that too much has been made of the relationship between the sexes formulated in this passage: “Milton’s connotative use of the word ‘equal’ requires him to say that ‘both’ are ‘not equal’, which shows that the usage is nearer to our usage of ‘identical’” (100). Porter believes that Milton “seems to be saying little more than that the two differ” (100), Adam being formed for reflection and bold physical action, Eve for less strenuous and more graceful pursuits. Thus, the relationship between Adam and Eve does not provide equality in the sense of *sameness*, for Adam and Eve have different talents and their sex is “not equal” (IV. 296), but in the sense of mutual completion: not unison as Adam mistakenly assumes, but “harmony”. Adam’s inability to differentiate between the two terms results in his inevitable wrestling with the problem of Eve’s implied inferiority; subsequently, it is Adam’s confusion about Eve’s position which fuels the reader’s doubts about the nature of the hierarchy itself.

Adam, who needs a supplement to his oneness, desperately “depends on Eve to perfect his [Adam’s] lack” (Stone 33). Long ago, Arnold Stein made comments in his book, *Answerable Style*, that are apropos: “She [Eve] is a concession to the limitations, the necessary imperfection of human nature... Man, though as nearly perfect as a human creature could be, requires completion” (78). His concessive need for Eve makes Adam anxiously aware of his dependence upon God’s creation. Ironically, the spiritual lack that uncannily undermines unity assumes physical form when one of Adam’s ribs is severed from his body, from which the missing “Link of Nature” (IX. 914), Eve, is created. Adam uses this fact to better bind Eve to him and to make her view their dependency on each other as he does. He reproaches his wife for running away from him initially and he attempts to dissuade her from repeating such an offensive gesture by reminding her of how deeply indebted she is to him:

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;  
 (IV. 482-486, italics added)

Adam's deliberate emphasis of "I lent" makes it appear that he volunteered to lose a rib for Eve's benefit; the reader, however, is aware that God made this decision for Adam and that the first human did not have any input into the matter. The anguished overtones of Adam's claim that she was formed from the rib belie the perfectly painless operation he underwent: sleep "instantly fell on [him]" (VIII. 458) and while he awakens with "Life-blood streaming fresh; wide was the wound" (VIII. 467), there is no mention of any suffering undertaken by the first human. It appears that nature's "failure" in subducting Adam's rib creates a space or void within him that yearns for the being created out of what was removed; indeed, his sense of deficiency prior to the birth of Eve appears to be all the more threatening once Adam relinquishes the rib, the symbol of the "feminine that he projects onto another body" (Gulden 1998: 140). Although this space within Adam theoretically should correspond to Eve's nature—just as the rib out of which she was formed corresponds to Adam's nature—this correspondence does not take place. Adam's rib provides for Eve a complete physical being; for Adam, however, the empty space leaves him needing Eve.

Waldock points out that Adam's speech is a "curious mixture" (43): the first human oscillates between imitating his author's theories of woman's place and function—"For well I understand in the prime end/ Of Nature her th' inferior, in the mind/ And inward Faculties, which most excel" (VIII. 540-542)—and admitting that Eve's presence raises a "commotion strange" as Adam is "fondly overcome with Female charm" (VIII. 531; IX. 999). Throughout the epic, it appears that Adam is tempted to idolize Eve, to subordinate himself to "the charm of Beauty's powerful glance" (VIII. 533). God's first creation tends toward idolatry, coming dangerously close to confusing God, who is "perfect" in contradistinction to mankind's "deficiency", with Eve, "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" (VIII. 548-550). Adam comes within a shade of attributing divine perfection to an inferior creature. As Langford suggests, "it is not God's authority that [Eve] usurps, but Adam's own sexual priority" (89). To Adam, "all the world", including Adam himself, takes second place to his wife; indeed, Adam's desire for his new companion is far from being contained but is instead "all" consuming.

Adam's perceived deficiency is remarked upon by Marshall Grossman who believes that Eve is "a being potentially superior because she is supplementary, a second making that reforms what was deficient in the original" (149). It has been argued by various critics (Grossman, Schoenfeldt, Nyquist) that Eve is viewed as the one who perfects what is deficient in man; indeed, the reader perceives Adam in the role of the "dispensable human prototype... Eve seems 'not after made occasionally', created from and hence secondary to Adam, but rather as one intended first, as if God botched the job the first time, then had to revise himself" (Stone 35). Cognizant of his potentially dangerous infatuation with Eve, Adam confesses to Raphael his anxious sense of dependence upon Eve who, as his hierarchical second, should depend on him:

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.  
 (VIII. 530-533)

Describing her to Raphael as the "Object" (VIII. 535) of his affection and desire, he addresses Eve as his "Fair Consort" (IV. 610) and, superlatively, his "fairest"<sup>4</sup> (V. 18). As van Nuis elaborates, Adam misvalues the qualities associated with his wife; predictably, this misevaluation will "culminate in Adam's desire, even belief, that Eve ought to be like him" (50). Despite Raphael's admonishments to refrain from succumbing to the influence of passion, to "take heed lest Passion sway/ Thy Judgement to do aught, which else free Will/ Would not admit" (VIII. 635-637), Adam continues to express this dependency anxiety in terms of a reproach against God. He is frustrated that he cannot control at will what in his prelapsarian prudery he euphemistically refers to as the "Commotion strange" in "some part" of his body (VIII. 531). Furthermore, Adam criticizes God for having taken too much out of him and conversely, for having on Eve "bestow'd/ Too much of Ornament, in outward show/ Elaborate" (VIII. 537-539). He frets that his wife is more complete, more physically attractive and fruitful, more in control of herself. When Adam's anticipatory attempt at self-exculpation is rejected by

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<sup>4</sup> Interestingly, both Satan and Adam address the first woman as "fairest", the superlative apogee of man, who is but "fair". This suggests that Eve "beats Adam at his own original game" (Grossman 36).

Raphael, who lectures Adam to “Accuse not Nature, she hath done her part;/ Do thou but thine” (VIII. 561-562), Adam attempts to minimize the extent of his subjection. As George Musacchio states, “Adam understands the difference between inner and outer qualities but does not understand why there appears to be a discrepancy in Eve” (117); to Adam, his wife wrongly appears to be the most excellent creature even though he knows he himself is.

However, Adam’s reply that Eve’s graces “subject not” (VIII. 607) demonstrates that he grasps the distinction between impulse and action, although, as Francis Blessington says, “the will fails to check the former [impulse] at his fall” (60). Despite Adam’s attempt to minimize the extent of his subjection, his excessive physical reliance on Eve has already been made evident and a modification of the hierarchy has been made in the reader’s mind; Adam places Eve’s beauty over his superior intellect. Adam’s questioning of Eve’s place in the hierarchy subtly forces the reader to follow suit: is Adam’s lack of completeness and independence at odds with the reader’s criterion used to evaluate the superior beings in the epic? Adam’s assumed superior status appears to be in conflict with his fierce dependence on his wife. As shall be seen, because Eve surpasses the beauty of Eden in the eyes of her husband, Adam will ultimately choose to fall with her.

Throughout the text, it is apparent that Adam struggles to resolve the dichotomous ideas he harbours about the patriarchal order: he recognizes Eve as his “Sole partner” (IV. 411) but he retains an endorsement of his superior position. Although as Fuller maintains, Adam and Eve are “one being made into two” (156), Adam needs to remind himself that despite his union with Eve, he is a distinct and superior being. The hierarchical terminology is evident in Adam’s initial speeches:

[In Eve’s presence] 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*, in the mind  
 .....  
                                 ... yet when I approach  
 Her loveliness, so *absolute* she seems  
 .....  
 All *higher* knowledge in her presence falls  
 .....  
 Authority and Reason on her wait,  
 As one intended first, not after made  
 Occasionally;

(VIII. 529-556, italics added)

The discrepancies in Adam's attitudes are, however, evident in his speech. Words like "prime", "inferior", "absolute" and "higher" confuse the situation and force Adam into a choice between two equally false conceptions of their relationship: either Adam is "first" or Eve is "first".

It is important to clarify, however, that "first" does not necessarily denote "superiority". Indeed as Schoenfeld states,

Despite Milton's frequent recourse to the argument that Eve's secondary birth dictates her subordinate status—an argument whose logic would make the animals superior to humans and Lucifer superior to Christ—it is Eve rather than Adam who first questions the order of the universe, first proposes an efficient division of labour, first eats the forbidden fruit and first exercises the conciliatory power of submission (319)

Consequently, Eve's faculties, which are "less exact", are not necessarily "inferior" (VIII. 539, 541): this equation turns a quality into a quantity. When Adam later learns that his wife has fallen, his initial reaction represents a subversion of that placement of the man above the woman in the hierarchy that God had ordained and to which the Son later refers in censuring Adam. Adam, first "[s]peechless" and "pale" (IX. 894), exclaims

O fairest Creation, last and best  
 Of all God's Works, Creature in whom excell'd  
 Whatever can to sight or thought be form'd,  
 Holy, divine, good, amiable, or sweet!

How art thou lost, how on a sudden lost,  
Defac't, deflow'rd, and now to Death devote?  
(IX. 896-901)

As Tanner correctly points out, the first human commits an error before he actually takes the fruit from his wife (114), by hailing her as the best “[o]f all God’s Works” (IX. 897), thereby exalting her over himself. Instead of curbing his admiration for his wife and recognizing his wife’s proper station, Adam commits a grave error in his judgment, experiencing no protracted period of deliberation comparable to his wife’s temptation at the tree. Employing the “argument from the unequal” (Danielson 172), the Son subsequently argues that Adam should not have disobeyed a divine injunction in order to obey Eve. By heeding his inferior, Adam has neglected his superior as the “Sovran Presence” points out to his human charge:

Was shee thy God, that her thou didst obey  
Before his voice, or was shee made thy guide,  
Superior, or but equal, that to her  
Thou didst resign thy Manhood, and the Place  
Wherein God set thee above her made of thee,  
And for thee, whose perfection far excell'd  
Hers in all real dignitie: Adorn'd  
She was indeed, and lovely, to attract  
Thy Love, not thy Subjection, and her Gifts  
Were such as under Government well seem'd,  
Unseemly to bear rule, which was thy part  
And person, hadst thou known thyself aright.  
(X. 145-156)

This passage emphasizes the importance of hierarchical positioning within the text and the importance of recognizing superior attributes. Adam does not necessarily over-value Eve as some critics (Fish 1967: 78) accuse him, but at the very least, he misvalues his female counterpart’s attributes. It is, in turn, this misevaluation that prompts Adam to depend on his wife and thus wrongly assign her to a higher station.

Eve represents an alternative realm to the masculine paradigm she is expected to adhere to; indeed, her character epitomizes the independence and wholeness of man. Eve’s independence is noted from the onset of her relationship with her husband when she flies from Adam immediately after her creation. In preference to her original, Eve



contemplates her own seemingly self-generated image reflected in the pool in pointed contrast to how the “deficiency” and incompleteness of Adam led to her creation in the first place. Although Eve’s beauty disturbs Adam’s reason, she does not initially express any form of dependency on her partner but instead admits to her innocent vanity:

That day I oft remember, when from sleep  
I first awak’t, and found myself repos’d  
Under a shade on flow’rs, much wond’ring where  
And what I was, whence thither brought, and how.  
.....  
As I bent down to look, just opposite,  
A Shape within the wat’ry gleam appear’d,  
Bending to look on me, I started back,  
It started back, but pleas’d I soon return’d,  
Pleas’d it return’d as soon with answering looks  
Of sympathy and love, there I had fixt  
Mine eyes till now, and pin’d with vain desire,  
(IV. 449-452, 460-467)

Eve continues to confidently affirm her beauty when she admits to Adam that she finds him “less fair,/ Less winning soft, less amiably mild,/ Then that smooth wat’ry image” (IV. 478-480). Various critics (Corns 64-68; Burden 83-85; Ogden, Stein 1967) argue that Eve’s narcissism does not constitute a sin since it is only an innocent stage of human development that is quickly outgrown. As Barbara Lewalski describes the incident, “[Eve’s] momentary turning back displays an impulse to vanity and self-confidence, grounded in an over-valuation of the beauty, softness and mildness of the ‘smooth wat’ry image’, thus far the only human goods she understands” (1969: 110). God ends Eve’s ignorant and therefore innocent romance with her image by first imparting to her the “unmistakable Platonic concept of mirror image” (Bloom 146); the deity therefore treats Eve’s experience with narcissism as a single educative lesson. Unlike Adam, who immediately recognizes Eve as his female “other half” (IV. 488), Eve has to be instructed by the voice of God to forgo her own image and embrace Adam as her sexual counterpart. Although Eve’s narcissistic attitude is not virtuous, this episode nonetheless suggests two things: that she does not regard Adam in the same way that he regards her

and that she is independent enough to flee from him with whose image she was unimpressed.

It is interesting to note that many critics claim Eve's response to her reflection denotes a vanity and shallowness that will later make her susceptible to the wiles of Satan. What such critics fail to take note of is that at no point during her account of her creation does Eve display a marked interest in *herself*; she instead naively believes her reflection to be another entity and, upon learning that her assumptions were incorrect, she forsakes her own image in lieu of Adam "[w]hose image [Eve] art" (IV. 472). Eve's apparently narcissistic attitude should be conceived in terms of her innocent and naïve thinking. Adam's narcissism, on the other hand, has a more deliberate character and manifests itself in a dual fashion: through his delight in his own body and through his delight in Eve, a replica of himself. Adam admits that upon entering the world,

Myself I then perus'd, and Limb by Limb  
Survey'd and sometimes went, and sometimes ran  
With supple joints, as lively vigour led:  
But who I was, or where, or from what cause,  
Knew not;

(VIII. 267-271)

Although the self-absorption which Adam experiences pass as quickly, his narcissism transmutes into an altered form: a desire for a companion. Since God creates Eve in Adam's likeness according to his "heart's desire" (VIII. 451), Eve is the "creation of Adam's imagination" (Paul Stevenson 48). Adam desires Eve because she is, in essence, a part of him: "Bone of *my* Bone, Flesh of *my* Flesh, *my Self*/ Before me" (VIII. 495-496, italics added). Adam's narcissistic attitude is distinct from Eve's because it involves a consciously chosen interest in his own entity.

Contrary to many critics' evaluation of Eve's attributes, the second human exhibits wisdom that is "felt rather than seen" (Chambers 118-121; Wittreich 163). One of the central examples revolves around the angelic visitation. Many critics view Eve's contribution in this scene to be of less interest than the dialogue between Adam and Raphael (Burden 87; Bradford 37, Turner 285) with only McColley mentioning the meal "insofar as it represents an example of Eve's creativity" (114) but refraining from

connecting it to the idea of wisdom. Whereas Adam has little competence in household management, Milton's text presents Eve as highly skilled; she already understands frugality, temperance and hospitality. The approach of the angel initially takes Adam aback. Anxious to impress the "Heav'nly stranger" (V. 316), Adam drops the elaborate titles he bestows upon his wife<sup>5</sup> and unwisely suggests that she

... go with speed,  
 And what thy stores contain, bring forth, and pour  
 Abundance, fit to honour and receive  
 Our Heav'nly stranger; well we may afford  
 Our givers their own gifts, and large bestow  
 From large bestow'd, where Nature multiplies  
 Her fertile growth, and by disburd'ning grows  
 More fruitful, which instructs us not to spare.

(V. 313-320)

The unexpected social situation paradoxically yields a measure of anxiety for Adam who takes it upon himself to guide his wife through her feminine duties. Eve, aware that in Eden both speed and stores are generally unnecessary, masks her impatience with her husband and explains that "small store will serve, where store,/ All seasons, ripe for use hangs on the stalk" (V. 322-323). She continues her speech to explain to her unwise husband that an abundance of food is available for use as it is, "Save what by frugal storing firmness gains/ To nourish, and superfluous moist consumes" (V. 324-325). As Gulden concludes, Eve demonstrates a "consciousness of the problem of superfluity or excess, particularity in her correction of Adam's excessive ideas of hospitality, but also in her unwillingness to serve fruit which is excessively watery" (1998: 140). Similarly, John Guillory argues that the rhetoric of frugality is central to the text and it is Eve— not Adam— who introduces the concept (80). Unfettered by the notion of hierarchy, Eve realizes that she must mask her confidence with submissive deference to her husband; the First Mother is careful to revert to her subservient position and she makes haste in

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<sup>5</sup> Milton departs from tradition in calling the First Mother "Eve" before the Fall, according to Leonard (especially pages 36 ff). Eve's name is spoken just twice in Book VIII— once by the narrator (40) and once by Raphael (172)— while her name appears seven times in Book V. This paucity is interesting to note when set against Book IX where "Eve" appears no fewer than thirty-nine times, seven times accounted for by Adam (227, 291, 911, 921, 1017, 1164). Why should the name be absent from Adam's story of the creation of Eve, yet abundant in the Book of the Fall?

accordance with her husband's wishes. Irene Samuel points out that although Eve corrects Adam's ideas on food preparation, she then accommodates his main wish that the pair be hospitable (708). Eve's knowledge in the events surrounding the meal preparation and presentation, and her skill in husbandry markedly contrast with her husband's. Although Eve is conscious of her role as Adam's helper and her association with the natural world, she nonetheless assumes authority during this episode.

Although Adam has traditionally been assumed to be more knowledgeable than his female counterpart, Eve's reaction to Adam often yields disharmony between the reader's assumptions and the actual transpired event. Throughout *Paradise Lost*, the reader assumes that Adam is the intellectual superior and that he frequently does the thinking for Eve, be it his explaining their need for rest (IV. 610-633), instructing her about the origin of the stars (IV. 660-688) or deciphering his wife's dream (V. 95-128). Indeed, such an assumption is reinforced through the use of the epithets that Eve uses to address Adam: he is her "Guide/ And Head" (IV. 443-443), her "Author and Disposer" (IV. 635). As van Nuis argues however,

Eve tests Adam's authorial voice in various ways... Her inquiry about the shining lights at night, besides questioning God's design, by implication challenged Adam. Although Adam's sophisticated reply met with no resistance from her at the time, Eve's subsequent dream [in Book Five] indicates that his explanation did not satisfy her deeper needs. (51)

Following this episode, Eve expresses slight displeasure when Adam renders his opinions on how she should prepare for Raphael's visit. As discussed, she opposes her husband's invasion of her domain of expertise and she attempts to dissuade Adam of his incorrect notion of food storage. Eve recognizes that her husband is superior to her and she attempts to maintain the illusion that her husband is far wiser than she. This is most apparent when Eve finally retreats during the discussion between Raphael and Adam. Although some critics believe that Eve leaves the discussion because she is bored, the narrator reminds the reader that Eve remains "attentive" (VII. 50) to Raphael's words; Eve does not retreat until Adam's fifth question has been posed, withdrawing precisely at

the point “when she seems to recognize in Adam’s penultimate question of Raphael a reformation of her own [question]” (van Nuis 50). Adam’s question, although phrased in more elaborate and sophisticated terms— thus displaying his intellectual and oratory skills to his audience— is a paraphrase of Eve’s simply asked question in Book Four: “But wherefore all night long shine these, for whom/ This glorious sight, when sleep hath shut all eyes?” (IV. 657-658) By posing a question similar to that of his less knowledgeable wife, Adam is revealed to be less confident and less wise than the reader had originally assumed him to be. When uncertainty emerges from behind Adam’s assumed persona, van Nuis suggests that there is a connection between Eve’s departure at this point and her unprecedented subsequent request to work alone: she “requires some solitude to adjust her image of Adam and to revise, as a result, the perception of her own” (51). Indeed, it is at this point that the reader is fully aware that his/her interpretations of Adam and Eve may not be congruent with his/her assumptions about the hierarchical arrangement implied within the epic.

The dispute between Adam’s and Eve’s interpretation of “individual solace” (IV. 483) is brought about by the final crisis which precludes the Fall: the luxuriousness of the growing garden. As Donald Friedman points out, “the world in which Milton leaves the reader at the end of *Paradise Lost* is a world of work; but it is equally and perhaps even more importantly, the case that the world of Adam and Eve before the Fall is a world of work” (128). There is no mistaking the significance of this departure from the dominant pastoral conventions of Milton’s time. Indeed, their “sweet Gard’ning labour” (IV. 328) is necessary to the preservation of their estate in Eden in an immediate and practical way. The happy couple’s task is not a purely gestural demonstration of hierarchical responsibility: presented to the reader as gardeners, Adam and Eve must reform and curb the nature that surrounds and nourishes them. Thus, for Eve, their job as keepers of the garden is to control its luxuriousness<sup>6</sup>:

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<sup>6</sup> It makes sense for Eve to be concerned with the garden. Not only has she been given the authority to name the flowers, but the identification of Eve with the flowers is of course a commonplace, and can be traced from the moment when she “first awak’t... under a shade, on flow’rs” (IV. 450-451), to the morning when she wins Adam over, to her concern for the sufficiency of their efforts to govern the garden and the “roses” (IX. 218). Eve, the emblematic female figure, “stands for the natural forces of fertility, and she therefore serves as a surrogate creator” (Madsen, 22).

Adam, well may we labour still to dress  
 This Garden, still to Plant, Herb, and Flow'r,  
 Our pleasant task enjoin'd, but, till more hands  
 Aid us, the work under our labour grows,  
 Luxurious by restraint; what we by day  
 Lop overgrown, or prune, or prop, or bind,  
 One night or two with wanton growth derides  
 Tending to wild. Thou, therefore, now advise  
 Or hear what to my mind first thoughts present,  
 Let us divide our labours, thou where choice  
 Leads thee, or where most needs, whether to wind  
 The Woodbine round this Arbour, or direct  
 The clasping Ivy where to climb, while I  
 In yonder Spring of Roses intermixt  
 With Myrtle, find what to redress till Noon:  
 For while so near each other thus all day  
 Our task we choose, what wonder if so near  
 Looks intervene and smiles, or object new  
 Casual discourse draw on, which intermits  
 Our day's work brought to little, though begun  
 Early, and th' hour of Supper comes unearn'd.  
 (IX. 205-225)

Van Nuis argues that Eve needs time alone to reassess the attributes of her husband (van Nuis 51). Whether one agrees with van Nuis or not, Eve uses her concern over the garden's luxuriant abundance as an excuse to work separately from her husband, claiming that their affections for one another interfere with cultivating the garden. Adam, however, has trouble recognizing that the garden's growth needs to be tamed, since, as he confesses to Raphael, he has trouble recognizing Eve's wanton luxury as unruly growth in need of subjection. Indeed, to Adam, female abundance—much like the garden's abundance—begins to look like perfection. On a prior occasion, however, Adam comments that the couple should retire for the night since "God hath set/ Labour and rest, as day and night to men/ Successive" (IV. 612-614). Adam continues to outline the couple's agenda, claiming that,

Tomorrow ere fresh Morning streak the East  
 With first approach of light, we must be ris'n,  
 And at our pleasant labour, to reform  
 Yon flow'ry Arbours, yonder Alleys green,  
 Our walks at noon, with branches overgrown,

That mock our scant manuring and require  
 More hands than ours to lop thir wanton growth:  
 (IV. 623-629)

This contrast in Adam's attitude prompts the reader to examine his dependency on his wife: if, in fact, "our general Ancestor" (IV. 659) does realize that their job is to contain the garden's wanton growth, why then does he attempt to dissuade Eve of this notion in Book Nine? Furthermore, if during the breakfast debate, Adam had simply explained that the couple did not need to increase their efficiency when labouring in the garden, is it not plausible to suggest that Eve would have replied as she did in Book Four, with "Unargu'd" assent (IV. 636)? Adam's reply to his wife's suggestion that they separate is that the "irksome toil" (IX. 242) need not be their priority if their work interferes with their blossoming relationship. As Adam justifies,

... not so strictly hath our Lord impos'd  
 Labour, as to debar us when we need  
 Refreshment, whether food, or talk between,  
 Food of the mind, or this sweet intercourse  
 Of looks and smiles, for smiles from Reason flow,  
 To brute deni'd, and are of Love the food,  
 Love, not the lowest end of human life.  
 For not to irksome toil but to delight  
 He made us, and delight to Reason join'd.  
 (IX. 235-243)

As evident in this passage, Adam's definition of the "need" for companionship sharply contrasts with Eve's interpretation of their relationship. Adam desires unity whereas Eve is interested in division. However, by undercutting the reason that Eve provides for dividing their labours—namely to meet all obligations as Eve understands them that have been assigned to them—Adam undermines his own injunction made just the night before. Thus, although Eve's proposal to "divide our labours" (IX. 214) is consistent with her own understanding of "individual solace", her interpretation remains at odds with Adam's understanding of the same term. Adam wants to be inseparable from his wife: indeed, his dependency is again apparent to the reader when he reiterates that it is best if he and Eve "sever not" because "tender love enjoins,/ That I should mind thee oft, and mind thou me" (IX. 366, 357-358). Unaccustomed to Eve's assertiveness since

she had previously obeyed “unargu’d” (IV. 636), Adam feels threatened as his wife challenges the validity of his claims and he thus resorts to qualifying— even revising— some of his earlier statements. This momentary shift in power confuses the reader who has traditionally used power as a defining indicator of the superior being.

The heightened tone which develops as this dialogue unfolds forces the reader to understand the shift in power from male to female. In recent years, the division of labour debate in Book Nine (IX. 205-384) has sparked much interest among critics. The “short retirement” (IX. 250) which Adam permits Eve has elicited a plethora of opinions. Some critics have blamed Eve for being “resistant to teaching” (Daly 378; Reichert 84) or “vain” (Waldock 66; Bowers 266-271; Stein 1967: 94-94); others have accused Adam of being weak to grant Eve’s request, reneging on his responsibility as “Head” in the earthly hierarchical scheme (Waldock 66; Low 30; Rajan 128; Danielson 126; Bell 865); and still others have applauded Eve’s independent spirit and “true grit” (Revard 72). Barbara Lewalski believes that Adam himself offers Eve a “better reason for going than those she had thought of herself” (1985: 235). As Eve exerts her independence, she infers some “unkindness” (IX. 271) from Adam’s initially somewhat patronizing reply. Although Eve appears composed and self-controlled, Adam’s words nevertheless have, as Langford suggests, an “astringent effect, as the word ‘austere’ (Gr. *Austeros*: ‘making the tongue dry and rough’) in her ‘sweet austere composure’ (IX. 272) would suggest” (140). Adam’s repeated imperatives— “Go”, “rely”, “do” (IX. 373, 373, 375)— produce unintended but intense psychological pressure, making it virtually impossible for Eve to now decide to stay without seeming to back down ignominiously. In his visceral response, Adam loses some self-control: he expresses not only anger as he “feverently” (IX. 342) addresses Eve with the harsh words “O Woman” (IX. 343), but also exasperation with his wife’s persistence as he twice impatiently, in sequence, urges her to “Go” (IX. 372, 373) if she considers that best. As Eve takes her leave, she refers explicitly to Adam’s formal permission and the force of his “last reasoning words”. Although neither Adam nor Eve has committed an error at this point in their dialogue— Eve has not disobeyed her husband and Adam has not attempted to curb Eve’s free will— their “emotions, imperfectly controlled, have sabotaged the dialogic exchange” (Lewalski 1985: 236).



Despite Adam having thirty-nine more lines than his female counterpart, it is she who controls the dialogue; moreover, by “having both the first and the last word, [Eve] dictates the outcome” (van Nuis 54). Ironically, Eve is, despite being labeled as the “weaker” (VI. 909), psychologically stronger and more aware than her husband; she is unafraid to explore both inner and outer worlds. Adam underestimates his inner strength and, as chastised by Christ later, the first human could have averted disaster “hadst thou known thyself aright” (X. 156). Since Adam wishes to keep Eve by his side for the “individual solace” (IV. 486) she provides and on which he has come to depend, his arguments, aside from being “illogical” (Kay Stevenson 126) reveal his own fears and insecurities. An opportunity has been created in the text for Eve— and thus the reader— to detect the disparity between Adam’s assumed strong character and the true self he reveals through his speeches.

As Arnold Stein indicates in his book, *Answerable Style: Essays on Paradise Lost*, Adam falls deceived by both an external agent— Satan— and an internal agent— Eve: since “Adam is tempted by Eve and Eve is part of himself, in these terms, Adam is also self-tempted” (75). This unmistakable parallel between Adam and Satan increases the discrepancy between the reader’s perception of the hierarchy and the actual hierarchy embedded within the epic. Waldock makes a comparison between the characters of Satan and Adam: “Satan is shown as mastered by one type of intemperance— unworthy ambition and lust for power; Adam by another— sexuality” (5). To make matters more disturbing, a parallel can be drawn between Adam’s and Satan’s self-absorption: Adam imitates Satan’s rhetoric, and the creation of Eve and Sin prompt Adam and Satan respectively to take note of their own physical statures (Myers 112). Indeed, despite their many differences, “Sin’s birth from Satan’s head and Eve’s from Adam’s side offer a striking parallel, one that seems to reflect more disparagingly on Eve than Adam” (Miller 62). It can be argued that whatever affinities Eve shares with Sin, Adam shares the same with Satan to a greater degree. There is a striking resemblance in the birth responses of Satan and Adam (Lieb 147). McColley (56) points out that both females are created from the left side of a male body and their births yield similar responses in the males: Satan “dizzy swum/ In darkness” (II. 753) and Adam becomes “Dazzl’d and spent, sunk

down” (VIII. 457). Since Adam has been discussed using birthing terminology, the reader is now forced to re-examine the entire foundation of the hierarchical structure. Moreover, if Adam shares attributes with Satan, what does this say about his assumed superior position in the earthly hierarchy?

At the end of Book Nine, the fallen state of Adam and Eve is evident in the mutual hostility with which they level largely correct accusations against each other. Eve, however, embraces her original role as the compassionate caregiver and is the one to initiate a truce between the couple. When Adam learns of his wife’s transgression, he is quick to dissociate himself from Eve. The distinction between man and woman that Adam offers in his justification for sinning affords the reader a glimpse of Adam’s fickle nature: he yearns for oneness with his wife during the prelapsarian state but quickly vies for an independent state from Eve once the couple falls. Although Adam’s first complaint attributes their plight not to their disobedience but to Eve’s “strange/ Desire of wand’ring” (IX. 1135-1136), it becomes apparent that Adam remains dependent on his wife both before and after the Fall; he desperately needs her companionship and he likewise desperately needs a scapegoat, someone to blame for his own transgression. Adam refers to his wife as “ingrateful Eve” (IX. 1164) and although he initially repels Eve with his manifesto of woman-hating, calling her “thou Serpent” (X. 867), Eve,

Not so repulst, with Tears that ceas’d not flowing,  
And tresses all disorder’d, at his feet  
Fell humble, and embracing them, besought  
His peace,

(X. 910-913)

As Daniel Doerksen states, “like Christ, Eve acts out of a humility powered by love” (125). Indeed, Eve transforms their individual miseries into “Commiseration” (X. 940), making complete sense for the first time of the marital solace. Eve freely admits that her sin is greater than her husband’s:

More miserable: both have sinn’d, but thou  
Against God only, I against God and thee,  
And to the place of judgement will return,  
There with my cries importune Heaven, that all  
The sentence from thy head remov’d may ’light

On me, sole cause to thee of this woe,  
 Mee mee only just object of his ire.  
 (X. 930-936)

As Francis O’Gorman observes, the statement “She ended weeping” (X. 937) is a statement of remarkably compressed meaning:

In the literal sense, the words mean simply that Eve’s sorrowful speech concluded in her tears, tears that accentuate her “lowly plight”. But rich in ambiguity the statement has wider meanings. Eve’s whole existence in Paradise, the story of the Fall itself, is summed up in it. She, the victim of the wiles of the lowly serpent, who has fallen from perfection to “lowly plight” has moved from joy to woe, from flawlessness to the tears of fallen humanity. It is a Paradise that ends in tears. (24)

An even greater contrast with Adam highlights Eve’s heroism. Although the first human harbours redemptive thoughts, wishing he could leave no curse to his sons (X. 818-820, 832-834), Adam does not act on this impulse. Instead, when Eve appears, he curses her and “relapses from his previous gesture toward repentance to the unproductive, accusatory attitude that marked the seemingly hopeless end of Book Nine” (Doerksen 126). In echoing Adam’s redemptive words, Eve imports fuller meaning to them: Adam’s desire to assume God’s wrath has an apocalyptic and suicidal resonance that Eve amplifies by wishing to bear all God’s wrath in order to spare her husband. It is highly ironic that Eve assumes the heroic initiative immediately after an unrepentant Adam utters the most misogynist comments in the whole poem. Only then does the first human respond sympathetically to Eve’s Christ-like motions and recognizes the image of his own despair in her. The final lines of the poem reflect the tenuousness of— and, more importantly, the real need for— their mutual dependence: “They hand in hand with wand’ring steps and slow,/ Through Eden took their solitary way” (XII. 648-649). It is Eve who both assumes responsibility for her sins and takes the initiative to repair the damage done to their relationship. Even after their scene of repentance, when questioned by the Son about the nature of their transgression, Eve simply admits that she fell because “The Serpent me beguil’d and I did eat” (X. 162). In contrast to Eve’s

concise admission that places the blame entirely on herself, Adam offers a lengthy confession and attempts to absolve himself of the sin:

O Heav'n! in evil strait this day I stand  
 Before my Judge, either to undergo  
 Myself, the total Crime, or to accuse  
 My other self, the partner of my life;  
 Whose failing, while her Faith to me remains,  
 I should conceal, and not expose to blame  
 By my complaint; but strict necessity  
 Subdues me, and calamitous constraint,  
 Lest on my head both sin and punishment,  
 However insupportable, be all  
 Devolv'd; though, should I hold my peace, yet thou  
 Wouldst easily detect what I conceal.  
 This Woman, whom thou mad'st to be my help,  
 And gav'st me as thy perfect gift, so good,  
 So fit, so acceptable, so Divine,  
 That from her hand I could suspect no ill,  
 And what she did, whatever in itself,  
 Her doing seem'd to justify the deed;  
 Shee gave me of the Tree, and I did eat.  
 (X. 125-143)

Although his answer to the Son's question rests in one line and mirrors his wife's earlier admission— "Shee gave me of the Tree, and I did eat" (X. 143)— Adam "breaks union" with his "Sole partner" (V. 612; IV. 411) and blames "This Woman" of whom he "could suspect no ill" (X. 137, 140) for his transgression. Throughout the epic, Adam and Eve are portrayed as complementary partners in a relationship: Adam is assumed to excel in wisdom and strength, and Eve is to excel in complaisance. Because Eve's moral strength markedly contrasts with her husband's, as evident during the judgment scene, the reader finds it difficult to digest Adam's willingness to displace the blame from himself onto his wife. As Northrop Frye states, when Adam eats the forbidden fruit, this represents a "surrendering of the power to act" (1965: 134): Adam becomes unable to recognize and admit his error. Although typically the tale of *Paradise Lost* is interpreted as "male virtue being undone by female concupiscence" (Steadman 1985: 43), this scene prompts the reader to at least question— if not reject— this now uncomfortable interpretation.

When Milton undertook his retelling of Genesis, a dualism emerged within the text, reflecting the conflicting roles of primal man and woman. The term “dualism” can suggest a multitude of meanings with reference to Milton’s epic; it may mean a belief that God created things visible and invisible; or that matter and spirit are separate and opposed entities; or that man and woman are polar opposites in their natures. Modern theorists have hotly contested the concepts of “sublimity” and “beauty” used in *Paradise Lost* for Adam and Eve in an attempt to secure a definition. In his treatise, *Observations of the Feelings of the Beautiful and the Sublime*, Kant distinguishes sublimity from beauty by suggesting that the former quality arouses awe and admiration while the latter merely arouses joy. Although the philosopher suggests that the proper blending of the two qualities includes both the sublime in females and the beautiful in males, Kant nonetheless qualifies his statement, suggesting a much more strictly dualistic perspective:

It is not to be understood by that that females lack noble qualities or that the male sex must do without beauty completely. On the contrary, one expects that a person of either sex brings both together in such a way that all the other merits of a woman should unite solely to enhance the character of the beautiful, which is the proper reference point. (76-77)

Kant’s treatise, written long after Milton’s epic, suggests that women are not lacking the sublime component but that they “naturally” tend to adopt the beautiful virtues rather than the sublime or pure virtues (74). Davies (84), among others, suggests that the sublime-beautiful distinction is necessary to understanding the different natures of Adam and Eve in *Paradise Lost*. Leslie Moore, in her book *Beautiful Sublime: The Making of Paradise Lost*, focuses on the characterization of Eve and notes that Eve has traditionally been regarded as “inhabit[ing] the realm of the beautiful and this is the antithesis to the sublime (including Adam)” (60). I contend that since God complied with Adam’s request for an equal partner, “fit to participate/ All rational delight” (VIII. 390-391), the assumption cannot and should not be made that the sublime ranks higher than the beautiful. By abandoning the old schema associated with these two dichotomous

qualities, the reader realizes that the beautiful is distinct from the sublime; neither is ultimately better than the other.

As has been discussed throughout this chapter, it is necessary for the reader to explore the character attributes of Adam and Eve to better understand the workings of the apparent hierarchies embedded within the text. Although Milton's *Paradise Lost* reinforces the traditional hierarchy— that man occupies a higher position than his female counterpart—the accompanying interpretation of the happy couple's characters throughout the epic causes the reader to re-examine his or her understanding of how the hierarchy has been defined. Eden's first couple is the product of two creations that put them into the symbolic relationship of husband and wife, a relationship that they had to be maneuvered into. Indeed, the dynamics of Adam's relationship with Eve are not the result of any innate predisposition within him for power; the relationship results from his "cooptation by a patriarchal authority that, even though Adam benefits from it, ideologically structures his subjectivity just as much as it does Eve's" (Langford 120). Adam and Eve view their relationship differently, with Adam harboring a stronger dependency on his wife. "Our First Father" and "Our General mother" (IV. 495, 492) possess different character attributes: Eve has been shown to be independent, wise and self-reflective; Adam has been shown to be emotionally attached to his wife, eloquent and knowledgeable. Although neither set of qualities has been shown to be superior to the other, the reader has nonetheless had to re-evaluate the assumed character attributes of Adam and Eve with the actual attributes as revealed through the epic's dialogues.

CHAPTER THREE  
 “Like Turbulencies”: Investigating the Attributes of a  
 “Good” God and an “Evil” Satan

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“That we go to *Paradise Lost* for its poetry, rather than for its theology is a truism and, at the same time, a distortion of the truth” —  
 Lawrence Hymen, *The Quarrel Within*

A re-evaluation of hierarchy in *Paradise Lost* leads beyond Adam’s and Eve’s character attributes to the reader’s perception of the divine and demonic entities within the epic. Since each reader experiencing Milton’s epic must supply his or her own criteria for ranking God above Satan, the text’s multiple interpretations of the characters yield disharmony between the reader’s initial understanding of the hierarchy and the actual hierarchy maintained within the epic. Indeed, as Fish maintains, there is no correct interpretation that can be consistently maintained because the “reader’s activities are at the centre of attention, where they are regarded not as leading to meaning but as *having* meaning” (1980: 158). It is therefore important to thoroughly explore the several criteria used to structure and set up the existing hierarchy within *Paradise Lost*. This portion of the thesis investigates the characters of God and Satan as perceived by the reader.

Despite various critics’ belief that Milton fails in presenting an unambiguously good God (Johnson) and inadvertently portrays not divinity but a “school-divine” (Empson 56), the reader nonetheless arrives at Milton’s epic with a set of preconceived assumptions about both God and Satan. The challenge for the reader is to reconcile his or her personal interpretations of “Heaven’s Lord” (VI. 425) and the “Antagonist of Heav’n’s Almighty King” (X. 387) in Milton’s text with his or her assumptions about the nature of the hierarchy. Although hierarchical positions “may be *differentiated* from one another and yet not ranked *relative* to one another” (Heller 67, italics added) according to the hierarchical principles underlying Milton’s text, the hierarchy functions such that each item is “either a greater or lesser degree than that which is adjacent to it in the chain [of being]” (Danielson 5). The reader of *Paradise Lost* has a “natural” tendency to use the criterion of good and evil to hierarchically arrange Milton’s God and Satan within the

text. By adopting this criterion to evaluate the divine and the demonic entities, the reader thus assumes that an entity is good precisely in accordance with its place within the framework: the farther down an entity is in the chain, the less good—and hence, the more evil—it is. Although tradition dictates that God should be viewed as unequivocally good—and Satan should be viewed as unequivocally bad—the reader’s responses to the characters within the epic suggest an alternative colouring for God and Satan alike. Unlike other critics, I am not, however, suggesting that God should be viewed as the tyrannous villain and that Satan should emerge as the hero and thus the true “Monarch in Heav’n” (I. 638). I am asserting that it is essential for the reader to explore the character attributes of God and Satan to better understand the workings of the apparent hierarchies embedded within the text. Although *Paradise Lost* reinforces the traditionally accepted hierarchy—that God occupies the highest position and Satan the lowest position—the accompanying portrayals of the demonic and divine entities cause the reader to alter his or her understanding of how the hierarchy has been defined. The temporary blurring of the concepts of “good” and “evil” confuses the reader who has become accustomed to unthinkingly using such concepts as a defining indicator of the superior entity. While the reader remains reluctant to relinquish his or her initial assumptions about the expected positions of God and Satan, at the very least the reader is forced to question the *criteria* that he/she has used to determine the hierarchical arrangement within the epic. In *Paradise Lost*, “point of view determines the perceiver’s response to the truths offered by the epic” (Crosman 90) and it is precisely these presumptions which I have been interested in exploring. The resulting disharmony between the reader’s perceived and actual interpretations of the hierarchy in Milton’s portrayal of the divine and demonic entities in the epic encourages the reader to re-evaluate not only his or her assumptions about the hierarchy, but also his or her understanding of the concepts of good and evil as they are applied to the characters of God and Satan.

As has been pointed out by a multitude of critics (Ricks 18-22; Ferry 5-8; Diekhoff 58), the ultimate ambition of Milton’s epic—“to justify the ways of God to men” (I. 26)—yields the problem of expanding Scripture without distorting the view of God. As a non-human entity, God should not be judged by the reader’s human standards.



However, throughout the epic, there exist persistent analogies between Heaven and Earth which encourage the reader to draw God down to human stature so that his acts and speeches are judged according to human standards. Indeed, human mental qualities and emotions are assigned and attributed to the heavenly agents in the epic. Satan, for example, speaks of God's "excess of joy" (I. 123) after having vanquished the rebel angels. When God speaks in Heaven, he diffuses a "Sense of new joy ineffable" (III. 137) among the angels. Although *Paradise Lost* contains no single descriptive passage depicting God as a total physical being, there are many ascriptions of individual human parts to the Deity: Beezulbub speaks of God's "potent arm" (II. 318); the Son's position at the Father's "right hand" is mentioned on numerous occasions (III. 279; V. 606; VI. 747, 892; X. 64; XII. 451); Raphael speaks of the gifts which the angels receive from God's "copious hand" (V. 641). Leland Ryken points out that in such references to various bodily members, "Milton's anthropomorphism takes the form of the rhetorical figure of synecdoche, in which a whole person is designated by one or more parts or aspects" (129). Although we are continually reminded by the narrator and Raphael alike that it is very difficult to translate heavenly reality into something easily understood by humans, the reader nonetheless evaluates God according to the only accessible standard: the human standard. Despite the fact that many critics have argued that God cannot be fairly understood in light of human virtue, *Paradise Lost* affords its reader little alternative.

The reader traditionally arrives at Milton's epic with a predisposition to think of God as the embodiment of perfect strength and majesty and of the corrupted fallen angels as depraved entities. Although God and his loyal angels are not directly present in the first two books of the epic, the narrator reinforces the reader's traditional view of God when discussing the Archangel's defeat:

... what time his Pride  
 Had cast him out of Heav'n, with all his Host  
 Of Rebel Angels, by whose aid aspiring  
 To set himself in Glory above his Peers,  
 He trusted to have equall'd the most High,  
 If he oppos'd; and with ambitious aim  
 Against the Throne and Monarchy of God  
 Rais'd impious War in Heav'n and Battle proud  
 With vain attempt. Him the Almighty Power

Hurl'd headlong flaming from th'Ethereal Sky,  
 With hideous ruin and combustion down  
 To bottomless perdition, there to dwell  
 In Adamantine Chains and penal Fire,  
 Who durst defy th'Omnipotent to Arms.  
 (I. 36-49)

God, the “Almighty Power” exercises his authority by banishing “th’Infernal Serpent” to his deserved “Prison ordain’d” (I. 43, 33, 71). The reader is awed by the narrator’s description of how God’s strength enables him to effortlessly vanquish the fallen angels. While there is little doubt that God is intended to represent the “omnipotent moral law” (Danielson 186) and that the narrator deliberately contrasts the divine figure with Satan during the central episodes of the epic, it is still important to understand the intricacies of God’s character. Indeed, as Weber claims, “if God is to be shown acting in a story, we have something better to do than take his status for granted” (145). Moreover, as the reader struggles to reconcile his or her assumptions about the nature of God as depicted in *Paradise Lost* with what God reveals about himself through his magnificent speeches, it becomes imperative to investigate the reader’s reactions to how other characters in the epic portray God. Weber’s belief that *Paradise Lost* is a “unified defense of God” (78) prompts the reader to examine if the two principal attributes of “Heaven’s Lord” (VI. 425)—his goodness and his authority—are unwaveringly apparent in his nature.

Goodness and authority are generally treated as two main attributes of God. Traditionally, God is conceived in the Judaic-Christian concept of God as the infinite self-existent Creator of everything that exists. In this doctrine, “creation” refers to far more than fashioning new forms from an already given material; it means “creation out of nothing—*creatio ex nihilo*—the summoning of a universe into existence when otherwise there was only God” (Hicks 9). Since the nature of the universe and its existence depend upon the will of this transcendent Creator, God is regarded to be omnipotent. As an all-powerful and all-knowing entity, God has the ability to reward— or, alternatively, punish— his creations at his sole discretion. Because of God’s unconditional love for his creation, it has always been assumed that he never wields his power in an unjust fashion. Indeed, the nature of agape—the universal and unconditional love offered to his

creatures by God— is to value a creation in such a way as to “actively seek his or her deepest welfare and fulfillment” (Smith 59). God’s universal love for human creatures is the basis for that side of theistic religion that knows God as the final succor and security of a person’s life; the ultimate of grace is similarly believed to be the ultimate of power and the sovereign love which guarantees one’s final fulfillment and well-being. God has traditionally been revered as a patient and forgiving entity who is capable of calmly pointing out the error of his creations’ choices and extending forgiveness to his creations’ inevitable oversights. Goodness constitutes the very essence of God’s character. However, because good is a relational concept referring to the fulfillment of a being’s basic desires and nature, “when human beings call God good, they mean that God’s existence and activity constitute the condition of humanity’s highest good” (Hicks 14). Thus, the presupposition of such a belief is that God has made human nature in such a way that our highest fulfillment is in fact to be found in relation to God. God’s virtuous attributes— including his omnipotence, omniscience, benevolence, calm forgiveness and goodness— fuse together to provide a universal understanding of God’s character. It is these attributes that we, as readers of *Paradise Lost*, expect to assign to Milton’s God throughout the epic.

Conventional Christian interpretations of God’s character have prompted various critics to aver that the disinterested goodness of Milton’s God is markedly evident from the content of his speeches and from their very tones; indeed, God’s speeches in Book Three of the epic have been characterized as “toneless”, “flat”, “calm”, and “impersonal” (Ferry 62, Samuel 121, Wilkes 15). However, as the “glorious Maker” (IV. 292) observes Satan on his journey of revenge to Earth, God says:

... .And now  
 Through all restraint broke loose, he wings his way  
 Not far off Heav’n, in the Precincts of light,  
 Directly towards the new created World,  
 And Man there plac’t, with purpose to assay  
 If him by force he can destroy, or even worse,  
 By some false guile pervert; and shall pervert;  
 For man will heark’n to his glozing lies,  
 And easily transgress the sole Command,  
 Sole pledge of his obedience: So will fall

Hee and his faithless Progeny: whose fault?  
 Whose but his own? ingrate, he had of mee  
 All he could have; I made him just and right,  
 (III. 86-98)

It is at this dramatic juncture that God can no longer be represented as indisputedly “good” and disinterested. As Elizabeth Fuller comments, God’s voice is not “impersonal” but quite the opposite: God sounds “testy, frustrated, hurt, vindictive and rigid” (55). The tone of “whose fault?/ Whose but his own? Ingrate” (III. 96-97) is hardly flat, but instead assumes an angry and possibly even defensive tone. Stanley Fish in *Surprised by Sin* argues against this interpretation, claiming that when God asks “whose fault?” and answers “Whose but his own? *ingrate*” (III. 96, 97, italics added), the

question is posed because the exposition of the thing or item under consideration (man’s positioning of the universe) requires that it be answered; in the answer given, “ingrate” (III. 97) is a term not of reproach but of definition. That is to say, the names God imposes reflect the accuracy of his perception rather than his attitude toward the object named. (64)

Fish’s reading requires an extraordinary disinterestedness in the reader who, up to this point, has been encouraged by the text to be emotionally involved. Irrespective of which viewpoint one adopts, the tone of God’s speech nonetheless unsettles the reader who sees in it at least a partial challenge to his/her own assessment of the same speech; God’s impressive speech does not possess an impassive magnanimity as expected. Leland Ryken believes that God’s speeches are not toneless, nor do they demonstrate a total lack of rhetoric; indeed, the intrusion of personality is not “minimal” as Fish would prefer (65) but the “incensed Deity” wants “proof [of] obedience”, “rigid satisfaction” and payment of “that debt” (III. 187, 103, 212, 246). Although some critics (Roland Frye 79) aver that God’s anger serves to reconcile man to God and to himself—the creator must be angered by sin precisely because “he loves the sinner” (Roland Frye 1960: 78)—God’s wrath still provides readers with a challenge to explain. If wrath is one of the Seven Deadly Sins, how then can God be endowed with an infirmity that he has forbidden to man? The possibility of God’s explosion into wrath— even into a wrath that would destroy his

creation— is referred to throughout the epic by a plethora of characters: Adam, the Son, Raphael and of course, Satan and his fallen society.

The fallen angels are the first set of characters to pepper the epic with numerous references to God's volatile nature. Satan boasts that God's "wrauth or might" (I. 110) will never exhort submission from him. Moloch speaks of the demons as "Vassals of his anger" (II. 90) while Belial mentions the "rage", "ire" and "anger" (II. 144, 155, 158) of the fallen angels' "angry Foe" (II. 152). As even Abdiel points out on the eve of the war in Heaven, he will fly the tents of Satan "lest the wrath/ Impendent, raging into sudden flame/ Distinguish not" (V. 890-892). Moreover, although the rebel angels refer to their opponent as "the potent Victor" (I. 95), God's "rage" and "anger" (II. 143, 158) are subtly evident in the narrator's first lines about God's victory: "The Almighty Power/*Hurld* [Satan] headlong" (I. 44, italics added). Satan is aware that God's "vengeful ire" (I. 148) may work to his advantage when he makes his way into Eden:

... here perhaps,  
Some advantageous act may be achiev'd  
By sudden onset, either with Hell fire  
To waste his whole Creation, or possess  
All as our own, and drive as we were driven,  
The puny habitants, or if not drive,  
Seduce them to our Party, that their God  
May prove their foe, and with repenting hand  
Abolish his own works. This would surpass  
Common revenge.

(II. 362-371)

Satan has witnessed the anger of God, which at times is so great that it threatens to destroy the very creation that was created out of love; indeed, Satan hopes that when God's creation is "seduce[d]" the "angry Victor" may indeed "abolish his own works" (II. 368; I. 169; II. 370). Although Satan and his depraved cohorts can attest to being victims of God's "rage" (I. 95), such statements are nonetheless enveloped in irony: their version of God's character cannot be accepted as the truth unless it is corroborated by details elsewhere in the text.

Surprisingly, references to God's anger are not limited to the rebel angels but extend to the speeches of the unfallen characters as well. In Book Three, the Son asks

that the Father let his “anger fall” on him (III. 237). Similarly, after the vicarious satisfaction for the sins of man, the Son anticipates returning to Heaven and seeing the Father’s face “wherein no cloud/ Of anger shall remain, but peace assur’d/ And reconcilment; wrath shall be no more” (III. 262-264). The loyal angels subsequently praise the Son for undertaking to “appease” God’s “wrauth” (III. 186, 406). Ryken argues that the righteous anger of God is “retributory in nature [and] isn’t a desire for personal revenge but is rather the working out of divine justice” (136). However, as some critics point out (Samuel 176-184; Burden 34-40) the potential for God’s volatile nature to erupt, causing irrevocable harm to his own creation, is a threat that looms large throughout the epic. The Son mentions a similar possibility in response to God’s wrath in Book Three:

Or shall the Adversary thus obtain  
His end, and frustrate thine, shall he fulfill  
His malice, and thy goodness bring to naught,  
Or proud return though to his heavier doom,  
Yet with revenge accomplish’t, and to Hell  
Draw after him the whole Race of mankind,  
By him corrupted? or wilt thou thyself  
Abolish thy Creation, and unmake,  
For him, what for thy glory thou hast made?  
(III. 156-164)

In addition to the Son’s allusions to God’s uncontrollable fury, Raphael admits to his human charge that the loyal angels were commanded,

To see that none thence issud forth a spie  
Or enemie, while God was in his work,  
Least he, *incenst* at such eruption bold,  
*Destruction with Creation* might have mixt.  
(VIII. 233-236, italics added)

Although both the Son and Raphael fear that God’s anger knows no boundaries, Adam optimistically rejects such a possibility, assuming that God, “Creator wise” (IX. 938,) would not do something so irrational as to “destroy/ Us his prime Creatures” (IX. 939-940). Despite the fact that the reader is ultimately aware that God refrains from destroying mankind, the constant allusions to God’s wrath vex the reader’s previously assumed understanding that God’s nature is unequivocally good. Although the reader is

not made wholly aware of the precise sources of God's anger, the ideological contest between good and evil is, as Fuller neatly captures "in the dramatic dimension of the poem redefined as a contest between anger and pain. In terms of the action arising from anger and pain, the contest might appear to be a contest of power between unequal forces" (57). Thus, if God's wrath and power are so great that he is *capable* of destroying his creation out of wrath (even as he created it in love), the reader is left somehow to reconcile the vice of anger with God's goodness and the rest of his virtues. This particular aspect of God's character remains incongruent with the "wise" (IX. 938) and just expected nature of a God that traditionally occupies the highest position in the hierarchy.

Along with his goodness is his authority, the second principal attribute of the Christian God. Without question, Milton's God is presented as "th' Omnipotent" (I. 49) and is "Omniscient... in all things wise and just" (X. 6). God's impressive theoretical attributes— that he is "Omnipotent,/ Immutable, Immortal, Infinite" (III. 372-373)— are congruent with the reader's predisposed understanding of God's ineffably majestic nature. Although God's claim of being omnipotent and omniscient remains undisputed, critics (Carey 52-67) have pinpointed the "aridity, hypocrisy and narrow cruelty" (Ricks 22) which most readers find at times in Milton's God. I am not suggesting that God is not omnipotent but rather that the reader is led to examine the disparity between his or her *presumed* account of God's omnipotence and the *actual* attribute itself. Because the reader arrives at the epic with a set of preconceived beliefs about God and his attributes, he or she does not expect inconsistencies from such concepts as omnipotence and omniscience; indeed, God's authority is expected to be clear and unambiguous, especially when the reader gets to listen to God's own speeches. However, despite the fact that God himself demonstrates his authority to the reader, the reader nonetheless struggles to reconcile the marked inconsistencies found in his or her understanding of Milton's God. For example, Milton's Deity purports that Satan has escaped the confines of Hell because "all chains/ Heapt on him" could not hold the Devil in the main "Abyss" (III. 82-83, 86). However, this explanation is inconsistent with the explanation offered earlier to the

reader by the narrator:

So stretcht out huge in length the Arch-fiend lay  
Chain'd on the burning Lake, nor ever thence  
Had ris'n or heav'd his head, but that the will  
And high permission of all-ruling Heaven  
Left him at large to his own dark designs,  
(I. 209-213)

The narrator has, in one instance, told the reader that God allowed Satan out of his confines, and on a different occasion, the reader has been told by God himself that Satan successfully escaped from his prison. These contrasting accounts are, at the very least, emphatic enough to awaken a suppressed mistrust in the reader's initial belief that God is unambiguously "good". Milton's great epic strategically hints at God's hypocritical state through this marked discrepancy, causing the reader to wonder if indeed it was not through the "sufferance of supernal Power" that Satan and his rebel angels "'scap't the Stygian flood" (I. 241, 239). But, if this is the correct account, how is the reader expected to reconcile his or her belief that God is unequivocally good with the fact that Satan was deliberately unchained in order to bring about the fall of mankind? As an omniscient being, God had the foreknowledge that in releasing Satan—or permitting Satan's escape—he would be exposing man to a temptation to which he knows man will succumb. Although Adam recognizes God's ability to make "evil turn to good" and "light out of darkness" (X. 471, 473), the reader is confronted with two dichotomous interpretations: either the narrator's account is correct and God has blatantly lied about Satan's "escape" or God's account is accurate and Satan was powerful enough to escape the confines of Hell created by "th' Omnipotent" (I. 49) Father.

Such confusion permeates the central episodes of Milton's epic, such as the War in Heaven. Far from being "mere digression" (Waldock 106), the account of the War in Heaven is strategically located to receive central attention, with the focus of "evil on the one hand frustrated, and on the other creation and recreation" (Revard 19). This division of the epic permits the dramatization at the centre of the "divine images of God's ways at their most providential" (Summers 113). As benevolent as God is, however, there nonetheless exist some discrepancies between God's assumed character and the actual



qualities as presented by the text. As the Creator, God indisputedly has the right to allow vengeance to be taken by one whom he “sole appoints” (VI. 808). Although God imperatively and officially orders Michael to “drive out” (VI. 52) the rebel angels from Heaven, he later imperatively and officially appoints the Son to execute the same task. In his *Critique of Paradise Lost*, John Peter (64) asks why Michael was afforded only half the troops available for the task of expelling Satan’s troops from Heaven if it is evident that this ensures the stalemate that follows. In his direct order to Michael, God implies that no more than half of Heaven’s remaining forces are necessary for a victory:

Go Michael of Celestial Armies Prince,  
 And thou, in Military prowess next  
 Gabriel, lead forth to Battle these my Sons,  
*Invincible*; lead forth my armed Saints  
 By Thousands and by Millions rang’d for fight;  
*Equal in number* to that Godless crew  
 Rebellious, them with Fire and hostile Arms  
 Fearless assault, and to the brow of Heav’n  
 Pursuing drive them out from God and bliss,  
 Into their place of punishment, the Gulf  
 Of Tartarus, which ready opens wide  
 His fiery chaos to receive their fall.

(VI. 44-55, italics added)

Despite the fact that God is well aware that Michael will be unsuccessful in the task’s execution, he continues to reassure his soldier that he will be victorious with only half of Heaven’s troops. Although God maintains that a numerical superiority over Satan’s legions is unnecessary for the “Invincible” troops (VI. 47), and he bestows on Michael a specially tempered sword so that neither “keen/ Nor solid might resist that edge” (VI. 322-323), God still refuses victory to the loyal angels. Such covert assistance from a purportedly impartial God can be seen as just as fraudulent as “the fraud” (VI. 555) of Satan’s cannon, a legitimate invention of his own. Beyond this, the reader needs to ask why such an advantage is given to the loyal angels in the first place. Presumably, the rebel angels are permitted to feel the effects of pain (when the loyal angels do not) as a further punishment inflicted by God. The notion that God is impartial to his creations is questionable in light of his treatment of the loyal angels during the war. John Peter argues that “victory has been pre-empted for the Son, who, in due course, will implement the

order ‘drive them out’ and most impressively, will do so single-handedly” (80). God’s lack of frankness toward his own angels casts him in a somewhat dubious light: after all, why should his instructions to the loyal angels be so precise, so utterly devoid of qualification or condition? Why should he essentially hoodwink his own loyal subjects? God then is not “righteous” (VI. 804) as the Son hails him but is instead deliberately deceitful: irrespective of the instructions or advantages he gives Michael, victory is reserved for the Son and for the Son alone. Although the reader may not wonder why God has allowed only the Son to be instrumental in the rebel angels’ defeat, the reader is left to question why the “good” God purposely deceives his loyal subjects.

In addition to the reader’s interpretation of a deceitful God arises what has commonly been referred to as “the problem of evil” (Hicks 39). Evil refers to the suffering experienced by God’s creatures, from physical pain to mental suffering and moral wickedness. The appalling depth of suffering experienced by humans and the arch-angels prompts the reader to question whether God is as good and virtuous as he or she has been predisposed to assume. As an omniscient entity, God foresees what events are going to transpire between Satan and mankind, but, we are told, his foreknowledge does not cause the acts of Satan or Adam or Eve. Although God foresees that “man will heark’n to [Satan’s] glozing lies” (III. 94), the Creator makes it abundantly clear that his foreknowledge does not cause the inevitable transgression since “I made him just and right,/ Sufficient to have stood, though free to fall” (III. 98-99). Because God claims that he could receive no pleasure “from such obedience paid,/ When Will and reason... / [were] Made passive both” (III. 107-109), God explicitly rejects predestination by name and admits that the First Parents’ “Predestination” will be “over-rul’d” by their “Will” (III. 114, 115, 108). Announcing that he created man free to choose obedience or disobedience, God continues,

Such I created all th’ Ethereal Powers  
 And Spirits, both them who stood and them who faild;  
 Freely they stood who stood, and fell who fell.  
 Not free, what proof could they have giv’n sincere  
 Of true allegiance, constant Faith or Love,

Where only what they needs must do, appeard,  
Not what they would?

(III. 100-106)

As explained by John Hicks, to be a person with free will is to be a relatively self-directing agent responsible for one's own decisions; with this freedom is the potential to act wrongly as well as rightly (62). Since there can be no certainty in advance that a genuinely free moral agent will never choose amiss, God avers that Adam and Eve "themselves ordain'd their fall" (III. 128). Despite God's declaration that he "made [man] just and right,/ Sufficient to have stood though free to fall" (III. 98-99), the reader is acutely aware that God's creations cannot be entirely free without limiting God's authority to some degree. As Danielson points out, since angels and humans are not

fully automatic, their choices cannot be wholly controlled by God. Hence, it may be that God had no choice but to make no free creatures at all, or else to make ones who would cause evil. Given such a choice, God was justified in creating humans and angels as he did. (93)

God's prescience thus does not encumber the free will of man, which is an essential ingredient in the development of human history. However, critics such as Mackie, who claims that God could have created a man who would be genuinely free but who could, at the same time, be guaranteed to always act rightly, have challenged this idea:

If there is no logical impossibility in a man's freely choosing the good on one, or on several occasions, there cannot be a logical impossibility in his freely choosing the good on every occasion. God was not, then, faced with a choice between making innocent automata and making beings who, in acting freely, would sometimes go wrong: there was open to him the obviously better possibility of making beings who would act freely but would always go right. Clearly, his failure to avail himself of this possibility is inconsistent with his being both omnipotent and wholly good. (Mackie 209)

Since nothing occurs in the world of the finite unless willed by God, it remains necessary to differentiate between what John Patrick terms the "positive sanction of the good and the mere permission—the mere toleration of the existence— of bad" (19). God, as the reader is told, permits moral evil to exist in order to yield a greater good. However, if an

entity has the power to foresee evil, and if no preventative measures are taken against such an evil, does this not then amount to “willing calamity in a positive way” (Patrick 54)? The idea that God “form’d [Man] free” (III. 124) combined with the notion that Milton’s God created man with the *possibility* to choose evil remain at variance with the reader’s expectation of an omnipotent and just God.

The Free Will defense is a traditional model used to explain how God’s omnipotence and goodness might be asserted given that this world contains moral evil. Well before the publication of Milton’s epic, indeed, well before Christianity, the problem of evil posed a conundrum for many thinkers. One of the oldest and most famous formulations of the question is that of Epicurus (341-270 BC), as quoted by Lactantius:

God... either wishes to take away all evils and is unable; or He is able and is unwilling; or He is neither willing nor able; or He is both willing and able. If He is willing and unable, He is feeble which is not in accordance with the character of God; if he is able and unwilling, He is envious, which is equally at variance with God; if he is neither willing nor able, He is both envious and feeble and therefore not God; if He is both willing and able, which alone is suitable to God, from what source then are evils? Or why does he not remove them? (Danielson 3)

Although Milton’s epic does not suggest a reason why God has allowed evil to exist and enter Paradise, beyond free will in his creations, it remains undisputed that God as an omniscient being is aware of the evil possibilities that lurk in the abyss of Chaos. Mackie is an avid proponent of what he terms the “paradox of omnipotence” in which he points out that there exists a “fundamental difficulty in the notion of an omnipotent God creating men with free will for if men’s wills are really free, this then must mean that even God cannot control them, that is that God is no longer omnipotent” (57). As a challenge to the concept of a virtuous Deity, the problem of evil has traditionally been posed in the form of a dilemma:

(a) There is a God who is omnipotent and (b) this God is wholly good. These two claims yield a third claim (c) the evil of hatred and disease does really exist in the world. If a and b are true, how is it that evil can in fact exist? If b and c are true, how can God be omnipotent? If a and c are true, how can God be wholly good? (Danielson 2)

It appears that the Father's "inaccessible high strength" (VIII. 141) and his ability to potentially eliminate any existing evil remain at odds with his desire to have a free-willed creation. Despite the fact that the volition of man exists in a constant state of tension with the divine forces, according to Christian belief the "fall of man is not contrary to the will of God because the greater good of man can only be attained after man's original sin" (Featheringill 171). However, there exists an inconsistency between the reader's concept of evil and the concept of God's authority: if God created his creatures "Pure" (V. 97), and if evil can thus be assumed to be either sin or the punishment of sin, how can a universe which has been created with absolute power according to God's specific design contain evil? Although God's flawless creations are considered to be free and responsible to resist or choose evil, the reader is still unclear as to why God's world, as a sphere involving freedom, must even have evils present within it. Critics such as Christopher and Featheringill have neatly sidestepped this issue by arguing for a comprehensive notion of omnipotence of such a kind that God's power should not be taken to include that which involves a contradiction. However, the reader is aware that this qualification of God's powers is at variance with his or her previous assumptions about God's omnipotence and the reader subsequently struggles to adjust his or her perceptions of God's character accordingly.

As the superior being who unarguably assumes the highest place within the hierarchy, God alone reserves the right to grant or deny his creatures' requests. Although the reader expects God's intentions to be clear and unambiguous in his speeches, MacCaffrey posits that God's speeches are remarkable for their "verbal acrobatics" (1969: 72). Indeed, God's questionable sense of humour is evident in his banter with Adam about why the first human needs a companion. Although God openly admits that it is "not good for Man to be alone" (VIII. 445) and generously grants Adam his wife, this act appears less than amiable when the reader recalls that the very woman he supplies Adam with will be, if she so chooses, the death of humankind. God promises Adam a companion, "thy wish *exactly* to thy hearts desire" (VIII. 451, italics added) and delivers Eve, whose beauty was so "lovely faire,/ That what seem'd fair in all the World, seem'd now/ Mean" (VIII. 471-473). Despite God's gesture to create a being who "infus'd/

Sweetness into [Adam's] heart, unfelt before" (VIII. 474-475), the introduction of Eve generates new problems and tensions for Adam who was expecting his "likeness" (VIII. 450). The accepted hierarchy is questioned by the reader at this point: if Adam assumed that his companion will be his "likeness", why does the Father supply Adam with a being intended to be inferior to the first human? Moreover, when God realizes that Adam is awed by his new wife's "powerful glance" (VIII. 533) and that Eve stupefies Adam's thoughts to "mischief" (IX. 472), why does he do little more than send Raphael with an admonishment "with contracted brow" not to be "diffident" (VIII. 560, 562)? Since Adam is not successfully persuaded to alter his perception of Eve accordingly, and since there appears to be no deficiency in Eve whose character was "Created Pure" (V. 97), it appears as if "Heaven's all-ruling Sire" (II. 263) deliberately refrains from disclosing his intended plans for mankind.

As pointed out by Thomas Kranidas, God is "not strictly honest" (163) in what he chooses to disclose to his subjects and to the reader. God informs his Son about Satan's plans to tempt man; because of his omniscience, he is fully aware that the Devil will use "guile" (III. 92) and not force in his efforts to thwart mankind's obedience. "Heaven's Lord" (VI. 425) commands Raphael to warn Adam of the imminent danger:

... ..whence warne him to beware  
 He swerve not too secure: tell him withal  
 His danger, and from whom, what enemy,  
 Late fall'n himself from Heav'n, is plotting now  
 The fall of others from like state of bliss;  
 By violence, no, for that shall be withstood,  
 But by deceit and lies;

(V. 237-244)

Although the warning is futile in the sense that God foreknows Adam will fall, the Father readily admits that he is aware of the precise nature of Satan's methods of tricking man. God attempts to take preventative measures against the inevitable fall of Adam and Eve by issuing a series of warnings to be delivered by Raphael:

[Satan] who envies now thy state,  
 Who now is plotting how he may seduce  
 Thee also from obedience, that with him  
 Bereav'd of happiness thou mayst partake

His punishment, Eternal misery;  
 Which would be all his solace and revenge,  
 As a despite done against the most High,  
 Thee once to gain Companion of his woe.  
 But list'n not to his Temptations, warn  
 Thy weaker; let it profit thee to have heard  
 By terrible Example the reward  
 Of disobedience; firm they might have stood,  
 Yet fell; remember, and fear to transgress.  
 (V. 900-912)

In Book Eight, a similar but less explicit warning is administered by Raphael to Adam:

... take heed lest Passion sway  
 Thy Judgement to do aught, which else free Will  
 Would not admit; thine and of all thy Sons  
 The heal or woe in thee is plac't; beware.  
 I in thy perservering shall rejoice,  
 And all the Blest: stand fast; to stand or fall  
 Free in thine own Arbitrement it lies.  
 Perfect within, no outward aid require;  
 And all temptation to transgress repel.  
 (VIII. 635-643)

However, when these two warnings sent by God through his mouthpiece are juxtaposed against Raphael's detailed accounts of the War in Heaven, the reader finds the warnings both inadequate and misleading. When the loyal angel explains the events of the War in Heaven to his human charge, he harps on Satan's use of force to gain his ends:

*Main Promontories flung, which in the Air  
 Came shadowing, and opprest whole Legions arm'd,  
 Their armour help'd their harm, crush't in and bruis'd  
 Into their substance pent, which wrought them pain  
 Implacable, and many a dolourous groan,  
 Long struggling underneath, ere they could wind  
 Out of such prison, though Spirits of purest light,  
 Purest at first, now gross by sinning grown.  
 The rest in imitation to like Arms  
 Betook them, and the neighboring Hills uptore,  
 So Hills amid the Air encounter'd Hills  
 Hurl'd to and fro with jaculation dire,  
 That under ground they fought in dismal shade;  
 Infernal noise; War seen'd a civil Game*

To this uproar; horrid confusion heapt  
 Upon confusion rose; and now *all Heav'n*  
*Had gone to wrack*, with ruin overspread,  
 (VI. 654-670, italics added)

Raphael's narrative of the War in heaven is "designed to communicate to Adam one overriding lesson in faith as well as several lesser recommendations for the conduct of his experiential life" (Swaim 181). Because Raphael focuses the majority of his discussion about Satan on the Devil's strength instead of his cunning guile, Kranidas notes a very peculiar point about the nature of the warning that the loyal angel issues to Adam. Despite God's explicit command to Raphael to warn his new creation that Satan will use subtlety and not force to sway them, Raphael does one of three things:

(1) he deliberately disobeys God and refrains from specifying how Satan will cause mankind to fall or (2) he conveniently forgets to mention that guile and not force will be used or (3) Raphael misunderstands God's orders and doesn't realize that a vague warning is not sufficient to prevent God's creation from transgressing. (68)

As the omniscient Deity, God presumably must be aware of the misleading way that Raphael warns Adam and yet, he does not intervene in the matter. Indeed, as Kranidas posits, "God's only purpose in sending Raphael with a warning is so that he [God] cannot be accused of not having sent any" (63). Although the loyal angel does suggest to Adam that he be careful to "list'n not to [Satan's] Temptations" (VI. 908), the reader is aware that such warnings are unclear when juxtaposed with the impressive accounts of Satan's rebellion in Heaven. It is these two conflicting accounts that make the concepts of God's goodness and authority that much harder to reconcile.

Throughout the epic, the reader is forced to examine his or her interpretations of the forgiving nature of Milton's God. A modified version of the doctrine of election is present in *Paradise Lost*, again forcing the reader to re-structure the criteria used to evaluate God's character. Although some critics boldly insist that God is a "despot who arbitrarily saves some and damns others, and who arbitrarily withholds from some the favours which he grants others" (Weber 174), other critics (Diekhoff, Kerrigan, 16-17; Shawcross 1993: 135) believe that since God maintains his rule of supremacy, he can



determine by his own criteria the creatures to whom he offers salvation. God, as the “worthiest” ruler, “excells/ Them whom he governs” (VI. 177, 177-178) and is represented as establishing the doctrine of election by arbitrary fiat: “Some I have chosen of *peculiar grace*/ Elect above the rest; so is *my will*” (III. 183-184, italics added). God attempts to flesh out his reason for granting Adam and Eve the very grace he refuses Satan:

[The rebel angels] themselves ordain'd their fall.  
 The first sort by their own suggestion fell,  
 Self-tempted, self-deprav'd: Man falls, deceiv'd  
 By the other first: Man therefore shall find grace,  
 The other, none: in Mercy and Justice both,  
 Through Heav'n and Earth, so shall my glory excel,  
 (III. 128-133)

As the Creator, “Heaven’s Lord” (VI. 425) affords himself the luxury of choosing to whom he grants more grace. Milton, however, in his version of the doctrine of election, makes a clear distinction from the Calvinists: he agrees with the positive version of this doctrine— that extra grace is given to some— but he rejects the doctrine of reprobation, believing that God does not deny grace to his creatures. In exploring the difference between the treatment of fallen man and his treatment of fallen angels, God admits that man is ultimately given grace because he “falls deceiv’d/ By the other first” (III. 130-131), while the rebel angels fall “self-tempted” (III. 130). This distinction, however, is not as accurate as it initially appears: Satan is the only rebel angel who falls self-tempted. The remaining rebel angels were tempted— just as mankind was tempted— to fall by the Arch-Fiend. Satan, vexed with God’s announcement to elevate the Son’s status, convinces his companions to move to the North in order to receive “The great Messiah, and his new commands,/ Who speedily through all the hierarchies/ Intends to pass triumphant and give laws” (V. 691-693). The Devil convincingly persuades his legion to leave “that Mount whereon/ Messiah was declar’d in sight of Heav’n” (V. 764-765) and advocates their necessity to “govern, not to serve” (V. 802). Although it follows that God can refuse Satan grace on the basis of his articulated distinction, it still does not adequately explain why the remaining rebel angels are refused grace. If, as God suggests in his speech, man is afforded grace because he was tempted by Satan, the rebel angels

should—save for their leader, Satan—similarly be given grace since they too fell “deceiv’d” (III. 130). The rebel angels, like Eve herself, were “deceiv’d” (III. 130) by Satan to disobey God’s commands. While it remains true that the fallen troops fought directly against God’s rule, the rebel angels were indeed swayed by the Devil’s skilled oratory remarks. As the narrator points out, only Abdiel remained “unmov’d,/ Unshaken, *uneduc’d*, / unterrifi’d” (V. 898-899, italics added) by Satan’s words. Thus, although the rebel angels actively participate in Satan’s quest to usurp God’s authority, the reader blames the Devil for tricking his troops into believing that such behaviour is necessary and wonders why God is not able to be more lenient with the fallen angels who have made a poor judgment call. The reader is aware of these inconsistencies in God’s forgiving nature and he or she struggles to justify how God’s treatment of the fallen angels is fair. If the difference in God’s treatment of the fallen angels and of fallen man does not constitute injustice, it is then necessary for the reader to re-evaluate his or her own understanding of God’s character.

In reordering their interpretation of God’s character and his various attributes, readers have long grappled with the issue of the hero in *Paradise Lost*. Conceptually, God has traditionally been viewed as the “absolute good” (Danielson 4); he has been assumed by the reader to have an unflawed character and to possess only the most virtuous characteristics. Throughout *Paradise Lost*, Milton places together the concepts of epicness and Christianity and provides the reader with a false sense of security: he or she assumes that these two different sets of moral worlds or ways of judging behaviour can co-exist, only to find that this is not the case. If, as Crosman points out, Milton had taken the “course of his predecessors and tried to fuse epic and Christian values in a single hero, his reader would not have been initially aware of their incompatibility” (6). Indeed, Christian values are intrinsically and irremediably anti-epic simply because “worldly triumph is the theme of the epic while the Christian theme is one of worldly defeat as the necessary prelude to spiritual victory” (Crosman 6). The hero of an epic is not the entity occupying the highest position within the hierarchy implicit in the hero’s world. Although the reader understands and expects God to be the moral center of the epic, God, as the ruling figure, does not translate into God as the epic’s hero. The disjunction between the

epic convention and the Christian hierarchical convention employed by Milton forces the reader to examine his or her previous assumptions about these two opposing genres (Woodhull 52-61). By making this contradiction explicit— especially in the figure of a military hero, Satan— Milton exploited it. Indeed, as the events and dialogues of the epic unfold, the reader is left in a quandary: if the reader is unable to recognize God as the hero of Milton's epic, how does this alter his or her understanding of the hierarchy? More importantly, if God is assigned by the reader to be the moral center of the epic instead of the epic's hero, who then is cast in the role of the epic hero?

Though critics have engaged in a long debate over the identity of the hero in *Paradise Lost* (MacCaffrey 1959, Rajan 93-105; LeComte, Hamilton), they have devoted less attention to the concept of "heroic virtue". As Steadman points out, the ambiguity of the word "heroic" and the failure to ascertain what it means to the reader have made it a "sort of semantic no-man's land, over which contending scholars have skirmished without establishing possession" (1985: 24). Moreover, as Boyd Berry points out, the epic makes the reader want to choose a hero among its characters, a hero who is a "principal personage who figures from first to last and commands some of our admiration and sympathy in some degree" (184). Although according to the old theoretical framework, the reader expects Satan to be presented as a detestable character, the "Apostate Angel" (I. 125) is flawed, but magnificently so, and is humanly understandable in his presentation. Satan's seemingly heroic qualities— his superhuman courage, endurance, ingenuity and determination— are all exercised in direct opposition to the "Sovran Voice" (VI. 56). But although Satan embodies many of the values that readers prize, Satan is a villain and is denounced as such by the poet. The apparent insolubility of this paradox produces in the reader the "hateful siege of contraries" (IX. 121) as Satan calls it. Although Shawcross maintains that Satan is "hardly heroic" (1982: 33), he does state that the Devil could be perceived as a hero "only if one believes that God is wrong in his treatment of the angels and particularly Satan" (1969: 34). Despite the fact that the "Fiend's" (III. 430) speeches in Book One have been regarded as revealing a "typical confusion of heavenly and infernal values as they substitute political style for genuine homage to truth" (Toliver 30), the reader is left to wonder the following:

if the reader's perception of a "good God" wavers even slightly, is it not possible then for his or her perception of Satan's "bad nature" to likewise be amended? As a "congenial and sympathetic figure" (Northrop Frye, 1965: 28), the character of Satan manages to drive Milton's reader to better understand the profundity and accuracy of the conception of evil as it appears to the reader in *Paradise Lost*.

Despite the volumes of criticism directed toward understanding the Satanic controversy, readers of Milton's epic struggle with the inconsistencies between Satan's assumed attributes and his perceived attributes. If, however, discrepancies exist within the nature of God, then is it not possible to challenge the traditionally accepted view that Satan represents only "absolute evil"? Satan appeals to the reader precisely because he is disjunctive in outer and inner substance: elements of the magnificent Lucifer fuse together with elements of the despicable Satan. Indeed, as Fuller perceptively avers, "there is a continuum of correspondence between Satan's physical metamorphoses and his psychic divisions" (52). Satan appears to the reader as a tantalizingly complex character with many facets to his persona. As Kastor (72) notes, Milton applies different names for the figure in different roles: Lucifer (Archangel), Satan (Prince of Hell) and the Devil (Tempter). The reader does not perceive Satan as two incompatible beings—the corrupt character of Satan with his grandiose ambitions and the fantastic character of Satan with his impressive determination—but instead views the Devil as simultaneously harboring both aspects in his one character. The perception of different levels and kinds of characterization in Milton's Satan by Waldock (81-82), Gilbert (57), Rajan (97) and Werblowsky (25-26) seems entirely accurate. Without question, readers are immediately able to detect the variety within Milton's Satan. Just as the reader must come to terms with God having dual components to his character—the absolute good and the not-so-absolute good—so too must he or she grapple with the Devil's dichotomous nature.

Milton's portrayal of the Arch-Fiend prompts even the most devout reader to realize the conflict inherent within the rebel angel's mind. Satan and his cohorts recognize the "misery" and "ruin" (I. 90, 91) that they have fallen into, and "the Fiend" (III. 440) unhappily realizes that Hell will follow him wherever he goes because it is more than a physical representation of his punishment:

Me miserable! which way shall I fly  
 Infinite wrath, and infinite despair?  
 Which way I fly is Hell; my self am Hell;  
 And in the lowest deep a lower deep  
 Still threat'ning to devour me opens wide,  
 To which the Hell I suffer seems a Heav'n.  
 (IV. 73-78)

Satan's miserable predicament is also voiced in the narrator's speech in an earlier passage:

... ..horror, and doubt distract  
 His troubl'd thoughts, and from the bottom stir,  
 The Hell within him, for within him Hell  
 He brings, and round about him, nor from Hell  
 One step no more then from himself can fly  
 By change of place:  
 (IV. 20-23)

Milton's deliberate use of the throbbing repetition— "Hell within him, for within him Hell" and "Which way I fly is Hell, my self am Hell" (IV. 20, 75)— provides a sense of eternal emergency for Satan, a panic that can scarcely be governed but must be endured. As pointed out by various critics (Davies, Macaulay, Gilbert 41-44), Satan's soliloquy in Book Four appears to be a hopeless cry for help from a sufferer stranded beyond the reach of aid. Because God has decreed that he and the Messiah are one in government as an act of creation, Satan must then either bow to the Messiah as to God or deny God with the denial of the Messiah. The Devil finds himself in a conundrum: "to assent to Messiah's rule would mean to abandon those angelic prerogatives (to govern and not to serve) he has only now promulgated" (Lee 104), but to deny the Messiah's rule would mean to deny God. Thus, the predicament that Satan finds himself in— vaunting his dual absurdities that the contest with God is feasible and that such a contest is one that Satan intends to win— emphasizes the hell within him. Although Milton strategically reminds the reader that Satan's vicious passions are wrong to harbour, the reader nonetheless is drawn to extend his or her awed sympathy to the Devil in his anguish. It is this act which vexes Milton's reader: how can a thoroughly evil Satan elicit sympathy from the reader?

The concept of hierarchy is severely questioned in *Paradise Lost* when discussing Satan's position within the framework. Although some critics believe that Satan is

considered to be the lowest ranked creature within the hierarchical structure (Heninger 119; Curry 22-29), other critics maintain that God's hierarchy of creation has no place for evil or sin. Indeed, in Tillyard's conception of the Elizabethan Chain of Being, Satan is not assigned any rank at all (91). It remains undisputed that a hierarchy is present in *Paradise Lost*, with the epic characters arranged one below the other, beginning with God who secures the top position and ending with the "Artificer of fraud" (IV. 121). Again, the discrepancy between the actual hierarchical arrangement—that Satan should theoretically not be assigned a ranking at all—and the reader's perception of the hierarchical arrangement—that Satan is assumed to occupy the lowest ranked position—is evident throughout Milton's epic. Satan, it appears, is not unequivocally bad enough to warrant the reader removing him entirely from the hierarchical framework. It is the reader's tendency to include Satan in the assumed hierarchy within *Paradise Lost* which subsequently causes him or her to re-evaluate the actual hierarchy evident in the epic.

As touched upon earlier, a deliberate parallel is shaped in *Paradise Lost* between Satan and Adam; indeed, Adam's point of entry into the drama occurs between the time Satan contemplates the loss of his perfect state and the time Raphael recounts that loss. The first human represents, in the truest sense, "the universal created being who confronts an immense creation and an unapproachable Creator whom he feels he must revere but whom he finds a limitless enigma" (Revard 72); indeed, Adam speculates about the nature of God, recognizing and affirming the "infinitely good" Creator (IV. 414). As Revard points out, the first human speaks as the angels speak in praising God, as Satan himself must have spoken prior to his fall and as Satan continues to affirm. Even in his lapsed state, the "grisly King" (IV. 821) admits that it was God who created what he was "in that bright eminence, and with his good/ Upbraided none" (IV. 44-45). Although Satan recognizes God's goodness, he is unable to learn how to abide in it and how to be a part of it through his own responses, believing that "all [God's] good prov'd ill in me" (IV. 48). Both Satan and Adam struggle with their assigned positions within the hierarchy: Adam is told that he is superior to Eve and Satan is told by God that the Son has been promoted to "Head" and "Under his great Vice-gerent" all creatures must subsequently "confess him Lord" (V. 606, 609, 608). Adam struggles to understand how

Eve, who “seems wisest, virtuousest, discreetest, best” is to be regarded as inferior to him, “her Head” (VIII. 550, 574); for the first human, there exists an obvious discrepancy in his request for an equal partner— his “likeness” (VIII. 450)— and the apparently inferior wife he is supplied with. Satan undergoes a similar reassessment of his own place within the existing hierarchy when the Son is introduced. Although his disobedience is fueled by “envy against the Son of God” (V. 662) instead of confusion, as is the case of Adam, Satan nonetheless questions the newly adjusted hierarchy:

...new Laws thou seest impos'd;  
New Laws from him who reigns, new minds may raise  
In us who serve, new Councils to debate  
What doubtful may ensue

(V. 679-682)

The Devil struggles to accept the anointment of the Son and subsequently refuses to accept that the Messiah is to be considered to have a higher ranking than himself. Adam’s dilemma about Eve’s position in the hierarchy mirrors the prelapsarian Satan’s struggle to embrace his new position under the Son. God, however, offers Adam assistance through Raphael, yet refuses to extend the same help to the equally perplexed “Apostate Angel” (I. 125). Although Adam’s struggle with the newly developed hierarchy is markedly different from Satan’s, both characters are ultimately unable to accept what they perceive as their assigned positions within the framework. It is this parallel between Adam and Satan which further prompts the reader to re-evaluate the essence of Satan’s character.

Without minimizing the nefariousness of the “mortal foe” (III. 179), *Paradise Lost* reminds the reader that, despite Satan’s admission of the error of his ways, he cannot repent and reform because God has ultimately denied him grace. Since Satan fell “self-tempted, self-deprav’d”, there is “no place/ left for Repentance”; the Devil has boasted that he could “subdue/ Th’ Omnipotent” (III. 130; IV. 79-80; IV. 85-86). Without giving the “Fiend” (III. 498) even a moment to repent his actions, God “casts [Satan] out/ From all [Heaven’s] Confines” and banishes him to a lifetime of “augmented pain” in “the place of evil, Hell” (VI. 272-273, 276). The Devil is painfully aware that even if “By

Act of Grace [I could obtain] my former state” (IV. 94), he can never return to his prelapsarian state. Indeed, Satan observes that,

... .. never can true reconcilment grow  
 Where wounds of deadly hate have pierc'd so deep:  
 Which would but lead me to a worse relapse,  
 And heavier fall: so should I purchase dear  
 Short intermission brought with double smart.  
 This knows my punisher;

(IV. 98-103)

The “Author of evil” (VI. 262) consists of a juxtaposition of incompatible elements, making him the most dynamic character “with whom the reader can identify far more easily than with the perfection of the Son or the awesomeness of God” (Shepard 7). Despite Satan’s unchanging defiance and desire to pervert God’s creations, Satan’s speeches touch upon his awareness of past folly. The “adversary” (III. 156) admits to Beelzebub that his “Glorious Enterprise” has since turned into “misery” (I. 88, 89) and the Devil laments that he is “fall’n” and has exchanged the “celestial light” from Heaven for this “mournful gloom” of Hell (I. 84, 244, 243). Without hope for repentance, Satan conceals his melancholic thoughts and proceeds to deteriorate into a degenerate state from which God refuses to save him.

Although Satan’s whetted ambition to have “equal’d the most High” (I. 40) is deserving of the mental turmoil that engulfs him, a plethora of critics have commented on how Satan’s vices are converted into epic virtues. Indeed, the “false dissembler” (III. 681) stands “proudly eminent” above his army (I. 590), watching them from under brows of “dauntless courage and considerate Pride” (I. 603). Despite Satan’s façade of bravado, his soliloquy on Mount Niphates brings to mind at least something of what was involved in the deflecting of his will and obedience:

... ..lifted up so *high*  
 I ’sdain’d subjection, and thought one step *higher*  
 Would set me *highest*, and in a moment *quit*  
 The debt immense of endless gratitude,  
 So burthensome, still paying, still to owe;  
 Forgetful what from him I still receiv’d,



And understood not that a grateful mind  
 By owing owes not, but still pays, at once  
 Indebted and discharged; what burden then?  
 (IV. 49-57, italics added)

To this account of mounting and falling, Satan's physical position as he soliloquizes at the top of Niphates lends a particular vividness. The lines, with their strategic placing of "high", "higher" and "quit" catch a precarious balance and sudden tumbling out of his current state: Satan's fall is instantaneous simply because, being created perfect, he cannot be sinful before the fall. Since it is presumed to be the fall that flaws the nature—instead of the flawed nature that brings about the fall—the origins of Satan's malicious designs remain unclear. Satan's admission that God's "service [was not] hard" (IV. 445) and that his own revolt was unjustified prompts the reader to pity the predicament that Satan has been placed in: the Devil must wrestle with a morally deficient composition that now exists within him. Satan's inner helplessness and his sheer inability to be other than he is forces the old assumptions about the hierarchy to be re-examined: why has God, the superior being, intended such apparently cruel designs for the Arch-Fiend? If the reader can have pity on a previously assumed detestable Satan and harbour resentment toward the previously assumed benevolent God, how can God not have pity? Moreover, how can the existing hierarchy as perceived by the reader—such that God occupies the top position and Satan the last—make sense in light of such character revelations?

One of the greatest puzzles about Milton's Satan is not, as many critics have focused on, how good can become evil, but specifically how Satan in becoming evil could be said to have aspired to become like God. The wish to be like God may be understood in two ways: to resemble him in goodness or to equal him in power. The desire, however, to equal God in power is irrational since such a goal is clearly impossible. As C. S. Lewis points out, the Arch-Fiend's desire to have "equal'd the most High" (I. 40) accounts not just for the mental turmoil that engulfs him, but for the metamorphosis of Satan which he describes thus: "from hero, to general, from general to politician, from politician to secret service agent, and thence to a thing that peers in at bedroom or bathroom windows and thence to a toad and finally to a snake—such is the progress of

Satan” (97). Although there is little doubt that Satan’s impulse to repentance is at least in part blocked by his vicious passions which constitute the compendium of every possible error— envious ingratitude, proud disdain and a disobedient will— Satan’s ambitions serve to challenge the traditional hierarchies that have long since been textually and culturally embedded. Satan’s desire to have “*equal’d* the most High” (I. 40, italics added) prompts the reader to consider the significant difference between equality and likeness<sup>7</sup>. Such terms are not synonymous, as they represent two different comparisons, that of quantity and that of quality. Steadman clarifies the distinction between these two terms: “Equals are those things that have the same quantity” whereas “like things are those that have the same quality” (1968: 162). In asserting his equality with God (as opposed to vying for a likeness with the divine power), the “adversary” (III. 81) blasphemes and attempts to justify his rebellion through the argument of equality. Satan’s desire to usurp God’s prerogatives is markedly evident throughout his speeches. Ironically, the “Author of Evil” (VI. 262) intends to erect his “Palace of Lucifer” throughout the spacious North (V. 760) and reasons that the Son, the rebel angels’ equal, should not reign over them:

Who can in reason then or right assume  
 Monarchy over such as live by right  
 His equals, if in power and splendor less,  
 In freedom equal? or can introduce  
 Law and Edict on us, who without law  
 Err not? much less for this to be our Lord,  
 (V. 794-799)

In aspiring to “Set himself in Glory above his Peers” (I. 39), Satan is guilty of violating equality by affecting superiority over his equals. The issue of Satan’s equality retains its

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<sup>7</sup> Satan’s envious impulses prompt him to duplicate the quality which he envies. However, this inevitably results in distortion as is seen by the ironic parallels between Pandemonium and Heaven (see Cope 55-57). Satan’s kingdom— with its “wealth” which outshone the “Barbaric Pearl and Gold” of oriental monarchs (II. 2, 4)— is inherently different from God’s; its superficial likeness serves only to point out the deep irony of dissimilitude. Although the royal seat in the North to which Satan has withdrawn imitates the “Mount whereon/ Messiah was declar’d in sight of Heav’n/ The Mountain of the Congregation call’d” (V. 764-766), the mount of Satan really does not resemble the mount of Messiah in any way other than they are both bright and elevated. Satan’s ornately decorated mount lacks the “Transcendent brightness” (I. 86) of God’s domain. The Devil at best can sit “rais’d” (II. 5) and is unlike God who is “Thron’d above all highth” (III. 58). Satan’s realm, which is ablaze with artifice, cannot successfully duplicate his rival’s and it is perhaps this disappointment which some critics (Schwartz) say greatly magnifies Satan’s flawed character.

central importance despite his admission that God has “prov’d” the “stronger... with his Thunder” (I. 92, 93). If Satan had desired a likeness to God, this would then have been compatible with the highest virtue since the desire for divine resemblance is linked to true holiness and truth (Schwartz 87). However, despite the “Warrior Angel’s” (IV. 946) claim, he did not necessarily believe that his wish for equality would be granted, simply because as a rational creature, he would have known that this goal was impossible. As the Devil confesses in his soliloquy in Book Four, his fallen cohorts “little know/ How dearly I abide that boast so vain” (IV. 86-87). Satan must therefore have wished for the “authorized *imitation* of God’s likeness, but the manner he chose for his imitation must have been an unauthorized one” (Revard 65). Satan does not sin in wishing to be *like* God; he sins by having this wish in an *improper order*. This minute detail— “the principle of proper order” (Revard 68)— determines what will be in a creature: the genesis of beatified grace or of sinful and ultimately damning pride. Although Satan initiated the War in Heaven to protest against the Son’s position in the hierarchy, the Devil is guilty of establishing a similar hierarchical arrangement in Hell, with himself occupying the highest position. Because the Devil successfully erects a hierarchical framework in Hell that is similar in its structure to that in Heaven, the reader’s habit of hierarchical thinking has been challenged: should a hierarchy that appears to be arbitrary established by Satan be perceived differently than the hierarchy established by God? And if differences do exist between the two, how are they accounted for and explained by the reader? Satan’s refusal to accept the traditional hierarchy prompts the reader to likewise question the assumptions associated with each position within the hierarchy.

As a “heterogeneous complex of ingredients, part man, part spirit, part attested biblical Presence and part dogma” (Peter 15), God as a character in *Paradise Lost* has been investigated by various critics. The theological appropriateness and literary success of Milton’s anthropomorphic presentation of God have been questioned repeatedly from Shelley who believed that God is a cruel torturer and tyrant (534,) to Bush who claims that the Father is an “almighty cat watching a human mouse” (1962: 381), to Waldock’s pronouncement that God is a “divine egotist” (103). Satan too is a complex character. Although critics such as Rajan (94) oppose the “modern stock response of admiration for

Prometheus rebels with the stock response of the seventeenth-century Satan hatred” (Crosman 8), Milton’s portrayal of the Devil is at variance with the reader’s assumptions about Satan’s character. As Frank Kastor points out, the Devil is a “trimorph or three related but distinguishable personages: a highly placed Archangel, the grisly Prince of Hell and the deceitful serpentine Tempter” (15). The different aspects of Satan’s character, which are revealed to the reader throughout the epic, prompt him or her to consider why inconsistencies are present in the Devil’s nature. If the Arch-Angel’s character is, as traditional assumptions dictate, entirely “bad”, how can readers during moments in *Paradise Lost* perceive the demon to be otherwise? Satan’s attributes in *Paradise Lost*— along with God’s attributes— encourage the reader to re-examine the criteria used to set up the existing hierarchies. It appears that God is not unequivocally good any more than Satan is unequivocally bad. I am not, however, suggesting that God and Satan are equal to each other, or that their positions within the hierarchy are reversed. I am maintaining the premise that God occupies a higher position than Satan but I am simultaneously suggesting that the reader is led to re-evaluate his/her own criteria for ranking God above Satan. Because the criteria used by Milton to hierarchically arrange God above Satan cannot be identical to the reader’s, disharmony between the perceived and actual hierarchy is the inevitable result. Thus, although *Paradise Lost* reinforces the traditionally accepted hierarchy— that God ranks higher than Satan— the accompanying interpretations of the divine and demonic entities cause the reader to re-fashion his or her understanding of how the hierarchy has been hitherto defined.

## CHAPTER FOUR

### The Final Frontier: An Overview of the Miltonic Challenge

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“One of the central problems facing a student of Milton today is how to interpret what he wrote” –Annabel Patterson, *John Milton*

*Paradise Lost* stands as the “consummation not only of Renaissance commentaries... but of centuries of biblical interpretation and imaginative speculation” (Duncan 269). Anything written about *Paradise Lost* “inevitably adds a voice to the Milton controversy, however peaceful the aims of its author, however uncontentious its tone” (Bergonzi 163). Despite the claims that Milton and his epic are a “mausoleum to dead ideas” (Lewalski 1985: 43)— indeed, as Douglas Bush overstated, “the literati have not for decades granted Milton a place in the canon of poets who minister to our needs” (1964: 9)— *Paradise Lost* retains its ability to startle its reader. The epic ministers to our need to “commit [ourselves] in passionate argument about literature” (Ricks 12); it continuously calls our assumptions about the nature of the hierarchy and the characters’ attributes into question by manipulating our responses to the text. Because the reader arrives at Milton’s text with a set of preconceived beliefs— specifically that Eve is inferior to Adam and that God’s unambiguously good attributes allow him to occupy the highest position within the hierarchy— it is these same assumptions that invariably force the reader to perceive and thus experience *Paradise Lost* in a particular manner. Moreover, since each reader experiencing the epic expects the epic’s characters to maintain certain attributes, the crux of the reader’s problem is to reconcile his or her expectations about the nature of the hierarchy with the actual hierarchy as presented in Milton’s text. Throughout this thesis, I have mainly been interested in both understanding the disharmony between the reader’s preconceived and actual interpretations of the hierarchy as well as revealing how a reader’s responses and assumptions alter the hierarchical structures embedded within the text. It is through this process of re-interpretation and re-evaluation that Milton’s epic can be understood in a way that has not hitherto been fully studied: the cognitive paradigm.

The cognitive approach centers on the way in which readers structure their experiences. In the case of *Paradise Lost*, we are required to re-structure our current

interpretation of the epic's events when new information is presented to us. Although there is no doubt that a hierarchy is present within Milton's epic, the reader's current organizational system within his or her mind must be re-evaluated when he or she is presented with the various attributes of a character. As our previous assumptions about the characters' natures are disbanded—Eve is no longer seen as a dependent and unwise character and God is no longer regarded to be unequivocally good—we must subsequently amend our understanding of the hierarchy. The discrepancy between the actual hierarchical arrangement and the reader's perception of the hierarchical arrangement results from the criterion used to hierarchically arrange the characters within the text. While the reader is aware that God occupies “unequal'd” the highest position in the Elizabethan Chain of Being and that Adam is ranked higher than Eve, the reader must admit that this ranking does not occur simply because of the character's superior attributes. It is the reader's perception of the epic characters that causes the notion of hierarchy to be questioned and it is this perception which prompts the reader to re-evaluate why such constructs have remained thus far.

In *Paradise Lost*, we are aware that the schemata garnered from the textual experiences are incongruent with our hierarchical assumptions: we expect certain characteristics which are not always delivered to us by the poet. Although there exists an implicit imbalance between the sexes such that Adam has traditionally been regarded as having superior attributes to Eve, we are forced to re-evaluate our understanding of how the hierarchy has been defined. Adam and Eve are not “one flesh” (IX. 959) as Adam literally—and thus mistakenly—assumes; each character has his or her own distinct identity with his or her own distinct attributes. Adam, apart from being knowledgeable and eloquent, is emotionally attached to his wife. Indeed, he desires a supplement to his oneness, “depending on Eve to perfect his lack” (Stone 33). Although the first human recognizes that Eve's proper place in the hierarchical framework is under him, he nonetheless is tempted to subordinate himself to his wife's charms. The reader witnesses many of Adam's insecurities—ranging from his underestimation of his inner strength, to his fretting that Eve has been afforded “Too much of Ornament, in outward show/

Elaborate” (VIII. 538-539)— and is forced to alter his or her assumptions about the presumed hierarchical arrangement within the epic.

Milton’s Eve is portrayed as being an independent and self-reflective creature. The presentation of Eve’s many attributes— she is frugal, hospitable and wise— causes the reader to understand Eve’s character in a manner that he or she had not previously expected. Although the reader arrives at the epic with the assumption that Adam is the intellectual superior of the pair and that Eve is more dependent on her husband than he on her, Milton quickly disposes of such assumptions through his character portrayals. *Paradise Lost* simultaneously reinforces the traditional hierarchy— that man occupies a higher position than his female counterpart— and challenges *how* the reader has arrived at his or her definition of hierarchy. As the reader accepts that Adam’s qualities are not necessarily superior to Eve’s, the reader is forced to re-evaluate the criterion used to hierarchically arrange Adam above Eve.

Past critics, in dealing with the hierarchical issue, have limited their discussions to character studies (Steadman 1968: 51-86; Tannis, Musacchio): they have mainly been concerned with understanding if God can be viewed as tyrannous and if Satan can be viewed as the hero. Although the process of defining the “hero” in *Paradise Lost* is tangential to this thesis, I have attempted to understand how the issue of “heroic virtue” (Steadman 1985: 26) applies to the demonic and divine entities of Milton’s epic. Traditionally, God has been viewed as the “absolute good” (Danielson 4) and Satan as representative of all primordial evil. But, as Helen Gardner explains, “Milton is guilty of creating the last great tragic figure in our literature [Satan] and destroying the unity of his poem in doing so” (120); we expect an unflawed God and a detestable Satan, only to be presented with characters that are inconsistent with our assumptions. Milton does not attempt to make the incomprehensible God a unified and fully realized character in the epic, nor does he attempt to portray the Deity as an always attractive character by human standards. Indeed, as Lewalski points out, Milton “employs a mix of generic patterns and references to suggest the manifold qualities and aspects associated with the Deity” (1985: 113). Apart from the traditional qualities that the reader expects to assign to Milton’s God— his omnipotence, omniscience and goodness— the reader is also made aware of

the inconsistencies in God's character. How is the reader expected to reconcile the vice of anger with God's goodness? Is God's treatment of the fallen angels consistent with the reader's assumptions of a fair and just Lord? The different aspects of God's character—and likewise Satan's character—which are revealed to us throughout the epic's dialogues and events prompt us to consider how these inconsistencies affect our perception of the hierarchy. Indeed, both God's and the Devil's attributes encourage the reader to examine the criterion used to set up the existing hierarchies. If God has not been demonstrated to be unequivocally good any more than Satan is presented to be unequivocally bad, how has the reader altered his or her previous understanding of the text to fit with the new schemata? Although some critics will argue that the traditional assumptions are used for educative purposes—to lead readers to “measure Satan against a great range of heroes and heroic action and against all these standards to find him still wanting” (Gilbert 56) and to likewise measure God using similar comparisons—the reader realizes that his or her previously held assumptions must be re-visited, especially in light of the divine and demonic character attributes.

The idea of hierarchy is questioned in *Paradise Lost* mainly through our responses and reactions to the character portrayals. Although the reader arrives at Milton's text with a set of preconceived assumptions about the expected attributes of the epic characters, the rich characterization in Milton's text, juxtaposed with the reader's perception of the characters prompt him or her to re-evaluate such concepts of hierarchy that has hitherto been accepted. The resulting disharmony between our perceived assumptions about the hierarchy and the actual hierarchy encourages us to experience *Paradise Lost* in a truly unique way. Indeed, as Crosman points out, “truth exists [in *Paradise Lost*] and is the same for all viewers” (89) but it is the reader's presuppositions that determine his or her response to that truth. The disjunction between these two perspectives—what the reader assumes he or she will experience and what the reader actually experiences—has been my focus throughout this thesis. By juxtaposing opposing concepts—epic convention and Christian hierarchical convention, vice and virtue—Milton suggests to his reader that there are other ways to interpret the epic without relying on traditional conventions. Indeed, the reader's sympathies for the epic characters—specifically Satan and Eve—



stem from an admiration for someone refusing to accept a static social order. If the characters themselves do not believe the hierarchy has been defined using the appropriate criterion, as critical readers why should we? In order to successfully understand the intricacies of Milton's text, it becomes not only necessary but crucial to understand *why* there exists a discrepancy between what the reader assumes or expects and what actually is experienced.

Although this thesis has attempted to arrive at a more complete understanding of the concept of hierarchy employed throughout *Paradise Lost*, it has never been my intention to reveal the "correct" concept of hierarchy for my reader. Just as Milton was aware of the mutable and imperfect nature of our lives on earth to offer a single interpretation of the hierarchy, so too am I aware of the reader's constantly changing world. The surrounding stimuli in a reader's environment affect how he or she thinks about the hierarchy prevalent in Milton's epic; indeed, although the concept of hierarchy remains, the content of hierarchy has changed throughout the years. It is thus futile to operationalize the term "hierarchy" since its definition is shaped according to the reader's personal criteria. The dynamic process of re-interpretation encourages readers to participate in often contradictory activities: "we decide, we change our decisions, we form expectations, we are shocked by their non-fulfillment, we question, we muse, we accept, we reject" (Suleiman 288). As the reader is forced to disband his or her previously maintained assumptions about the epic's characters, the reader's understanding of the concept of hierarchy is invariably altered to accommodate for the reader's new schemata. It has not been my focus to answer how readers should think about the hierarchical issues in *Paradise Lost* but rather to encourage readers to examine the criterion used to hierarchically arrange Milton's characters in the epic and to see if such criterion is consistent with the text's interpretation of hierarchy.

*Paradise Lost* simultaneously conforms to the orthodox views about the function of literature and challenges the same orthodox tenets that other works celebrate. Although we normally distinguish sharply between reading and criticism, I am uncomfortable with this antithesis since we can only criticize what we have read and "as we read, we inevitably criticize" (Crosman 8). As Susan Suleiman points out, "[a]s we

read, we oscillate to a greater or lesser degree between the building and breaking of illusions... [reading] is not a continuous process but one which, in its essence, relies on interpretations of the flow to render it efficacious" (288). Since we arrive at Milton's text with a set of preconceived assumptions about the epic characters and the nature of hierarchy, we must then be prepared to re-structure our understanding when presented with new—even unexpected—schemata. As Ferry comments, "when [readers] find complexity in our responses to the behaviour or speech of a character... we must judge the character by the interpretation, not the interpretation by the character's words or acts" (16). Although Ferry, like Fish, believes Milton "consciously wants to worry his reader, to force him to doubt the correctness of his responses" (Fish 1980: 4), I am instead claiming that the reader should re-examine his or her perceptions when confronted with new information. By consciously examining our preconceived ideas about what is considered to be "natural", we as readers become aware of the inadequacy of the traditional approaches previously used to interpret and understand Milton's challenging epic. Because no critical approach has been successful in accounting for the discrepancy in the reader's experiences, the cognitive approach I have suggested serves as an appropriate starting point when exploring how hierarchy is questioned in *Paradise Lost*. Our assumptions about the epic's characters as well as our beliefs about the perceived hierarchy evident in Milton's text is a topic which warrants more attention in future criticisms to *Paradise Lost*.

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