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Paradise Lost and the Medieval Tradition

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PARADISE LOST AND THE MEDIEVAL TRADITION

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PARADISE LOST AND THE MEDIEVAL TRADITION

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This thesis is a comparative study of the Medieval influence on the creation of John Milton's *Paradise Lost*, and the purpose of this thesis is to establish *Paradise Lost* as a poem designed to correct what Milton saw as the errors of the Medieval theological worldview. A range of topics are discussed, from the loyal angels to the Garden of Eden to Hell and Satan, and particular attention is given to Dantean parallels in these areas of Milton's poem. The thesis shows how Milton responded to such Medieval concepts as courtly love and salvation theory and demonstrates how Milton elaborates on, corrects, or repudiates Medieval literary and theological notions. In doing so, Milton has not only created the great English epic that he envisioned; he has produced a truly Protestant epic.

Much attention has been given to the Miltonic influence on the Romantic period and to the influence of the classical poets on Milton. The contrasts and parallels between Milton and his Medieval predecessors has garnered much less attention but is equally important to a complete understanding of Milton as a man and poet. An appreciation of the Medieval influence on the poem *Paradise Lost* allows the reader to gain a fuller understanding of Milton's own theological beliefs, and it will also help the reader to see how *Paradise Lost* took the form that it did.

Introduction

When I first began preparing to write on the connection between John Milton and the Medieval poets, I was buoyed by the thought that I was breaking new ground, embarking on a voyage on which there were no footpaths to follow. True, I had read a handful of short articles comparing very narrow aspects of *Paradise Lost* to the *Inferno*, but I had found no work which cast a wide net over the topic. My enthusiasm was somewhat dampened when I came across *Dante and Milton: the Commedia and Paradise Lost*, a text no longer in print but which caused me to no longer feel like such an innovative thinker. I went through a brief period of miniature despair in which my project lacked its former luster, and I temporarily shelved the idea. After thinking it over for a while, my spirits were renewed, and I set out with increased vigor to produce a more up-to-date study of not only Milton and Dante but of Milton's relationship to other poems and poets of the Medieval period, particularly William Langland and the religious poems of the Anglo-Saxon period.

Much has been said about how Milton was influenced by the classical poets—Virgil, Ovid, Homer, Cicero. A great deal of study has also gone in to examining the influence which Milton's poetry had on the British Romantics, and by extension, modern poetry itself. There is, of course, a wide gap in this literary timeline from Cicero and Ovid to Blake and Shelley, and it is this gap in understanding that I want to help bridge. The link between Milton and the poets of the Medieval period has long been an under-researched and under-appreciated aspect of Milton studies, though it is one which is essential to a thorough and complete understanding of Milton's poetry. The Middle Ages saw

significant transformations and elaborations on Christian theology, developments which helped pave the way for the Protestant Reformation and modern notions of the Christian faith. Theologians of the Middle Ages asked tough questions about God, Sin, and Faith which poets like Langland, Dante, and others attempted to answer, and Milton would, of course, also approach those issues, though all three often found that easy answers eluded them. Also during the Middle Ages, the Church came under increasing fire from the literary talents of the day for its wealth, decadence, and spiritual sloth, suffering particularly harsh treatment from the pens of Dante, Chaucer, Boccaccio, and Langland. The theme of corruption in the Church is one which Milton himself will pick up on in the closing pages of *Paradise Lost*.

It is appropriate that Milton would owe such a great debt to the Medieval period in general and Dante in particular. The similarities between the lives and personal traits of John Milton and Dante Alighieri are actually quite striking. Both men were active in the political institutions of their respective countries, Dante serving as prior in Florence and Milton serving in several capacities, most notably as secretary of foreign tongues and as a propagandist for the Puritan government. Also, Milton and Dante served their nations at times of deep social and political unrest. Italy in the 1200-1300s was rife with Civil War, as was the England of the 1600s, and both often include autobiographical tidbits in their works. Both men were deeply influenced by the works of the classical Greek and Roman poets, particularly Virgil and Ovid, though Dante would only have known the Greek poets second-hand as he could not read the language. As poets, they both wrote of Heaven and Hell, but more importantly, each had a deep sense of the role of the Poet and of Authorship, and they sought to demonstrate their mastery of language and poetry with highly ambitious projects.

For Milton, the Medieval worldview provided an incomplete, and occasionally inaccurate, portrayal of Christian and religious history, one which he sets out to correct in *Paradise Lost*. Milton places a profound importance on education and correction in his epic, from Book I when he corrects the Ancient Greeks for their error in describing the fall of Mulciber to Book XII when Michael instructs Adam on the latter days. *Paradise Lost* is a poem of learning and correcting of errors. Milton "[regarded] classical myths as deformations (often beautiful deformations) of biblical truth" (Teskey 24, n. 746-48), and he had a similarly mixed feeling toward his Medieval predecessors. Though he obviously admired Dante, for example, he often makes references to the *Comedy* in order to demonstrate his superiority in the poetic arts. In much the same way that Dante will occasionally correct Virgil's pagan errors in the *Comedy*, Milton will use his extensive knowledge of Medieval literature to correct or repudiate what he felt were their erroneously held positions. Milton will agree with or find common ground with Dante, Langland, and others, while he also attempts to more fully explain or improve upon their depictions, but generally in *Paradise Lost*, Milton reacts against the literary and religious thought of the Medieval period, advancing a different Christianity than that which came before. *Paradise Lost* represents Milton's refutation of the Medieval world, and in doing so, he did not only set out to write the great English epic; he has composed the first truly Protestant Christian epic.

Milton's intimate knowledge of Medieval literature is easily attested. When Milton first conceived of the idea for an epic poem, he originally intended to write an epic on an English national hero, either Alfred the Great or King Arthur, the latter being the hero of many Medieval romances. Milton's study of Italian literature brought him into contact at an early age with that country's great literary triumvirate, Dante, Petrarch, and

Boccaccio, and during his private studies, Milton made notes on Chaucer's *Canterbury Tales* and the French *Romance of the Rose*. His knowledge of Langland's *Piers Plowman* is also beyond dispute as he cited the poem in his earlier prose works (Lewalski 144). Milton's familiarity with the other Medieval works in this study are, however, admittedly speculative. There are several tantalizing ties between Milton and the poems of the Junius 11 Manuscript, a collection of Old English poems which include retellings of the Biblical books of Genesis, Exodus, and Daniel, as well as a separate poem generally given the appellation "Christ and Satan." There is, however, no indisputable evidence that Milton did encounter these pieces.

This study focuses on four major areas of Christian theological thought. The first chapter deals with angelic nature in general and the loyal angels specifically, particularly as it relates to their function of educating Adam and Eve. The focus on angelic beings will continue in the second chapter, though the emphasis will shift to Satan and the Fallen Angels, as well as their home in Hell. It is in his depictions of Hell and Satan that Milton will most directly challenge Dante's version of Christian history, and it is also here that Milton will loudly proclaim his superiority over Dante in the poetic arts. In Chapter Three, the attention will turn to the Garden of Eden and Adam and Eve, the subjects of Satan's hellish wrath, and Milton will use the relationship between Adam and Eve, installing Adam as the preeminent member of the pair, to dispute the Medieval "cult" of courtly love. The final chapter details Milton's Heaven and his reaction to Medieval salvation theology, and it is here that Milton's personal religious beliefs become most readily apparent.

Admittedly, this study of Milton's *Paradise Lost* cannot claim to be an authoritative study of the issue. Infinitely more could be said about all of the topics the reader will

encounter in these pages, as well as topics and writers which could not be discussed here because of space constraints: views of government and kingship, comparisons with St. Augustine, Aquinas, and other religious figures, stylistic issues, and many others. I do hope that this study will cause more people to consider the links between John Milton and his Medieval predecessors, how their thoughts, beliefs, and visions compare with one another, and how Milton was influenced by those great literary figures that came before him.

At this time, I would like to thank those people who made an undertaking of this magnitude possible. First, many thanks go to Dr. Katherine Green, with whom I first studied John Milton and through whom I first encountered *Paradise Lost*. Her assistance and encouragement was invaluable at all stages of this process.

Also, I owe a great debt and thanks to Dr. James Flynn, for it was through him that I was first truly introduced to Medieval literature, an acquaintance which has had a tremendous impact on my life and my course of study.

This project certainly would not have been possible without the direction and guidance of my director, Dr. Lloyd Davies, who was kind enough to overlook my somewhat unorthodox approach to writing this thesis. To paraphrase what my friend and boss Dr. John Hagaman once told me, Dr. Davies is a true scholar in every sense of the word.

Finally, I must thank my loving and lovely wife Jennifer for the support, patience, and constant sacrifice she had to make in order for me to finish this thesis in a timely manner.

Chapter One: Ministers of God

Angelic beings have diverse roles in the Bible, from warring spirits in Heaven to divine messengers and intercessors for humanity. In orthodox Christian thought, for example, angels are "all ministering spirits sent forth to minister for those who will inherent salvation" (Heb. 1:14). Since it is impossible that Man is capable of approaching God or attaining salvation on his own merits or through his own intellectual capacity because of the taint of original sin, it is occasionally necessary in both Biblical and literary history for angels to assume their function as "ministering spirits" and to guide humanity back to God—or in some cases, prevent them from going wayward in the first place. Angels, whether good or bad, are one of the driving forces behind Milton's *Paradise Lost*, and he makes much freer use of these semi-divine messengers than do his Medieval counterparts. Though Milton's heavenly angels serve a much different purpose in *Paradise Lost* than in the *Inferno* or similar texts, it can be shown that he may have taken some of his key concepts and ideas about angelic beings from the Middle Ages, Dante in particular. For Milton, the heavenly host will be used in various ways to attempt to prevent the Fall, whether by patrolling the Garden of Eden or by telling Adam and Eve explicitly about the dangers ahead. Likewise, they will discourse with the First Parents on the future and other issues in ways which remind one of the interactions between Dante and Virgil. Though often subtle and unheralded, the Medieval influence on Milton's "Heaven'ly choir" (III.217) is apparent.

One characteristic common to all of Milton's angels, both good and bad, is the ethereal substance of their beings. C.S. Lewis wrote that he once believed that Milton's description of the material, corporeal nature of his angels was a poetic fiction, that he

invested his angels with both matter and form. Lewis, however, would later determine that he had made an error on this point, saying that the portrait Milton paints of the angels "is meant in principle as a literally true picture of what they probably were according to the up-to-date pneumatology of his century" (108). Lewis continues by saying that though typical Christian belief, represented by no less a personage than St. Thomas Aquinas, saw the angel as an essentially immaterial being, Milton's angels exhibit characteristics and perform activities that an immaterial being would not need to do. He notes, for example, that Raphael dined with Adam in the Garden of Eden out of true hunger and need for sustenance, and Lewis believes that "it is inconceivable that Milton should have so emphasized the reality of angelic nourishment (and even angelic excretion) if the bodies he attributed to his angels were merely a poetic device" (109).

One aspect of Milton's angelic beings which has long been overlooked is the Dantean influence. Though Dante does not deal overmuch with angels, nor does he dwell on their corporeal bodies when he does discuss them, Dante does treat at some length the substance of immaterial beings, such as the shades in his *Inferno* and *Purgatorio*. That there is a measurable difference between the living human body and the soul which inhabits that body is made clear very early in the *Inferno*; in Canto III, for example, Charon tries to deny Dante passage on his skiff because of the weight of his body, and Phlegyas will have a similar experience in Canto VIII when the Poet steps onto his boat to cross the Styx. This dichotomy will be highlighted at other moments in the text when Dante dislodges rocks as he climbs while Virgil glides along with little effort. Milton's creation would necessarily operate under similar physical laws, yet no such evidence of a physical angelic body presents itself in the text of *Paradise Lost*.

More to the point for Lewis' argument and closely intertwined with the differences between material and immaterial body is the question of whether or not pain can be inflicted on such a shade and whether or not an immaterial shade would have the need for sustenance, amorous inclinations, and other very human attributes. At more than one point in *Paradise Lost*, Milton shows that the angelic form can indeed suffer injury, but it cannot actually be destroyed. In Book I, for example, Satan remarks that "this empyreal substance cannot fail" (l. 117), meaning that the material of which the angels were created is imperishable, much like the souls of human beings. When Satan is wounded in battle during the War in Heaven and he first knew pain, it was only a minor inconvenience for him because his "ethereal substance closed / Not long divisible" (VI.330-1). The same is true for the sinners in Dante's *Inferno*, as when the Sowers of Discord in Malebolge are hacked to pieces by a demon as they circle the ditch, yet their grievous wounds are healed by the time they finish making their rounds. Despite this imperishability of their bodies, the angels are not impervious to pain, and on this score, the angelic body is no different than the human soul in *The Divine Comedy*.

In *Purgatorio*, Dante uses the soul of the ancient poet Statius to explain the origin of the soul and how the shades of the Gluttonous can feel want and appear gaunt when they, lacking their physical bodies, seemingly do not need nourishment. The essential element of Statius' complicated explanation is that the soul, upon the death of the body, "unfastens from the flesh" (XXV.80), and though the body is now inert, the "memory, intellect, and the will remain in / action and are far keener than before" (ll.83-4). The immaterial shades appear in their human form because "the formative force radiates upon it, / giving shape and measure as though to living members" (ll. 89-90), and "the

neighboring air is shaped into that form the soul [. . .] imprints upon it by its powers" (94-6). Dante endows the souls in both *Inferno* and *Purgatorio* with "their bodily senses even though they have no bodies" (Hollander 568), and Milton will do the same with his angels. Milton's angels most certainly have the intellect, will, and memory of which Statius spoke, and the fact that angels, as immaterial beings, would be endowed with some of the same traits and needs as humans is not so difficult to believe nor is it necessarily unsound theologically. The Bible says, for example, that Man was created but a little lower than angels; it would seem appropriate, then, that man and angel could share some of the same basic needs while simultaneously being physically different in nature. Lewis may be correct that Raphael, Michael, and the other angels do have real physical bodies, but it seems neither likely nor necessary to read the text in such a fashion.

One of the most controversial (and surprisingly so) issues surrounding the Miltonic angels regards their sexual nature, and more particularly, the amorous or—as some have argued—homosexual tendencies of these angels. First, we should note that Milton's angels, good and bad, apparently have the capability to morph between male and female forms, an ability which should not be surprising given that the angelic form in *Paradise Lost* is capable of shape-shifting, as when the Fallen Angels assume pygmy status to enter Pandemonium and when Satan takes the image of various animals to gain entrance into Eden. Milton says in Book I that "spirits, when they please / can either sex assume or both, so soft and uncompounded is their essence pure / not tied or manacled with joint or limb / nor founded on the brittle strength of bones / like cumbrous flesh but in what shape they choose" (ll. 423-8). Aside from providing further evidence that the Miltonic

angel lacks a physical body, these lines would also argue against a notion that the angels are strictly male.

As to their amorous feelings, there is also no denying that the Miltonic angel is capable of feeling a wide range of emotions and experiencing numerous psychological states. Regardless of whether or not they assume male or female form, the angels have the capacity to "execute their airy purposes / and works of love or enmity fulfill" (I.430-1).[1] Those who read a blatantly homo-erotic nature or propensity into Milton's angels seem to be, for whatever reason, misconstruing what is going on in the text. In this instance, Lewis is quite correct that "since these exalted creatures are all spoken of by masculine pronouns, we tend, half consciously, to think that Milton is attributing to them a life of homosexual promiscuity" (112-13). Moreover, the Biblical tradition on which Milton draws also provides some reasonable hint that reading a homosexual tendency into the angels' actions is unnecessary. It is said in the Gospels that angels neither marry nor are given in marriage, and though this does not make specific mention of angelic gender, it does strongly suggest that the laws of gender and sexuality in Heaven are not as those on earth. Angels definitely have human-like emotions, but it would be unwise to read more into it than that.

Another very important aspect of Milton's angels is that both fallen and faithful angels exhibit free will. This point is made expressly clear by Raphael in Book V when he tells Adam that the angels stand before God in the same way that he and Eve are supposed to—by virtue of their obedience and their love for God. The angelic host retain their

[1] It is also not inconceivable that Milton would have seen a distinct Biblical precedent for angels having amorous thoughts. In the Book of Genesis, for example, it is said that "the sons of God" (6:2), often believed to be a reference to angels, "saw the daughters of men, that they were beautiful; and they took wives for themselves" (6:2).

happy state enthroned before God only so long as their "obedience holds, / on other surety none" (ll. 537-8), and the angels are free to "stand or fall" (l. 540) based on how they discharge this one duty. To fully uncover what Milton's perception of free will and obedience was, it is necessary to establish how Milton would have understood the concept of free will. The idea that angels were endowed with free will and could choose to either serve or rebel against God did not originate with Milton; angelic free will goes back to at least the 11th Century AD and the writing of St. Anselm of Canterbury. As Archbishop of Canterbury, Anselm wrote a series of major works and treatises on theological matters, including "On Free Will." In it, Anselm sets up the issue of free will as a debate between a student and a teacher, and he establishes a working definition of free will. Free will is not "the power to sin or not to sin" (176), for if this were the case, Anselm argues, then neither God nor the good angels (who are incapable of sin) would have free will; it is, rather, a freedom of choice, and though that choice *could* involve sin, it does not necessarily do so.

Anselm argues that "the free will of men differs from the free will of God and the angels" (176), and this is a distinction which Milton does not make. For Anselm, the key is that no one can lose the moral integrity of their will unless they, of their own volition, chose to abandon it, and here he makes a distinction between free will (what man and angels have) and right free will (which is what the heavenly angels showed by their obedience to God). The right free will is the freest will because those who keep the right will, the one which remains faithful to God, is "unable to lose this state" (176). Milton does not quite keep with this theory, for the angel Raphael tells Adam that "Myself and all th' angelic host that stand / in sight of God enthroned our happy state / hold as you

yours while our obedience holds / on other surety none" (V.535-39). Milton does, however, use language very reminiscent of Anselm's treatises "On Free Will" and "On the Fall of the Devil." For example, Raphael tells Adam in Book V that "to persevere / He left in thy power, ordained thy will / by nature free" (ll. 525-7). The word "persevere" is a key, recurring word in Anselm's understanding of the angelic revolt, for both Milton and Anselm say that angels and humanity were created good, and Anselm argues that the difference between the heavenly and fallen angels was their perseverance. In "On the Fall of the Devil," Anselm says that Satan (and by extension, the fallen angels) suffered the penalty of his actions "because he did not persevere," whereas the "praiseworthy perseverance" of the good angels redounds to their glory (229). Before ascending again to Heaven, Raphael gives a parting warning to Adam, telling him to beware "lest passion sway / thy judgment to do aught which else free-will / would not admit" (VIII.635-7) and assuring him that the heavenly multitudes are anxious for their fate, saying that "I in thy persevering shall rejoice / and all the Blest" (ll. 639-40). Though Man, because of his free will, is susceptible to outside temptation, Milton follows Anselm in believing that temptation cannot force someone to sin unwilling,[2] for as Raphael says in Book VIII, humans were created "perfect within" (l. 642) and did not require outside assistance.

An area in which Milton makes a significant, though largely unnoticed departure from the Medieval tradition, and that sheds considerable light on comparing the two world views, is the absence of neutral angels in Heaven's civil war in *Paradise Lost*. In Canto III of the *Inferno*, Virgil explains that in the vestibule of Hell there is "that wicked band /

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[2] Anselm himself says explicitly that it is impossible to sin unwilling since to sin is an overt act of the will.

of angels, not rebellious and not faithful / to God, who held themselves apart. / Loath to impair its beauty, Heaven casts them out / and depth of Hell does not receive them / lest on their account the evil angels gloat" (ll. 37-42). Dante here may be reflecting an invented Medieval position (Hollander 59) , but Milton stays much closer to the Biblical tradition—such as there is one—on the fall of the angels by reporting that Satan "drew after him the third part of Heav'n's sons" (II.692), reflecting the vision of John the Revelator who watched as the Dragon "drew a third of the stars of Heaven and threw them to the earth" (Rev. 12:4). Although it may be that Milton was less willing to take liberties with or stray from the traditional Biblical story (and what would become orthodox Protestant positions) than his Medieval predecessors, as when Dante placed righteous pagans in his Limbo or when Dante, Langland, and others wrote the Roman Emperor Trajan into their Heaven, there is perhaps a better explanation. In many ways, *Paradise Lost* is quite politically charged, and for a strong partisan like Milton, remaining neutral in a civil war would have been anathema. In Milton's conception of the war in Heaven and in the English civil war, there is no room to sit on the sidelines.

Having spoken more generally about the heavenly angels of *Paradise Lost*, it is necessary to look specifically at Milton's treatment of some of the very prominent angels in the text. Adam and Eve receive divine instruction from the archangels at two points in the text: after the discovery of Satan in the Garden and after their Fall from grace. After his escape from Hell, Satan contrives to enter into the Garden whereupon he learns of the one condition by which the couple must abide. He waits for nightfall before creeping up to Eve in her sleep and whispering into her ear, causing her to have a terrifying dream, one which is abruptly ended when the Garden's angelic guardians interrupt Satan. The

reader does not learn the nature of the vision until Book Five when Eve relates to Adam her dream: the voice of one who was "shaped and winged like one of those from Heaven" (l. 55) beckoned her to the tree of Knowledge and bid her to taste of the fruit, after which she was taken up with him into the clouds and observed the wide earth. It is this action which first precipitates God sending the archangel Raphael to the Garden.

Raphael's intervention serves two main purposes. In one respect, Milton is using the scene to defend God and render Him blameless in the Fall; this aspect will be discussed in more detail in a later chapter. More obviously, though, the purpose of Raphael's trip to Eden is simply to put Adam and Eve on watch and prevent the Fall. Not all have agreed that this was, in fact, the purpose of Raphael's coming to Eden. Margaret Thickstun, for example, says that "Raphael's task is neither to prevent the Fall nor to satisfy God's sense of justice" (248); it is, rather, to prevent Adam from claiming to be surprised and try to excuse himself of his actions. Whether one believes that Raphael's main mission was to give Adam no excuse for his rebellion or not, the fact remains that the consequence of Raphael's trip are the same; his attempt to prepare Adam for the trials ahead certainly had the effect of a preventative measure against the Fall and of reinforcing God's sense of justice.

After initially discharging his duty, Raphael is prepared to leave when Adam decides to use the opportunity to call upon him to answer some of his questions about Heaven and the time before his creation. Raphael, as well as the other angelic beings who protect and speak with Adam and Eve, has a unique role in that he is a guide for the First Parents who dwells with and has direct access to God, and as such, the teaching and direction that Adam and Eve receive from him is extremely vital. Thickstun believes that the scenes in

which Raphael instructs Adam in the Garden has a basis in the Puritan mode of education, namely that in the "modified Calvinist system" of Milton's day, "clergymen identified stages of conversion—conviction of sin produces repentance, regeneration, and, finally, sanctification—and worked to produce the first in order to prepare for the later stages (249). This, of course, fits in with her belief that Raphael is preparing Adam for the initial steps toward repentance. Though I believe that this part of her theory is inaccurate, I do agree with her when she writes that in Milton's version of the Genesis story, "Authority itself encourages in the student learning about values and exercising judgment" (246). That—being able to exercise good judgment in the face of temptation and spiritual warfare—is precisely what Raphael is trying to inculcate in Adam, though his efforts will, of course, fall short.

There is, I think, another reason that Milton would include this education scene between Raphael and Adam in *Paradise Lost*, and it must be assumed to be quite important to Milton since most of Book V and the entirety of Books VI, VII, and VIII are given over to the discussions between Adam and Raphael. This extended scene gives the reader much more than just pertinent plot background and insight into Milton's theological beliefs; it also highlights a very important aspect of Milton's personality regarding education. Milton was a very informed and very politically active writer, more so perhaps than any author before him, and he was clearly a very republican thinker. Milton believed at the time of Charles I that he needed to "challenge and educate his countrymen to seize this unprecedented opportunity to secure their liberties in a free commonwealth" (Lewalski 199), and it was around this time that he completed one of his earlier projects, an early history of Britain. "The overarching lesson" that he took from

the completion of that project was "that the British people from earliest times have displayed a troubling, innate characteristic: though valorous in war, they sadly lack the civic virtues needed to sustain free governments and their own liberties" (217). Near the end of the Puritan Interregnum, when many began to call for the return of the monarchy, Milton again came to see that England suffered from a "national defects of servility and political ineptitude," causing them to be like "the backsliding Israelites in the wilderness" (358). Milton furthered believed that people must be properly educated to be worthy of their liberties (and presumably agree with Milton politically). In the case of *Paradise Lost*, Raphael is educating Adam in the things that will make him a fit "citizen" of Eden, the things that will make him worthy of the great liberty which God has granted to him. This is why Raphael tells Adam in Book VIII, when the latter has inquired about the motion of celestial bodies, to "solicit not thy thoughts with matters hid / Leave them to God above. Him serve and fear!" (ll. 167-8). In order for Adam to remain in Paradise, he must be educated to choose what is best for him and never lose track of that in the pursuit of vain musings.

At this juncture, it is appropriate to ask why Milton gives the role of the first guide to the angel Raphael. That Michael should appear prominently in the text is no great surprise given his role in the New Testament: it was he whom John the Revelator saw in his vision warring with the Dragon in Heaven, and Michael also was said to contend with Satan over the body of Moses in the Book of Jude. Raphael, though, has no history in either the Old or New Testament. Indeed, his appearance is particularly intriguing because Raphael's most famous role in religious writings comes in the Book of Tobit, an Apocryphal book in the Catholic canon, and Milton had a deep distrust of Catholicism.

First, it is important to keep in mind that inter-testamental works such as the Book of Tobit provide a key link between the Old Testament period, when demons and angelic forces are mentioned quite rarely, and New Testament writings in which demons and angels play a more prominent role in the Christian story. Also, there is a parallel between the entrance of Raphael in both Tobit and *Paradise Lost*: in both texts, a couple (Adam and Eve and Tobit and Sarah) offer prayers and orisons to God, at which point God instructs Raphael to assist the afflicted pair. The answer to why Milton chose to include Raphael here may lie, in part, with the fact that the Book of Tobit, despite its apocryphal status, still enjoyed considerable appeal in Protestant circles. During the Protestant Reformation, the authority of the apocryphal books had been challenged, but the 1546 Council of Trent had decreed that most of those books, including Tobit, were sacred and should be considered canonical (de Silva 39). That fact would have given Milton some cover for using a figure from that text. The best solution to this question may simply be that in the Book of Tobit, Raphael assists Tobias in battling the demonic forces of the spiritual realm. Therefore, Raphael would be a messenger skilled in the art of spiritual warfare and an entirely appropriate instructor for Adam and Eve at the time of their greatest danger.

When Adam and Eve next receive divine instruction, it will come from the archangel Michael, the victor of the War in Heaven, who arrives in the Garden with a retinue of Cherubim to remove the First Parents from Paradise. Michael plays two major roles in Milton's poem: he is Satan's primary angelic antagonist during the War, and he acts as Adam's instructor by granting him visions of the future. Though Michael reprises Raphael's role as an educator to Adam, the emphasis the former takes is decidedly

different from the latter because Raphael approached the First Parents in a pre-lapserian environment, whereas Michael must help Adam and Eve adjusted to their changed status. As such, Michael's educative purpose is forward-looking compared to Raphael's hindsight instruction.

For Michael, it will be necessary to prepare Adam for the difficulties ahead, including teaching him about things that he never knew in Eden, including death and sickness. A major goal of Michael's discourse will be to teach him patience and moderation, and his words will allow the First Parents to "lead / safest thy life and best prepared endure / thy mortal passage when it comes" (XI.364-66). The revelation of the future will occur in the guise of a dream vision, a common Medieval motif, and Michael will take Adam to the top of the highest hill in Paradise to lay out the future before him. In some ways, Michael's style of speech and his relationship with his pupil reminds one of how Virgil interacts with Dante and how the ancient Poet discharges his heavenly duties. Both Michael and Virgil are necessarily given to pedantic lectures, for they both are often called upon to explain matters which are complicated and previously unknown to their charges, as when Virgil discourses on the structure of Hell in the *Inferno* or on love in *Purgatorio* and when Michael gives his discourse on Death, which Adam had never known before, in Book XI. If Fish is correct in saying that "Michael's strategy in Book XI is Milton's strategy in the entire poem, whereby his reader becomes his pupil, taught according to his present capacities in the hope that he can be educated" (Fish 22), then it is appropriate to discover what Adam learned from his angelic tutelage. By the end of Book XII, Adam professes to have learned that "to obey is best / and love with fear the only God [. . .] to observe His providence and on Him sole depend" (ll. 561-64). Coming

as it does less than one hundred lines before the end of the entire poem, it could be said that this is the message that Milton wants his reader to take to heart in order to prosper spiritually in the postlapserian world.

The scene atop the mountain also allows Milton, through the archangel Michael, to expound upon a subject that both he and many Medieval authors cared deeply about: corruption in the Church. Authors in the Medieval period had various means of addressing sin in the Church, ranging from those like Chaucer and Boccaccio who sought to lampoon the guilty parties and make them look ridiculous to those who took the matter much more seriously, such as Dante and Langland. Milton would have seen many of the same problems in the Church of his day, and in Book XII, Michael echoes the writings of the Apostle Paul when he warns Adam that "grievous wolves" will turn "all the sacred mysteries of Heav'n / to their own vile advantages" (508-10). Though Milton's remarks could be a general reference to religious corruption with more specific overtones being made towards the Catholic Church, there is no doubt that one of Milton's major concerns here is secular influence on Christianity. Milton's concern about clergy who "seek t' avail themselves of names / places and titles and with these join / secular power though feigning still to act / by spiritual" is a concern certainly shared by Dante, who decried papal corruption in general and Pope Boniface VIII in particular for joining the spiritual with governmental power.

One issue which surrounds major angelic figures like Uriel, Gabriel, Raphael, and Michael in *Paradise Lost* is the effectiveness with which they discharged their duties. The general consensus seems to be that the heavenly angels largely failed in the tasks that they were assigned, though when speaking of Raphael's instruction to Adam, Thickstun

argued that "far from failing in its overt intent," Raphael's mission was successful in that it fulfilled "its even greater goal: to prepare Adam, and through Adam Eve, to explore the possibility of repentance" (246). Neil Forsyth does not share such a positive opinion of the heavenly angels or how they discharged their duties. He is particularly harsh in regards to Gabriel and the other heavenly angels who "are supposedly on watch" over Adam and Eve, for he sees them "comically, even foolishly, certainly irresponsibly [. . .] killing time" (125) when Uriel comes to report of Satan's presence in Paradise. Forsyth may be unduly harsh on the angelic guardians, for while it cannot be overlooked that on the whole, God's faithful angels were unsuccessful in their task of guarding Adam and Eve and preventing the Fall, this can hardly be considered surprising since God Himself declared that their "sincerest care could not prevent" (X.37) the Fall, and God "easily approved" (l. 31) their conduct and vigilance. Their very fallibility is one thing that distinguishes the Miltonic angel from many depictions of angelic beings in the Middle Ages, and Milton's angels are made all the more real by the fact that they have such very human qualities to them. Though more knowledgeable than their human counterparts, angels are not omniscient beings and are, like humans, susceptible to deception, or as Milton says when Uriel is tricked into revealing the location of Adam and Eve in Book III, "neither man nor angel can discern / Hypocrisy, the only evil that walks / Invisible except to God alone" (ll. 682-4). Despite this declaration, there is one loyal angel who does not fall for Satan's guise and hypocrisy.

One of the most curious angelic figures to appear in Milton's poem is Abdiel, the angel who opposed Satan's attempted rebellion in Book V. He is described by Milton as the seraphim who was so devoted to God that "none with more zeal adored / the Deity

and divine commands obeyed" (V.805-6). Abdiel's character is all the more interesting because it is he who delivers in Book VI the first physical blow to Satan, landing "a noble stroke" (l. 189) on the Devil's "proud crest" (l. 191), causing him to recoil several feet as "amazement seized / the rebel throne but greater rage to see / thus foiled their mightiest" (ll. 198-200). The reader could easily expect that the honor of first striking Satan would be given to Gabriel, Michael, or even Uriel, but instead, it is given to Abdiel. That Milton would give such a prominent role to such a little known character at this dramatic moment suggests that Milton is trying to use Abdiel to illustrate an important point. A poet who so carefully crafts his stories as Milton would not have given this moment to Abdiel without a reason.

It is significant that Raphael recounts this episode only moments after admonishing Adam and Eve to increased vigilance and reminding them that only by obedience do they remain in God's favor. In a sense, Abdiel's obedience serves as an example for the First Parents to emulate and is a type of temptation story: Satan lured Abdiel and the others by artifice to his palace and attempted to seduce them through his rhetoric to join in his rebellion. Of all the myriad of angels present, only Abdiel, in the face of pressure and the temptation of the freedom that Satan promised, remained obedient. Abdiel represents constancy in the face of temptation, and he is an example of using his heavenly education for the good and making himself worthy of liberty. One may also see that Abdiel is akin to Raphael in God's scheme, for in the same way that the archangel was sent to warn Adam and Eve and render them defenseless when they fell, Abdiel serves a similar function with Satan and the rebel angels. He is instructing Satan and those clamoring after him, giving them one last warning not to stray from God's path, and he does this to

ensure that Satan, like Adam and Eve, will have no justification or rationalization for his failure and disobedience.

Paradise Lost, which began by recounting the ultimate act of angelic rebellion against God, closes with a picture of heavenly angels faithfully carrying out their duties to God. When Michael escorts the fallen pair out from Paradise, the cherubim and the flaming sword from Genesis 3:24 is placed at the east entrance of Eden to prevent anyone from approaching the tree of life. Alice Mathews has argued that the cherubs assigned to keep watch at the gates of Eden following Adam and Eve's expulsion can be "regarded not only as a reminder of sin and a protection of Eden, but also as a symbolic blessing of Adam and Eve's pilgrimage to a new life" (20). Though the final part of Mathews' statement seems to be a bit overly positive, for nothing seems particularly blessed as Adam and Eve look back at "the gate / with dreadful faces thronged and fiery arms" (XII.643-44), Milton does give her readers a bit of a sense that the story of Adam and Eve will not end in sorrow. They began their post-Eden journey with tears, though they were soon wiped away, and they saw that "the world was all before them, where to choose their place of rest, and Providence their guide" (ll. 646-47). The First Parents will no longer have the amiable Raphael or the vigilant guardians of Eden as their direct protectors, but the great consolation comes from knowing that God, Providence Himself, is still with them and will guide them through "their solitary way" (l. 649).

Whether God's angelic guides are ultimately successful in their mission or not is not a reflection of their qualities or abilities as guides. In the final analysis, progress toward God and spiritual salvation must ultimately be decided at the personal level, and it is up to the individual to decide whether to heed their guide or not. Adam and Eve failed in

this respect. The key function that almost all of the heavenly angels have in common is their role as instruments of education, whether it be Raphael and Michael to the First Parents or Abdiel to Satan. This idea of educating and instructing the major players in the story fits in well with Milton's attitude toward knowledge and how that makes one worthy of freedom. On that score, despite assistance from the heavenly angels, all three protagonists would fail: Adam and Eve will be exiled from Eden, and Satan and his followers will be exiled from Heaven.

Chapter Two: Separation from God

The orthodox Christian position is quite clear that salvation will ultimately be obtained only by the few, although everyone has been given the opportunity to find grace through sincere repentance. For those who have rejected Christ and spurned God's gift of life in the hereafter, a horrible ending awaits them: a place of total separation from God; the land of eternal night; the Devil's domain. Questions about Satan, Hell, and Sin have long been debated in theological discourse, and theologians are not the only ones who have sought to understand those weighty religious issues. Milton engaged those subjects with a vehemence equaled only, perhaps, by Dante in the *Divine Comedy*, and although Milton learned much from his Medieval predecessors and adopted many of their ideas of Hell and Satan, he also diverged from them in significant ways. Milton's Hell, like that of Dante, is rigidly organized and exhibits all the attributes of a civil and political society. It is in Milton's Satan that one recognizes the most significant break between Milton and the Medieval poets. One of the things which sets *Paradise Lost* apart from the *Divine Comedy* is the abundance of overt, as well as subtle, military imagery which surrounds the Devil. Though both Milton and those who came before him saw the Devil as a failed entity, the two sides had very different ways of expressing that common belief.

Perhaps the first pertinent question to deal with in discussing the Hell of *Paradise Lost* is its exact location in the cosmos. While it would be quite impossible to assign Hell a fixed geographic position on the map, the reader is given clues to its approximate location. Traditionally, Hell is thought of as being located deep in the center of the earth, but Milton has placed this prison for the damned outside of the universe entirely,

somewhere out in the murky abyss of Chaos. Though conceived of as a very real place, the description of Hell as being "as far removed from God and light of Heaven / As from the center thrice to th' utmost pole" (I. 73-4) must not be taken literally; there is also a metaphorically and theologically significant point to be made here. It is entirely appropriate that sin has been removed as far away from the purity of Heaven as it could possibly be. One could argue that Dante's influence on Milton can be seen in this detail, for in his *Inferno*, Hell—or more specifically, Satan and Cocytus—is also geographically located at the point in the universe furthest away from the Primum Mobile.

At the core of Milton's Hell is a rigid political hierarchy, and business is routinely conducted in Hell just as it would be in any earthly city. When the rebel angels are driven over the walls of Heaven and plummet to their eternal perdition, they find themselves "rolling in the fiery gulf" (I.52) where they are "to dwell in adamantine chains and penal fire" (ll. 47-8) as retribution for their unlawful rebellion. Upon their arrival, Hell is not only devoid of light; it is devoid of both infrastructure and any cohesive mode of operation. Satan and the rebel angels soon work to fix that by raising a city from the ground up and imposing structure and hierarchical order on what is chaotic disorder. After Satan rallies his defeated army from their post-battle torpor, brigades of fallen angels begin the process of making Hell more like the Heaven to which they had become so accustomed. In short order, Mammon, the "least erected spirit that fell / from Heav'n" (679-80), and his cohorts had excavated the land and extracted all the gold for the demonic architect Mulciber to construct his grand creation. In this act, the demons are making their first attempt at autonomous rule, as everything previous to this had been created by God's hand.

Upon the completion of Pandemonium, the Fallen Angels gather to debate their next course of action, and the council which follows demonstrates the political and hierarchical nature of Hell. Satan opens the meeting with reassuring words that Heaven is not yet lost and then solicits advice from the assembly on how to regain their lost seat, whether by "open war or covert guile" (II.41), and each of the demons responds according to rank. The majority of the demons are won over by Mammon's argument that it would be better to imitate Heaven rather than return to a "state / of splendid vassalage" (II.251-2), and the "popular vote / Inclines, here to continue and build up here a growing empire" (ll. 313-4). It is appropriate that the political process in Hell, just as it is in real life, can be subverted by subterfuge, and so it is here: the popular will of the demonic audience is upended by the political machinations of Satan and Beelzebub to cement the former's reputation and glory. For all of his raging against the tyranny of God, Satan has duped his followers into accepting him as their monarch and their new god, as "towards him they bend / with awful reverence prone" and "extol him equal to the Highest in Heav'n" (II.477-9). Although Pandemonium is initially described as a type of demonic democracy, Satan clearly wishes to rival what he sees as God's totalitarian control over his domain and reveals through his deception that his interests are purely authoritarian.

From this perspective, it may seem that God has granted the Fallen Angels considerable autonomy in their operations. They have been allowed to build a palatial city of gold, and they have been permitted to assemble there to plot their return to power in Heaven and for Satan to engineer the ruin of God's newest creation. Indeed, far from being confined to a very restricted area in Hell, the Fallen Angels go out and explore their

surroundings at will in an attempt to find more hospitable ground; Satan is even allowed to escape Hell's boundaries with relative ease. God seems to be exerting no controlling hand over Hell. This would place Milton's Hell squarely at odds with Dante's *Inferno*, for Dante's Hell is extremely regimented: for example, when Virgil and Dante are forced to flee from the Malebranche in Canto XXIII, Virgil explains to the Pilgrim that the demons cannot follow into the next ditch because "high Providence, which made them / wardens of the fifth crevasse, / deprives them of the power to leave it" (ll. 55-7). Milton's rebel angels seem to have no such restrictions placed upon them; this sense of control is illusory, however. Milton makes clear that the damned angels can bluster and boast all they wish, but there is no place in Hell that will offer them respite for their torment, and as for Satan's still rebellious mind, all of his plans for vengeance will likewise go awry. Though Satan can make spectacular plans for revenge on God, the fact remains that "the will / and high permission of all ruling Heav'n / Left him at large to his own dark designs / That with reiterated crimes he might / Heap on himself damnation" (I.211-15). Satan may seem to have some control over his destiny, but he is only allowed enough leeway to bring about his own destruction and give God the opportunity to show His great grace and mercy.

Beneath this seemingly concrete and stable hierarchy and construction, there is an uncertainty to it as well, what Jeffrey Theis describes as "the confusion of elements" (104) in Hell's environment. Though the fallen angels will assert great effort in the creation of the palace of Pandemonium, there is no stability behind their endeavors: they are attempting to build something which will last in the unstable environment of Chaos, in which the elements of earth, fire, and air all mix together in a dynamic landscape that

"challenges the movements and assaults the senses of the fallen angels" (109). Theis also argues that the ability of the fallen angels to shape-shift "echoes the confusion of elements in Hell and suggests that the perplexing landscape of hell is a direct reflection of the devils themselves" (110). In some respects, it is possible to see Dantean influence in this idea of confusion lying under the surface of organization. During his trip through Hell, Dante is constantly assailed by forces which disorient his senses: the incredible stench of Lower Hell stops Virgil and Dante in their tracks, Francesca's lovely rhetoric causes the Pilgrim to swoon out of pity, the first sounds of the lamentations and anguish from Hell in Canto III cause him to weep, etc. Under the surface of all these chaotic forces, however, is the very clear divine plan and organization described earlier. Milton's idea of Hell as a place of confusion upon which some semblance of order has been super-imposed could have come from Dante.

It is also possible to see in Dante's City of Dis an antecedent to the palace of Pandemonium. In Greek and Roman mythology, Dis is another name for Hades (or Pluto), the God of Wealth, and Dis was "King of the Dead" but "not Death himself" (Hamilton 28). When Dante and Virgil approach the walled city, the latter describes the city in domestic, military, and political terms: behind the iron walls lay "the city of Dis" (VIII.68) and "its vast army and its burdened citizens" (l. 69). In *Paradise Lost*, Milton has the Fallen Angels using Pandemonium as the seat of governance for their legislative business when deciding how to continue the war with Heaven, and when Satan returns to Hell in Book X following his victory in the Garden, the demons assemble to hear their leader's rousing speech. Dante's infernal city does seem an apt precursor to Milton's demon capital in that Dis is also where Dante places the rebel angels, for the Pilgrim

looks at the threshold of Dis and says that he saw "more than a thousand angels / fallen from Heaven" (ll. 82-3), and much like Milton's bad angels, they are thoroughly defiant of Divine will. Thus far in Dante's journey, Virgil has been able to dispel all demonic resistance—Charon, Cerberus, Plutus, Phlegyas—and secure Dante safe passage by calling upon the authority of Heaven. The Fallen Angels prove to be much tougher for Virgil, though, and despite his presumed invocation of Divine Providence (we never actually learn what Virgil and the Angels discuss), the "adversaries slammed shut the gates" (l. 115), causing Virgil to warily tell the Pilgrim "this insolence of theirs is nothing new" (l. 124). Though Dante's Fallen Angels are under no pretenses of regaining their seat in Heaven, they are continuing Satan's work, begun in the Garden, of hindering mankind (specifically Dante, here) from attaining salvation. It will take an angelic messenger from Heaven to force the way open in Canto IX, and the language that the angelic being uses is echoed in *Paradise Lost*: the Divine Messenger calls them "outcasts of Heaven, race despised" (ll. 91-2), while Milton's narrator calls them "spirits reprobate" (I.697) who have been "amerced / Of Heav'n" (I.609-10). The angel then chides them for their insolence, the same problem that caused them to follow after Satan in *Paradise Lost*, saying that their resistance to divine will "has so many times increased your pain" (l. 96), a phrase which appears in Belial's speech in Book II. Milton has transformed the threatening, terrifying, and cold City of Dis, with its iron walls and irrational guardians, to the decadent palace of Pandemonium, resplendent in its gold covering and its halls ringing with reasoned arguing.

In the same way that Hell itself exhibits military organization, so too do the Fallen Angels. Satan is the unquestioned governor of this upstart city, and Beelzebub is his

second-in-command. Milton here follows the Medieval precedent of distinguishing between Satan and Beelzebub (or Lucifer) as separate personages, though the names are often used interchangeably today. The hierarchical ranks which the angels assume in Hell are those which they had in Heaven, so it is fitting that Satan, as the highest ranking angel to fall, assumes the throne in Pandemonium. The mighty host of bad angels under him is organized in battalions, carry battle standards, and rally to the trumpets and martial music of an army. This demonic hierarchy and militaristic organization can also be seen throughout the *Inferno*, particularly around the City of Dis itself. More directly, this imagery occurs during the Poets' encounter with the Malebranche in Cantos XXI and XXII, though Milton does not follow the simultaneously comical and terrifying elements in Dante's depiction.

There is a significant difference, though, between Milton's Fallen Angels and the beasts which populate the *Inferno*. Milton's poem is decidedly character-driven, and the opening books of *Paradise Lost* are replete with the speeches and monologues of the Fallen Angels, allowing Milton to give the reader more insight into the emotional state of the rebellious angels than to the "Whirlwinds of tempestuous fire" (I.77) that swirl around them. Milton's characters express emotion and are capable of advanced thought, even hoping that they will one day regain the glory of paradise, though they might not agree on how best to accomplish this goal. By contrast, the demons in the *Inferno* never achieve the level or complexity of thought found in Milton's demons, and they are often severely limited in their ability to communicate at all. Plutus angrily confronts the Poets in Canto Seven but can only babble gibberish, and the same situation afflicts the giant Nimrod in Canto Thirty-One. Cerberus and the Minotaur cannot speak at all as they are

purely bestial characters. Dante's demons operate as appropriate symbolic counterparts to the sinners they are guarding. Cerberus and the Minotaur, for example, are apt symbols of the gluttons and the wrathful, respectively. Much of the power of Milton's poem comes from the psychological complexity of his creation, an attribute that is largely missing from Dante's demonic characters but is present in his human characters. In *Paradise Lost*, Milton gives to his Fallen Angels that same complexity that Dante does his human characters precisely because they still have the rank of "angel" and were, as the Bible says, created just above humanity. For Milton, then, it was necessary that his angelic characters have equal or greater emotional and intellectual capacities than humans, even in their fallen state.

Also significant is that Milton's Fallen Angels come largely from the pagan cultures of the Old Testament; Milton specifically references how humans gave new names to the Fallen Angels and worshipped them as gods in their own right. This represents a pronounced departure from his predecessor poets, and nowhere is that more evident than with the *Inferno*. Many of Dante's most memorable creatures are found in classical mythology, and for the modern reader, the recurring use of these monsters to preside over the damned in a very Christian Hell is quite surprising, though Simonelli demonstrates that this is not unusual at all. In that same way that Milton does not deny the existence of the bad angels, Simonelli shows that Dante never denied the existence of the ancient beasts in his Hell. Even though Dante, like most Medieval Christians, would have denied the divine identity of these pagan creatures, he would not have questioned their existence as evil spirits. Simonelli shows how some of the greatest Medieval Christian thinkers, notably Saint Augustine, believed that the false gods of the pagan world were in reality

"malignant spirits" bent on man's destruction (89). It is not unreasonable to think that Milton's knowledge of St. Augustine and Medieval theology would have played a role in his decision to use and identify the pagan gods of the Old Testament as real demonic spirits.

In one of his earliest descriptions of Hell, Milton's language exhibits significant parallels with the language which appears on the Gates of Hell in Dante's *Inferno*. Milton refers to:

> [. . .] sights of woe,
> Regions of sorrow, doleful shades, where peace
> And rest can never dwell, hope never comes
> That comes to all but torture without end
> Still urges and a fiery deluge fed
> With ever-burning sulfur unconsumed.
> Such place Eternal Justice had prepared
> For those rebellious, here their pris'n ordained
> In utter darkness [. . .] (I.65-72)

Compare this language with Canto III of the *Inferno*:

> THROUGH ME THE WAY TO THE CITY OF WOE
> THROUGH ME THE WAY TO ETERNAL PAIN
> THROUGH ME THE WAY AMONG THE LOST
>
> JUSTICE MOVED MY MAKER ON HIGH
> DIVINE POWER MADE ME
> WISDOME SUPREME, AND PRIMAL LOVE
>
> BEFORE ME NOTHING WAS BUT THINGS ETERNAL
> AND I ENDURE ETERNALLY
> ABANDON ALL HOPE, YOU WHO ENTER HERE (III.1-9).

Both poets here acknowledge that God Himself constructed Hell and ordained it for those who rebelled against Him, and Dante uses this to underscore the fact that Hell is "not an independent 'city' of rebels, but a totally dependent *polis* of those who had rebelled against their maker" (Hollander 56). Milton takes a similar position as Dante, and by

acknowledging from the opening lines of the poem that Eternal Justice ordained Hell as their prison, the attempts of the Fallen Angels to construct their own independent city in Hell is recognized as a vain project. The similarity between his language and Dante's reinforces the notion that despite the best efforts of the demonic angels, they have no hope of relief from pain or release from their prison.

Milton follows Dante and other Medieval poets not only in his language but in some of the activities performed in Hell. When the demons scatter following the great consult, they range far and wide in search of more hospitable territory as they await their leader's return, and Milton here grants his readers a panoramic view of Satan's kingdom. Though some of the "airy knights" (II.536) amuse themselves by jousting and performing "feats of arms" (l. 537) with each other—just one example of Milton's use of Medieval language and imagery—others seek quieter entertainment. Some of these demons "retreated in a silent valley" (II. 547) and serve as the scops of Hell, singing of "their own heroic deeds and hapless fall" (l. 549). Still others "sat apart on a hill retired / in thoughts more elevate and reasoned high / of providence, foreknowledge, will, and fate" (ll. 557-9). The scene Milton paints of these demons in repose bears considerable resemblance to Dante's Limbo and the quiet valley in front of the Gates of Purgatory. The shades in Limbo, for example, congregated in a "fresh, green meadow" (IV.111), and "the master of those who know" (l. 131), Aristotle, sat with Socrates and Plato, "his philosophic kindred" (l. 132). Similarly, the shades in the Valley of the Princes in Purgatory are "seated in the grass and flowers" (VII.82) of a "sunken valley" (l. 83). Milton draws on this image because in this scene he is dealing, as Dante does in the *Divine Comedy*, with lack of proper spiritual commitment and obedience towards God. Those in

Limbo and in the Valley of Princes had no opportunity to repent and were late repentant, respectively, and the Fallen Angels were unrepentant. Milton also uses this scene to parody philosophical debate in much the same way that the consult in Pandemonium parodied political debate, for Milton says that the Fallen Angels are practicing "Vain wisdom [. . .] and false philosophy" (l. 565). All the knowledge and wisdom possessed by those in Limbo did them no good because they lacked obedience to God (in their case, because of their lack of the Christian faith); the knowledge and wisdom of the Fallen Angels, also disobedient to God, will likewise be of no avail to them.

Milton's depiction of Satan bears relatively little resemblance to that often seen in works of the Medieval period. Depictions of Satan in Medieval works, though often brief, range from the ludicrous and comical to more frightful, physically intimidating imagery. In Medieval folklore, the richest source of diabology for the period, Satan had many attributes: he was the Dark Lord who abducted children and carried sinners to Hell; he could also be seen as a prankster, moving around church pews in the middle of the night; or he could even be slow of wit, tricked by mere school boys. Far from being a tremendously powerful being, in some stories Satan is defeated at a myriad of activities: wrestling, drinking bouts, card playing, and debating (Russell 74). As Lucifer receded in importance in Christian theology, it became more common to lampoon him as a ridiculous figure. In Chaucer's *Canterbury Tales*, for example, the Friar tells a story of a summoner who is tricked by a fiend and carried off to Hell. After the Friar finishes his tale, the Summoner retaliates in his prologue by telling the company of travelers about a friar who was guided through Hell by an angel in a vision, and when the clergyman remarked about how none of his fellow friars populated Hell, the angel quickly corrected

him. The angel called out to Satan "Lift up your tail [. . .] show us your arse, and let the friar see / The place where all the friars have their nest!" (ll. 1689-91). The figure whom Milton treats in such a moving, noble way is, in this instance, a figure of ridicule and gross humor.

No Medieval author saw fit to make Satan the center of his or her writing the way that Milton does. In *Paradise Lost*, the Devil is a powerful, even majestic figure and military leader who retains the faith and loyalty of his demonic army in hopes of once again reclaiming heaven. Satan is described in a way that makes him seem worthy of respect, pity, and sympathy. He is a wounded warrior, and the scars he received on his face from the war in Heaven are his trophies of honor (Peter 37), making him seem somehow valiant and a worthy opponent of God. Much of this sympathy arises because Milton paints for his readers a complex psychological portrait of Satan, making him out to be a being every bit as emotionally and psychologically vulnerable and compelling as any human. Satan, for example, exhibits genuine sorrow at the terrible ruin he brought his followers to, and his eyes show "signs of remorse and passion to behold / the fellows of his crime" (I.605-6) and cry "tears such as angels weep" (I.620). Upon first seeing Adam and Eve, his intended targets through whom he will revenge himself against God, Satan is rendered speechless (IV.358), and when he encounters Eve again in Book Nine, he is temporarily "disarmed / Of guile, of hate, of envy, of revenge" (ll. 465-6). It is these qualities that allow the reader to occasionally look past the profound dark side of Satan and come to almost admire Satan for his faults, as well as his fighting spirit in the face of such deep adversity.

Though it is easy to get caught up in the beauty and majesty of Milton's Satan, and occasionally sympathize with his plight, it is important to bear in mind that Milton's Satan is a failed being, just as he is in the Medieval tradition. One area in which Satan largely fails is in his rhetorical skill. At the beginning of *Paradise Lost*, Satan demonstrates all of the persuasive and linguistic aptitude which will make him such a dangerous opponent for Eve in the Garden. In Book I, he rallies his defeated army from their torpor with taunts and sarcasm, asking them if they have "chos'n this place / after the toil of battle to repose / your wearied virtue for the ease you find / to slumber here as in the vales of Heav'n?" (ll. 318-21), and his speech leaves them "abashed" (l. 332) to be found thus by their vaunted leader. Satan was so convincing in his rhetoric that the Fallen Angels did "not perceive the evil plight / in which they were or the fierce pains not feel" (ll. 336-7). Satan brings his persuasive rhetoric to full effect in Book II when he inspires his demonic host with false hope of ultimate victory, and he will convince Sin and Death to allow him to pass unopposed out of Hell's boundaries because he comes as "no enemy but to set free / from out this dark and dismal house of pain" (ll. 822-3) all those he brought to ruin.

As the poem develops, however, Milton will demonstrate the limits of the Devil's speech, thereby making him more similar to the Medieval Satan. Though Satan was able to deceive Uriel and gain admittance to Paradise in Book III by changing his appearance, once he was discovered his persuasive faculties failed him when paired up against the spirits "of happy sort" (IV.128). That Satan would fail in debates and linguistic jousts with un-fallen being is no surprise particularly given the precedence for his failure in Medieval literature. In *Piers Plowman*, for example, when Jesus comes at His Harrowing

to claim the souls which the Devil took through trickery, Satan attempts to stand in his way, saying that "by right and by reason, the race that is here / Body and soul belongs to me, both good and evil" (XVIII.278-9), and he will debate with Christ over the souls. Christ, however, dismisses his argument and asserts that Lucifer, because he took those souls by trickery, lost the right to them. Satan's inability to keep those souls is a result of his fundamental misunderstanding of God's plan of salvation, a topic which will be discussed in later chapters. In *Paradise Lost*, though, Lucifer does not merely fail to win an argument; he unintentionally lets something of his real motives be uncovered and makes himself look somewhat foolish in the process. When discovered and questioned by Gabriel about why he "broke the bounds prescribed" (IV.878) and came to Paradise, Satan attempts to cover up his real intentions with an off-the-cuff excuse, one which will leave him open to ridicule. Gabriel responds to Satan's statement that he was looking for a place of lesser pain to repose in by making great sport of the rebel angel, saying "disdainfully" and "half-smiling" (l. 903) that he must be the weakest of the fallen since no others attempted the flight from Hell, and he sarcastically hails Satan as "courageous chief / the first in flight from pain!" (920-1). Satan is so roused by Gabriel's insult that he slips up and reveals his true intentions to the angelic host: his true mission was to "spy / this new-created world" (ll. 936-7), and though he does not reveal the exact nature of his plans, he has now put the angelic guardians on alert that he is up to no good. This depiction of Satan, getting trapped in his own words and leaving himself open for ridicule, plays into the Medieval concept of Satan being bested in debates.

What explains this seeming inconsistency in Satan's rhetorical skill? How is it that Satan can be such a deft orator in some instances and fail so dismally in others? Perhaps

the best way to look at this dichotomy is to consider the Dantean concept of the loss or perversion of intellect. Virgil explains to Dante in Canto III of the *Inferno* that the sinners in Hell are there because they had "lost the good of the intellect" (l. 18) in their lifetime, causing them to commit sins of malice, fraud, and excess, and Virgil will later discourse in *Purgatorio* on perversions of love and how that turns people away from God. The same principle can be seen at work in Milton's demonic host. Satan and the Fallen Angels are most certainly intellectual beings capable of reasoning and logical thought, demonstrated most succinctly by the great debate in Pandemonium, but they lost the good of their intellect by turning it to malicious ends. Satan's rhetoric, therefore, is wholly convincing to the demonic horde but fails dismally when tried against the celestial angels. The Fallen Angels and Satan are on the same wave length, whereas the loyal angels still have minds unperverted by sin and not susceptible to Satan's subterfuge.

Milton's treatment of Satan's defeat also has a decidedly Dantean flavor to it. When Satan returns to Pandemonium to exult at his deception of Adam and Eve, he discovers that his greatest triumph has led to his undoing. In one of the most moving passages of *Paradise Lost*, Milton describes the great transformation of the once beautiful and powerful archangel to a miserable serpent:

> [. . .] he wondered, but not long
> Had leisure, wondering at himself now more;
> His visage drawn he felt to sharp and spare,
> His arms clung to his ribs, his legs entwining
> Each other, till, supplanted, down he fell,
> A monstrous serpent on his belly prone,
> Reluctant, but in vain; a greater power
> Now ruled him, punished in the shape he sinned,
> According to his doom: he would have spoke,
> But hiss for hiss returned with forked tongue
> To forked tongue; for now were all transformed

> Alike, to serpents all, as accessories
> To his bold riot [. . .] (X.509-21)

The transformation of Satan in *Paradise Lost* can be found nowhere in the Bible, but there is a very important literary precedent for the metamorphosis into a serpent. In Ovid's *Metamorphoses*, the Roman poet tells the story of the transformation of Cadmus into a serpent (IV.563-603), but more importantly for Milton's portrayal of the scene is a parallel in the *Inferno*. In Cantos XXIV and XXV, the Poets enter the Seventh Bolgia of Malebolge in the Eighth Circle and encounter serpents and the shades of the thieves, and they see the contrapasso that the sinners Cianfa and Agnello endure: Cianfa, in the shape of a six-legged serpent, fastened himself on Agnello and bit him on his cheeks, and the two shapes first merged and then exchanged natures. Dante, in a characteristic display of pride in his artistic ability, exalts himself over his classical predecessors Lucan and Ovid, saying "Let Lucan now fall silent" (XXV.94) and "Let Ovid not speak" (l. 97). Milton's treatment of Satan here is a direct response to Dante, telling Dante that he no longer has a reason to boast himself. By his metamorphosis of Satan, Milton is establishing himself as the premier poet of the underworld, and he is asserting his superiority over Dante by showing that he, not Dante, had created the embodiment of the perfect contrapasso (to paraphrase Bertrand de Born).

Early in *Paradise Lost*, Milton compares Satan entering the Garden of Eden to "a thief bent to unhoard the cash / of some rich burgher" (IV.188-9), the "first grand thief into God's fold" (l. 192). The idea of Satan as a thief in the Garden also has a precedent in Medieval literature, most famously in Langland's *Piers Plowman*: in Passus XVI, for example, Lucifer steals the fruit from the Tree of Charity (representing the souls of the Patriarchs and Prophets) in Piers' Garden, and he will later lose possession of the fruit

because he took them through thievery and deception. It is entirely appropriate, then, that Milton's Satan suffer the fate of a Dantean thief by being turned into a serpent, though there is an important distinction in the type of punishment meted out: Satan is "punished in the shape he sinned" (X.516), whereas Dante's sinners are punished according to the nature of their actions. Satan's ignoble end represents an instance of Milton trying to out-do Dante.

In *Paradise Lost*, Milton has taken upon himself the enormous task of creating a poem equal to the *Divine Comedy*, to out-perform Dante at their common poetic task. In Book I, Milton says that he will sing of "things unattempted yet in prose or rhyme" (l. 16), a statement which sounds very much like Dante in *Paradiso* when he says "the seas I sailed were never sailed before" (II.7). It is not that singing of Heaven and Hell is something that has been unattempted; it is, rather, something Milton feels he can do better than Dante. The transformation of Satan is another such moment when Milton has the *Comedy* in mind. Dante boasted that he perfected Ovid's art of metamorphosis by allowing men to change to animals and then change back into human form in a perpetual cycle, telling Ovid in Canto XXV to "not speak" (l. 97) because "never did he change two natures, face to face, / in such a way" (ll. 100-101) as Dante accomplished. Milton would lord it over Dante by transforming, not a man, but an archangel and semi-divine beings, and not just any high-ranking angel—Satan is also the enemy of mankind and God's primary antagonist. In that way, Milton is using Dante's own art and boast to out-perform the Medieval poet.

The contrapasso is one of the defining features of the *Divine Comedy*, and Kenneth Gross has argued that the contrapassos witnessed in the *Inferno* are "a demonic parody of

true conversion" and are "symbolic incarnations of cupiditas" (135), demonstrating that perversions of love are the basis for the punishments of Hell. Milton, however, only uses the contrapasso once, and when he does so, it is at a major point in the text: the final appearance of Satan in a poem in which Satan had played such a dominate role for so long. He saves the contrapasso for this moment, for Milton's narrator had previously stated that Satan was merely heaping future punishment upon himself by his disobedience to God, and the contrapasso here shows that Satan's rebellion has finally been punished in totality. Milton, though, also does something which Dante does not. Neither in *Paradise Lost* nor in the *Inferno* is there any possibility for repentance or release from Hell, yet Milton requires that the rebel angel continually perform penance regardless. At the time of their transformation, the serpents were afflicted with hunger and thirst, and a grove appeared in Hell which was sent by God "to aggravate / Their penance" (X.549-50). When they tasted the fruit of the tree, the fruit turned to bitter ashes, yet continually they tried for the fruit, for "oft they fell / Into the same illusion, not as Man, / Whom they triumphed, once lapsed" (ll. 570-72), and they did this until they regained their former shape. Milton suggests that this scene repeats itself yearly as the demons "undergo / this annual humbling certain numbered days / To dash their pride and joy for Man seduced" (X.575-77). In this way, Milton has truly perfected Dante's art, because his punishment of Satan, forcing Satan to relive the act which had him damned, is more appropriate than Dante's contrapasso of having Satan frozen in the ice with those who have betrayed their master. In a way, Milton's contrapasso is also much bolder because it does not deal with personal, individual sins, those sins for which the shades in the *Inferno* are being punished. Instead, Milton has gone on record saying that this is the punishment of those

who doomed humanity, those who caused Original Sin to enter the world. In that way, then, Milton is much more ambitious in his use of the contrapasso than even Dante.

Toward the end of Book II, Milton will make one final nod to the Medieval period with his use of the allegorical characters Sin and Death. Though allegory was a very common literary device throughout the Middle Ages, it was one which had generally lost favor by Milton's time. The use of allegory had been so popular because of the preponderance of the dream vision motif in the Middle Ages, and many of the most important writers of the period relied on the allegorical device in some way: Dante, Chaucer, Langland, the *Pearl* poet, Guillaume de Lorris, and Jean de Meun, for example. Milton's poem, of course, is certainly not a dream vision, so his use of the allegorical device here must serve another purpose. Paul Rovang believes that Satan's encounter with Sin and Death is the greatest example in *Paradise Lost* of the influence of the Arthurian stories, especially Sir Thomas Malory's *Le Morte D'Arthur*. Milton's interest in the Arthurian legends is well attested, though Barbara Lewalski notes that he came to lose interest in the topic "as he had come to doubt King Arthur's historicity" (444). The focus of Rovang's argument centers on Book Seven in Malory's text and the similarities between Duke de la Ruse's challenge to Sir Gareth and Death's confrontation with Satan. Rovang shows that the preliminary challenge in Malory "is a prelude to a more dramatic encounter between Gareth and Gawain, whom Gareth fails to recognize as his brother," and this has a parallel in *Paradise Lost* when "Satan fails to recognize Death as his son" (3). Rovang considers that the narrowly averted and potentially disastrous battle between Death and Satan has its roots in the conflict between Arthur and Mordred; that scene, he says, "is bound to remind us of Arthur's demise at the hands of his son by an incestuous

(and, apparently, like Satan's, incognizant) encounter with his half-sister" (4). The similarities are indeed striking, and given Milton's intimate knowledge of Medieval literature and the King Arthur story, can hardly be considered accidental.

Milton's conception of Hell and Satan was influenced as well by some other Medieval poems that are little known to the literary world at large. The Anglo-Saxon poems "Christ and Satan," "Genesis A," and "Genesis B" may be truly pivotal texts in their effect on Milton's epic poem. In them is a forerunner for *Paradise Lost* in the anonymous poet's treatment of Satan and his plight after his fall. Though it has not yet been proven—and indeed may be impossible to prove—there is some circumstantial evidence that suggests Milton would have had some access to these works. In 1654, Milton's friend, the Dutch scholar Franciscus Julius, published the Genesis poems in Amsterdam before Milton's blindness, and Jeffrey Russell speculates that it was possible Milton himself had access to them around this time. Given the great "similarities in characterization, mood, and diction," and considering that "nowhere between the eleventh and the seventeenth centuries is the rebellious prince of Hell portrayed with such strength and latent sympathy" (138), it seems likely that Milton would have known those texts (though I disagree with Russell that the Genesis poet is very sympathetic with Satan).

The Hell and Satan of "Genesis A" and "Genesis B" are remarkably similar to that of Milton. In "Genesis A," Satan's pride causes him to contemplate his "deed of folly, to plot and hatch it forth" as he is "thirsting for battle" (7) against God. There are, more importantly, great similarities in language between *Paradise Lost* and the Genesis poems: the rebel angels were driven "from their ancient home and seat of glory" and "hurled

from Heaven," and for eternity, "those dusky spirits dwelt in exile" (8). Lucifer fell because he could no longer "find it in his heart to serve the Lord God, or be subject to Him" (12), and upon their defeat, "three nights and days the angels fell from Heaven into Hell. God changed them all to devils" (13). Hell is a place "devoid of light" (13), and as the demons are stretched out upon the fiery lake, they plot the downfall of the human race, with Satan saying that "we needs must ponder earnestly to wreak this grudge on Adam" (15). As in *Paradise Lost*, the demons come to accept that Heaven is now lost to them and decide that the only way to get their revenge is to subvert Adam and Eve and "bring them to forsake God's word and teaching" (15). Parallels to these phrases can be found throughout Milton's epic.

Milton's picture of Hell, Satan, and the Fallen Angels was impacted more by the Medieval worldview than most people realize. While Dante played the greatest role in shaping Milton's thoughts on the afterlife and the demonic, particularly in his construction of Hell, the Medieval influence extends as far back as the Anglo-Saxon period, all the way to William Langland and the high Middle Ages. From his decision to place the Devil's quarters in the north country to his characterization of Satan himself, the imprint of the Middle Ages can be found throughout every book in *Paradise Lost*. Though Milton is undisputedly a poet of great imagination and power, *Paradise Lost* would have looked very different if not for the profound effect that the Medieval poets had upon Milton's poetic art.

Chapter Three: Dwelling with God

Almost 3,000 years ago, a Jewish scribe put pen to parchment and set down an account of the beginning of mankind and humanity's eventual Fall from grace and descent into sin. It is, by far, one of the most recognizable stories in the Hebrew Bible, and the tale of the First Parents has been analyzed, expanded upon, and moralized in many ways. Milton, though, has constructed the most vivid and significant representations of the Biblical story in literature, and though he was quite familiar with Medieval accounts of the Fall ranging from the *Romance of the Rose* to *Purgatorio* and *Piers Plowman*, the story Milton recounts in *Paradise Lost* is thoroughly original. Milton's version of the Adam and Eve story has provided considerable fodder for modern critics, particularly feminist critics who accuse Milton of blatant misogyny in his portrayal of Eve. While that is certainly an understandable conclusion, Milton's portrayal of Eve, particularly his belief in her culpability for the Fall, also follows traditional Christian interpretations of the event. Though a poet of great originality and imagination, Milton was unquestionably influenced by literary precedent. That is readily apparent from examining the way in which he allowed Medieval thought into *Paradise Lost* and in how he reacted against other notions present in the Middle Ages.

The Garden of Eden, concurrently a symbol of purity and the site of humanity's fall from grace, is an image which recurs constantly in Medieval period, from the early Anglo-Saxon poems to the French romances during the High Middle Ages. It is also the locus for much of the action in *Paradise Lost*, and the Garden is one of the subjects with which Milton interacts the most in terms of Medieval precedent. Though the Bible itself provides relatively sparse details regarding the Garden of Eden, Milton provides his

readers with a fairly thorough accounting of Eden and its pleasures. Much of Milton's description of Eden incorporates "the rhetorical tropes by which poets had established an ideal landscape (a stream, flowers, shade trees, fragrant breezes, birdsong) and conventional features of the earthly paradise" (Knott 66). However, Milton's Garden, though being the epitome of idyllic splendor, is also described in somewhat surprising terms, as when Milton says that the steep wilderness of Eden has "hairy sides [. . .] grotesque and wild" (IV.135-36). Knott focuses more on the wildness and life of the landscape itself, saying that in Milton's earthly paradise, to the extent that "order exists in the Garden, whether in the larger pastoral landscape or in the more intimate spaces tended by Adam and Eve, coexists with this sense of an unrestricted, virginal nature playing out its own fancies independent of any human (or angelic) presence" (68). Knott correctly notes that "wildness" before and during Milton's time carried with it a negative connotation, citing specifically the example of William Bradford's *On Plymouth Plantation* when he described the New World as "a hideous and desolate wilderness, full of wild beasts and wild men" (Bradford 49). Milton most certainly does not see the wildness of Eden in such negative terms, however, for Milton shows that beneath the seemingly wildness of Edenic nature, there is still a controlling and mitigating factor at work, namely the social hierarchy which prevails in Eden.

Given the strictly hierarchical nature of Milton's Hell and Heaven, it should come as little surprise that the earthly paradise should also exhibit this structure, though this middle realm (unless one argues that Chaos is a distinct realm) will have the human race, and Adam specifically, at its head and being above Eve, while both of the First Parents are above the animals. In Milton's conception, the Earth and humans were created for

one purpose: to replace the ranks of loyal followers that God lost as a result of the angelic rebellion, and it is understood that at some future point, Earth and Heaven will be divinely joined. In Book VII, Raphael explains that the Earth was formed in the realm of Chaos, but Milton makes a rather radical departure from Orthodox Christian teaching in that he describes the Son as being the member of Godhead that actually created the Earth. When God proclaims "Let us make Man in Our image, according to Our likeness" (Gen. 1:26), many Christians interpret that passage as an acknowledgment that the Son was eternally co-existent with the Father, in much the same way they interpret John 1:1—"In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God." Milton, however, carries that assumption much further by actually making Christ the creation agent, though Milton is at least staying consistent within *Paradise Lost*, for he previously gave the role of creator to the Son regarding the angels.

It is quite likely that Milton's image of the Garden of Eden was at least partially affected by one of the most influential texts of the Medieval period, the *Romance of the Rose* of Guillaume de Lorris and Jean de Meun. That Milton knew the work well is indisputable, for he had read and taken notes on Chaucer's translation of the poem (Lewalski 126). Edward Sichi, Jr. has written of the parallels between *Paradise Lost* and the *Romance of the Rose*, arguing that "if a major theme of *Paradise Lost* and the *Roman de la Rose* is love, including the proper relationship between man and woman and their proper relationship with God, the similarity between the two poems is even more evident" (154). Sichi is quite correct on that point, and the topic of the proper male/female relations as envisioned by Milton will be discussed in more detail later in this chapter.

One of the main areas of influence one finds between *Paradise Lost* and the *Romance of the Rose* involves the Garden itself and the Narcissus motif. When the Dreamer in the *Romance* approaches the Garden of Pleasure, he finds that it is enclosed by a high wall decorated with paintings and inscriptions. Those paintings on the outside of the wall were embodiments of things which could not be found within the walls of a prelapserian Eden: Envy, Hate, Old Age, Covetousness, Sorrow, Cruelty, Poverty, Religious Hypocrisy, and other similar figures. The idea of a walled Eden is not found in either Dante's *Purgatorio* or Langland's *Piers Plowman*, but Milton does include such a structure in *Paradise Lost*. "The verdurous wall of Paradise" (IV.143) was a mighty impediment, and Satan, like the Dreamer in the *Romance*, initially finds that his access to the Garden is denied as the wall has neither gate[3] nor door through which he could enter. Whereas the wall in the *Romance* would have kept the Dreamer out had not Lady Idleness opened a door for him, Satan exhibits contempt for the wall and hurdles over it with a single leap. In both instances, the inner sanctuary of the garden, despite its seemingly significant defenses, is rather easily transgressed.

The most common parallel between the two texts regards the use of the Narcissus motif. Edward Sichi argues that the fountain scene in Book IV of *Paradise Lost* where Eve becomes self-enamored is more than just a "complementary [. . .] recasting of Ovid's story"; it is, rather, "a replay of the famous fountain in the *Roman*" (161). There is a similarity in tone between *Paradise Lost* and the *Romance*, for both Milton and de Lorris use the Narcissus episode as a warning to the female reader. De Lorris recounts Narcissus' hardheartedness and uses it as a cautionary tale, exhorting those "ladies who

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[3] There is, in fact, one gate mentioned by Milton, but it was not available to Satan because it "looked east / on the other side" (IV.178-79), and Satan had approached the Garden from the West.

behave badly to your lovers, learn from this example, for if you leave them to die, God will repay you" (24). Milton, however, intends his reader to derive a different lesson from the episode. Rather than serve as a warning about faithfulness to one's love, Eve's initial rejection of Adam is the first inkling of Eve's vanity and independent streak, the same sense of independence which will cause her to separate from Adam in Book IX. This scene also reinforces the notion that it is Adam who is to have dominance in their relationship, for when Eve yields to Adam's will, she finds that it was he "for whom / and from whom I was formed flesh of my flesh / and without whom am to no end, my guide / and head" (IV.440-443). The proper relationship between Adam and Eve will be discussed in more detail later in this chapter. Also, aside from the more obvious parallels, it is interesting to note that the Dreamer in the *Romance* says that as he approached the Spring of Narcissus, the God of Love followed him, "watching like the hunter" (23). In *Paradise Lost*, Milton, in a relatively subtle way, depicts Satan as a hunter stalking the Garden of Eden, for Satan assumes several lower forms "as their shape served best his end / nearer to view his prey" (IV.398-99), and in the form of a tiger he came so close to Adam and Eve that "he might surest seize them both / gripped in each paw" (ll. 407-8).

The most extensive Medieval treatment of the Garden of Eden which could have influenced Milton is found in Dante's *Purgatorio*. Dante places the Garden of Eden atop Mount Purgatory itself, and his description of the pleasures of the Garden, from the "thick and verdant foliage" (XXVIII.2) to the fragrant air and gentle breezes, is similar to the language that Milton uses in his description. For comparative purposes, however, the most important parallel comes in the figures of the ladies that Dante encounters on the

top of Mount Purgatory and how they compare to Milton's Eve. Before entering the Earthly Paradise, Dante has a dream of Leah and Rachel, the sisters from Genesis, and elements of Milton's Eve can be seen in both of them. In *Paradise Lost*, Eve can be found among the flowers tending the Garden, and in Dante's dream, Leah is also tending the flowers in Eden, for she is a symbol of Eve in her prelapserian state. Leah tells Dante that her sister Rachel "never leaves her mirror / sitting before it all day long" (XXVII.104-5) for she is "eager to gaze into her own fair eyes" (l. 106). Although Dante will establish this seeming vanity as an example of the active life (Leah) and the contemplative life (Rachel), thereby negating any vain connotations to Rachel's self-admiration, Rachel's gazing into the mirror cannot help but to bring the reader back to the Narcissus scene in *Paradise Lost*. Eve would also have stared at herself continuously, but it was out of vanity and not contemplation that she was acting. It is this vanity and lack of true contemplation that will ultimately doom Eve in *Paradise Lost*.

The use of music and verse plays an important role throughout *Paradise* Lost, and Adam and Eve sing hymns and songs of praise to God as an integral part of their daily routine in the Garden of Eden. A common subject that the First Parents address in their daily worship is God as Creator, as when they "under open sky adored / the God who made both sky, air, earth, and heav'n" (IV.721-22) and praised Him who "also mad'st the night / Maker Omnipotent, and Thou the day" (ll. 724-25). In Book V, Adam and Eve exhort the Sun to "acknowledge Him thy greater" (l. 172) and tell the Moon, the fixed stars, and "ye five other wandering fires [. . .] resound / His praise who out of darkness called up light" (ll. 176-79). At the end of Book VII, the angels also praise "creation and the six days' acts" (l. 601), for "to create / is greater than created to destroy" (ll. 606-7).

This emphasis on the role of God as Creator reminds the reader of Anglo-Saxon hymns which so often had creation as their subject. In *Beowulf*, for example, the scop who so enraged Grendel sang "with mastery of man's beginnings / how the Almighty had made the earth" (ll. 91-2) and invested it with light, water, heavenly bodies, and human life. Even the first recorded poem in the English language, *Caedmon's Hymn*, also praises God and creation.

Although Adam receives the majority of attention in Medieval texts for his role in the Fall, Eve also receives a fair amount of scrutiny during the Middle Ages. The Medieval poems most analogous to *Paradise Lost* and the retelling of the Genesis story would undoubtedly be the *Genesis A* and *Genesis B* poems of the Codex Junius III Manuscript, and though it has never been shown for certain that Milton knew either poem, the similarities are quite remarkable. Despite the intriguing similarities between the *Genesis* poems and *Paradise Lost*, it is the differences—as when Satan initially attempts to subvert Adam before moving on to Eve—that provide some of the most fertile grounds for comparing the Miltonic Eve with Eve as a character in the Middle Ages. Eve will ultimately take the blame for the Fall upon herself in the *Genesis* poems, but she is dealt with in a more sympathetic way than Milton is wont to do. The *Genesis* poet says of Eve that "God had wrought her soul the weaker" (19), a belief that Milton also puts forward, but Satan approaches the *Genesis* Eve in a much different way than Milton's Satan. In the guise of the Serpent, Satan tells Eve that he is a representative sent from God to instruct them to eat of the fruit and that Adam turned him away. The Serpent tells her that if she will convince Adam to eat of the fruit, "I will not tell our Lord what evil Adam spake against me, his wicked words accusing me of falsehood" (18), and the wrath of

God could then be avoided. When faced with the proposition of displeasing God, Eve promised to get Adam to eat of the fruit, and then she ate of the fruit herself and experienced a vision of the heavens and earth quite similar to the dream that Eve relates in Book V of *Paradise Lost*. Perhaps the key difference between Milton's Eve and the *Genesis* Eve is that vanity and pride do not factor in to the latter Eve's decision; as the poet says, "all this she did with good intention" (21). Although the result is the same in the *Genesis* poems as it is in *Paradise Lost*, the reader is left with a much more complex and understanding view of Eve.

Though the comparison between Eve in *Paradise Lost* and the character of Eve in Medieval literature is the most pertinent way of approaching the Medieval influence on Milton, it is also instructive to see how Eve's role as a woman compares with Medieval notions of femininity. In this respect, though Milton is writing almost 200 years after the end of the Middle Ages (and about 1,000 years after its beginning), his view of women and their role in society seems considerably less progressive than during the Medieval period. This is not to say that Medieval writers and philosophers took an enlightened attitude towards women: in Medieval iconography, for example, the serpent in the Garden of Eden is sometimes portrayed with a woman's face, and when Sir Gawain is lamenting his humiliation at the hands of the Green Knight, he blames the trickery of Bertilak's wife for his failure and says that the world "through the wiles of woman" (l. 2415) had been lured into sorrow since the days of Adam, Solomon, Samson, and David. These stereotypes still abounded, and Eve herself was sometimes viewed a bit harshly in the Middle Ages, but even in the worst conditions, many women in Medieval literature still retained a degree of power and influence. Eve, however, is specifically cast to be

Adam's inferior partner, both domestically and intellectually. Of particular interest is the fact that, especially in the temptation scene, Eve's sexuality is seen as a decided negative, almost something to be feared.

Medieval women, obviously operating in a postlapserian environment, exhibit fewer such limitations and are imbued with considerable power, whether that be poetic, political, or sexual power. Certainly in the courtly tradition, female characters and the male authors who created them embrace feminine sexuality to a degree that Milton's Eve could never do. If Queen Guinevere is portrayed as libidinous in the Arthurian tradition or if Sir Bertilak's wife in *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight* is seen as an aggressive temptress, it is of no concern to the author; the reader is not supposed to view them in a negative light. Milton's Eve, by contrast, is portrayed in such a way that an undiscerning reader would be left with a sense of disdain for the First Matriarch.

The negative connotation attributed to Eve's sexuality is further emphasized by the immediate ramifications of the Fall. After both of the First Parents have tasted of the fruit, Milton says that a feeling similar to intoxication overwhelms them, and though a sense of ecstasy seems to overtake them so that they could "scorn the Earth" (IX.1011), Milton says that "far other operation first displayed, / carnal desire inflaming" (ll. 1012-13). Given the apparent unease with which sexuality is treated in Book IX, it is instructive that Milton would make it part of the first sinful action taken by the couple after the initial eating of the fruit. It certainly does attest somewhat to Milton's attitude toward sexuality, but it may show another example of Medieval influence on the poem. In Passus XV of *Piers Plowman*, the narrator is brought to Piers' Garden in which stands a great tree held up by three props. The image of the tree shifts and is interpreted in

various ways, but its primary symbolic function is as a representation of the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil. The narrator is told that "the Flesh is a fierce wind" (l. 31) which "through lusts and delights [. . .] nourishes naughty sights and at another time words / and wicked works" (ll. 32-4). This is precisely the formula that Adam and Eve will follow in *Paradise Lost*: after being overcome with carnal "lusts and delights" for one another, their former happiness will give way to wicked words and works as they cast blame on one another for their Fall. Tillyard has suggested that Milton's perspective on the Fall was shaped by his first marriage, for that was "the one occasion when he allowed passion to gain the mastery over reason" (450), and for that reason "he cannot refrain from grafting sex onto the scheme of the Fall." Waldock has also noted the sexual component of the Fall, saying that "a new self-consciousness" resulted from the fall and "sensuality itself" (456) came into being. Upon tasting of the fatal fruit, Adam and Eve are now controlled by the Flesh rather than the Spirit, and it does certainly seem that for Milton, the ultimate representation of behaving in the Flesh revolved around sexuality.

The description of Adam's and Eve's amorous dalliance after the Fall is certainly a decided contrast to that which was given for their amorousness during their innocent phase. The scene, as related by Adam in Book VIII, is shrouded in delicacy and modesty as he describes leading a blushing Eve to the nuptial bower, and the narrative voice in Book IV declares that Eve did not refuse "the rites / mysterious of connubial love" (ll. 742-43). Lewis openly questions whether or not Milton was wise to include even the suggestion of prelapserian intercourse, for it is "dangerous to attempt a poetical representation of something which is unimaginable, not in the sense of raising no images, but in the more disastrous sense of inevitably raising the wrong ones" (122). Long before

Paradise Lost, there was debate as to whether Adam and Eve would have had sexual relations in the Garden of Eden, and here Lewis points out the divergence of opinion between Milton and the great Medieval theologian St. Augustine, who according to Lewis believed that unfallen sexuality was a mere hypothetical and therefore never would actually have occurred.[4] Whether hypothetical or actual, the effect and purpose is the same: perceptions of sexuality were altered in a postlapserian environment.

Even more than by her sexuality, Milton's Eve is defined in large measure by her vanity. This aspect of her nature is evident from the earliest moments of her creation, as when Eve first sees her image reflected in the water after her creation and is so drawn to herself that she admits she would have "fixed / Mine eyes till now, and pined with vain desire" (IV.465-6) had a voiced not warned her against it. When she first sees Adam himself a short time later, she turns away from him because she found him "less fair / less winning soft, less amiably mild / than that smooth wat'ry image" (ll. 478-80). It is interesting that even in Milton's prelapserian Eden, the First Matriarch is susceptible to the weakness of narcissism, though Milton (through Adam) attempts to gloss over this inconsistency by saying that Eve's actions were still "pure of sinful thought" (VIII.506). Despite this rather weak attempt to smooth over this peculiar incident, there is little doubt that Satan was ultimately successful in challenging Eve because he attacked her at the weakest point in her character: her vanity. In the serpent's guise, Satan plays directly to Eve's pride and vanity, saying that she "shouldst be seen / a goddess among gods adored and served / by angels numberless thy daily train" (IX.546-48). This characterization of Eve should certainly not come as a surprise to the reader; the stereotype of vanity in

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[4] Despite Milton's modest treatment of the subject and relatively delicate phrasing of the event itself, Milton's version of the consummation of their love drew criticism at the time.

women had existed for centuries before Milton, and that foible in the fairer sex was a stock motif in many of the bawdy "comedy of manners" plays written after the Puritan fall from grace during the Restoration period.

By tasting of the fruit of the tree, Eve has done something very dangerous in Milton's perspective; she has made herself superior to Adam, at least on the plane of knowledge. Northrop Frye, in *Children of God and Nature*, observed that "Milton places the supremacy of Eve over Adam at the central point of the fall" as a reaction against "the cult of courtly love" and the "worship of women in the literary conventions of his time" because they represented "one of the most direct and eloquent symbolic results of the fall of man" (461). Sexual hierarchy and male prominence over women was very much a part of Milton's personal and religious beliefs, and it is a belief which manifests itself throughout *Paradise Lost* as well. Milton often emphasizes the proper role of men and women by using Adam and Eve—before the Fall—as examples of that relationship. In Book VIII, to provide just one example, Raphael reminds Adam that he is to cherish and love Eve but must give "not thy subjection" (l. 570) to Eve for she is "less excellent" (l. 566) than Adam spiritually and intellectually. Eve was never intended to usurp Adam's place, but that domestic dynamic is significantly altered once Eve commits the act of disobedience. When Eve first sees Adam after she has tasted the fruit, she invites him to taste of the fruit as well so that "equal lot / may join us, equal joy, as equal love / lest, though not tasting, different degree / disjoin us" (IX.881-4). Adam's position as the superior member of the pair has been usurped by Eve's pretensions to equality, and now, at least from Eve's perspective, the best that Adam can hope to attain is equality with Eve. Their respective situations have been thoroughly and irrevocably reversed. Eve's

rebellion was against both domestic and religious male hierarchy, and therefore, the story of the Fall as presented by Milton has not only religious implications but societal ones as well—when women, because of their pride and vanity, seek to attain equality with men, disastrous consequences are assured.

Despite the largely negative view of Eve in the text, her temptation is not wholly unlike the temptation of Christ in the Gospels. Thomas Watson has written that the "symbolic construct" (90) of *Paradise Lost* is typological and that everything in the universe and along the continuum of history is connected and significantly related to Christ. The use of religious typology in literature was nothing new to Milton, for many Biblical and Medieval writers had suggested a typological link between Adam and Christ. Having examined the typology of *Paradise Lost*, though, Watson concludes that "Milton assigns to Eve the strongest typological parallel with Christ's threefold temptation" (91). His evidence for this is fairly sound, comparing the triad of temptations with which Eve and Christ were enticed, but Watson uses this linking of Christ and Eve's temptations as evidence that Milton was not a misogynist, as many of the poet's critics claim. Whether one believes that Milton was a misogynist on a personal level or whether he merely espoused the stereotypical views of women common in his society should not be the most important lesson one draws from this typological connection. It is significant, I believe, that Milton uses the temptation scene to establish a typological link between Eve (the deceived Parent) and Christ, and the importance of temptation and the root cause of temptation is underscored by the fact that *Paradise Regained*, the much shorter sequel to *Paradise Lost*, deals with the temptation story. Milton could have used any period in Christ's life for *Paradise Regained*—the Garden of Gethsemane, the Crucifixion, the

Resurrection—but he chose the temptation in the wilderness. In a way, the Garden of Eden is Eve's wilderness, and Milton is showing that Christ faced the same temptations that Eve did (and that all of humanity will face) but was unswayed by Satan's arguments and remained obedient to God. Both Christ and Eve had free will when deciding whether to give in to sinful seduction, but that free will should never be used as an occasion for sin or rebellion against God.

Before the Fall in *Paradise Lost*, Eve is prominently seen in her domestic role and as a willing inferior to Adam, and this latter aspect may best be illustrated by the First Parents' encounter with Raphael. Although they have both been created in the image of God, Milton places a strict division between them as "true authority" (IV.295) lies with men because Adam was created for "contemplation" and "valor" (l. 297), whereas Eve "for softness she and sweet attractive grace" (l. 298) was made. When Raphael enters the Garden, Adam sends Eve off on domestic errands necessary to properly greet their heavenly guests while Adam goes to bring the angel back to their bower. In this scene, Milton is drawing on some common Medieval motifs to portray Adam and Eve as a royal pair extending hospitality and gifts to a visitor of noble birth. In such great Medieval epics as *Beowulf* and *Das Nibelungenlied*, the kings Hrothgar, Beowulf, and Gunther all fulfill the role of the good king by being generous with their wealth and magnanimous in their behavior. Adam fits in this model as well by offering Raphael rest in the shady bower and promising him that he can "sit and taste" of "what the garden choicest bears" (ll. 368-69) until the day has passed. Eve is seemingly a perfected version of Queen Wealhtheow from *Beowulf*. The Queen, "adorned in her gold" (l. 614) and "decked out in rings" (l. 621), performs her ceremonial function by "observing the courtesies" (l. 613)

and serving the King's guests and thanes at the feast in Heorot. Eve has a similar role to play in the meeting with Raphael, for she "stood to entertain her guest from Heav'n" (V.383) and prepared an ample meal for them from the Garden's abundance, though she was "undecked save with herself" (l. 380). The proper gender roles in this case could not be clearer.

If Milton's portrayal of Eve is generally unflattering, his description of Adam, though possibly unintentional, is also far from positive. To Milton, Adam may have been seen more as a figure to pity, yet another poor Samson lead astray by a seductive Delilah. His act of rebellion was not motivated by pride or need for gain but by his love for Eve, for Adam laments "how can I live without thee, how forgo / thy sweet converse and love so dearly joined / to live again in these wild woods forlorn?" (IX.908-10). Adam is resolute in his belief that he and Eve are part of the same nature and must never be separated, even if it means he must sorrowfully give up Paradise. To a modern reader, however, Adam appears weak-kneed at best, if not a little bit ridiculous. He excels at playing the victim and casts aspersion solely on Eve in what is a weak attempt to cover up his very deliberate disobedience. The reader, of course, recognizes that both Adam and Eve were guilty of willful rebellion. The difference is that Eve at least owned her rebellion and admitted it while Adam sought to justify himself.

Milton makes explicitly clear the reason for Adam and Eve's expulsion from the Garden of Eden; it is the act of disobedience in eating the fruit from the Tree of Knowledge that has resulted in their removal from Paradise. In this respect, Milton follows Dante in the *Paradiso* when Adam explains to Dante the Pilgrim that "in itself the tasting of the tree / was not the cause of such long exile-- / it lay in trespassing the

boundary line" (XXVI.115-17). Though the reason given by Milton and Dante seems rather like common knowledge to modern readers, there was, at one time, a slightly alternate theory that had been raised. Though the position taken by Dante may be the majority position in the theology of the time, not all Medieval writers held to that opinion. In *Piers Plowman*, for example, Langland writes that it was the "desire to understand and be skilled in sciences / [that] put Adam and Eve out of Paradise" (XV.62-3). Langland follows up this passage by quoting from St. Bernard, saying in effect that it was the quest for knowledge that cost humanity the glory of immortality. Though it is difficult to say exactly where this belief came from, it is possible that Medieval Christian mystics had access to the Book of 1 Enoch, a pseudopygraphical retelling of the Genesis story. Apparently, Milton also knew this book, for he uses the name of one of the rebellious angels in Enoch as one of his fallen angels. Though Adam and Eve's fall did not result from a distinct quest for knowledge, being more a result of pride and a Dantean perversion of the intellect, it is interesting to note that Adam certainly displays an interest in the science of astronomy, as when he questions Raphael about the motion of celestial bodies. This interest could come from 1 Enoch, which describes the fallen angels instructing humanity "astrology [. . .] the seeing of the stars" and "the course of the moon" (8:3). Milton subtly raised the idea of Man's desire for knowledge in *Paradise Lost*, but he ultimately rejected it as a root cause of the Fall.

The story of Adam and Eve in *Paradise Lost* is one of the great tragedies of literature: the First Parents willfully reject the perfection of Eden to serve their own wills. As a consequence of Adam and Eve's disobedience, the world would have to be put right by the ultimate act of godly obedience and self-sacrifice. Though that promise of

redemption would remain unfulfilled at the end of *Paradise Lost* (and will not be recognized just yet even in *Paradise Regained*), the expectation of the victory of Eve's seed is there. It will be many years before that atonement is made, but Milton assures his readers that that victory will happen and that humans will again return to Paradise.

Chapter Four: Saved by the Grace of God

Orthodox Christian theology holds that after the Fall of humanity and the introduction of Original Sin in the Garden of Eden, the necessity arose for an intercessor to come and propitiate the sins of Mankind. For Christians, that intercessor was, of course, Jesus Christ—God made manifest in human form on earth—and it was through belief in Him and His sacrifice at Calvary that man could be saved. Among theologians and philosophers, though, there was considerable debate about how exactly Christ's sacrifice brought the believer into the grace of God. Throughout the Middle Ages, several theories of salvation were proposed by Christian theologians, most of which were ultimately rejected and then replaced. Many of those ideas would be unrecognizable today, but Milton serves as something of a transition point in the salvation debate, and the stance he takes in *Paradise Lost* is the one which has become the more orthodox Christian position. Milton's Heaven, God, and Christ, as portrayed in *Paradise Lost*, also provides insight into other aspects of Milton's religious opinions, opinions which put Milton very close to heresy in the eyes of the Church. Though often relegated to a lesser status than Milton's Hell and deemed more dull and uninspired than Milton's Satan, Milton's Heaven and his God are essential elements in Milton's religious beliefs.

Milton's Heaven is unique in that the celestial city shares some striking similarities with Hell, particularly in the military and political atmosphere which dominates the activities of Heaven. In the same way that Milton's Hell is organized around a tight hierarchy in its political and military dimensions, so too is his Heaven. At the head of this heavenly infrastructure is God Himself, who sits on a high throne "above all height" (III.58), a scene reminiscent of Satan seating himself on his infernal throne. Both places

were fashioned by God and are eternal and indestructible, reminding one somewhat of the inscription upon the gates of Hell in Canto III of the *Inferno*. Lewalski has also noted that both Heaven and Hell are places of process rather than stasis, saying that in Heaven there is a "continuous and active choice of good rather than the absence of evil" (465). This point is underscored by the War in Heaven, for Satan and the rebel angels, then residing in Heaven, made an active choice to rebel against God. When rallying the rebel angels in Book Five, Satan boasts that "we possess / the quarters of the north, there to prepare / Fit entertainment to receive our King / the great Messiah" (688-91). Also, as the war in Heaven is about to get underway, the armies of Heaven look out to see that "far in the horizon to the north appeared / from skirt to skirt a fiery region stretched / in battailous aspect" (VI.79-81). Milton most likely places Satan's quarters in the north because that is the direction with which Hell and Satan are commonly associated in many Medieval works. Kellogg notes that "the conception of north and south as symbolic of spiritual states [. . .] is likewise indebted to St. Augustine" (30), and "Satan is traditionally associated with the north as a symbol of the deprivation of the grace of God" (31). The continuing choice of obedience illustrates one major difference between Milton and Dante's portrayal of Heaven, for one does not get the sense in *Paradiso* that there is any active choice on the part of the souls Dante encounters. This indicates that Milton believed that salvation and spiritual progress was dependent on a constant focus and attentiveness to good, and only by actively pursuing good does one become worthy to stand in God's presence.

At this point, though, the similarities between the two armed cities end. Heaven is at the highest point of Milton's cosmos, and it is inhabited by God and the angels who did

not participate in Satan's failed coup. Unlike Hell, Heaven is a place awash in light, a point that is amplified by Milton's "Hymn to Light" in Book III (ll. 1-56) which serves as a transition between the description of Hell in Books I and II and that of Heaven in Book III. This transition is further highlighted by the mention of the great gulf which separates Heaven and Hell, a concept Milton most certainly derived from the story of Lazarus and the Rich Man in the Gospel of Luke in the New Testament, when Abraham speaks of the "great gulf" (Luke 16:26) separating the damned and the saved. In many respects, Milton's cosmic scheme is essentially the same as Dante's. There are ten recognized spheres; the first seven are planetary spheres, followed by the eighth sphere of the fixed stars, the crystalline ninth sphere, and the Empyrean in the tenth sphere, also referred to (as in Dante) as the Primum Mobile (Orchard 322). It is this final sphere, one which encloses all of the other nine spheres and in which resides the "first mover," that causes the entire cosmos to be put into motion.

The scientific progress being made in Milton's age was truly remarkable, and advances in the study of the cosmos caused many to question their former views of the universe. One of the major differences that stand out between the astronomical vantage point of Milton in the 17th Century and the Middle Ages is found in the debate over Copernicus' vs. Ptolemy's view of the universe. The geocentric model of the universe advocated by Ptolemy was the prevailing cosmic system for centuries and is particularly useful for informing Dante's understanding of the cosmos. The Copernican view of the universe fundamentally altered previous conceptions of the heavens and disturbed some Christian thinkers because Copernicus' heliocentric model effectively removed the earth from its former position as the center of the universe. Though Milton's cosmic scheme,

based as it seems to be on Dante (and by extension, Ptolemy), seems fairly well established, Milton himself sometimes seems doubtful about the structure of the universe, as when Raphael does not equivocally answer all of Adam's queries about the motion of celestial bodies, and this fact represents the scientific uncertainty in the 1600s about the universe. Raphael's response to Adam to not dwell on and attempt to understand things beyond man's control could perhaps be Milton's response to the question as well, or it may also be that Milton was quite unsure and did not want to find himself proven wrong and having written evidence of his mistake. One should not necessarily conclude that just because one finds the Ptolemaic system at work in *Paradise Lost* that Milton rejected the Copernican model. It seems more likely that the usage of Ptolemy's model merely suggests the influence of Dante's work and the uncertainty over the scientific advances of Milton's age. In addition, Milton perhaps felt safe using Dante's model of the universe, and given the fact that he had already alienated some with his borderline heretical theological views and was under political duress at the time, Milton could ill-afford to give people yet another reason to view him with suspicion.

The War in Heaven, one of the defining events in Milton's epic, is described as a literal encounter between Satan with his legions of demonic followers, and the heavenly angels, led by Michael and later assisted by The Son of God. Though a literal war between the forces of evil and good became popularized in later theology, alternative suggestions were occasionally proposed during the Medieval period, particularly in the mystery plays, which could show either that the expulsion of Satan and his followers was accomplished "by the simple fiat of the divinity" or that the war in heaven as described in Revelation 12 referred to "the struggle of the church against worldly tyrants" (Russell

202). The question, of course, is how Milton intended for this episode to be read. Many have sought from this episode to infer Milton's opinion on war, and given that *Paradise Lost* was written during great political turmoil (and not long after the English Civil War), it is only fitting that critics would attempt to establish parallels there.

It could be that Heaven's Civil War is also an allegorical encounter. Though Milton is not associated with allegorical writing to the extent that Dante or Langland may be, he was definitely no stranger to the device, having just used it in Book II. St. George argues that certain difficult passages in the war scene are "capable of illumination by a consistent allegorical reading" (190), and she further states that a "close analogy can be made between the war Milton wrote of and the conversion struggle of the human spirit" (193). While her argument is not totally without merit, one must think more of Dante than Milton when discussing an epic at whose heart is an allegorical struggle between spiritual progress and spiritual damnation. Though the angelic conflict could potentially be seen through an allegorical lens, the most likely option is that Milton intended for the war to be read as a literal conflict, one with a decisive nod to Chapter Twelve of the Book of Revelation, in which John the Revelator says "war broke out in heaven: Michael and his angels fought against the Dragon; and the Dragon and his angels fought, but they did not prevail, nor was a place found for them in Heaven any longer. So the great dragon was cast out, that serpent of old, called the Devil and Satan [. . .]" (vv. 7-9). Milton has used other aspects of John the Revelator's vision in *Paradise Lost*; it seems natural that he would use the War in Heaven in a similar fashion.

There could be yet another plausible reason for the preeminence of battle imagery. Berry situates *Paradise Lost* in the context of militant Protestantism and the popularity of

military sermons in the Church. In "Puritan Soldiers in *Paradise Lost*," Berry's intent is to explain the seeming paradox of how Milton's characters are shown constantly being active yet never actually achieving anything, as when "the whole war in Heaven solves nothing, Satan's long-term strategy comes to naught" (376), and human history is portrayed as a cyclical event. Just as importantly, though, Berry's essay shows that Milton could well have been influenced by the "Puritan Soldier" sermon popular with preachers at the time. Additionally, Milton believed that English society was in a backslidden state, and the "distinctive sense of spiritual soldiering" espoused by Puritan preachers developed, at least in part, as a response to "the shattering of seventeenth-century English society" (377). Such backsliding could be stopped only by returning to God in faith and obedience.

Despite the prevalence of military imagery and situations which surround it, Boesky has asserted that Milton's Heaven is largely reminiscent of 17th Century utopias. In Heaven, "all of the topoi of the utopian masterplot are present: the traveler from a distant commonwealth, the naive interlocutor, the comparison of a primitive culture with an advanced nation" (92). If Milton is, in fact, basing his Heaven on a utopian model, it is a utopia in which not all members of the society are seen as social equals, for even in Heaven, an inferior spirit must "[bow] low [. . .] to superior spirits" (III.736-37), as this "is wont in Heav'n" (l. 737). Given the highly hierarchical nature of the heavenly city, it seems more appropriate that Milton is simply modeling his Heaven on the rigid class and social structure of English life in the 17th Century, and more specifically, that of the monarchy. Rather than a utopian haven, Milton's Heaven is essentially a monarchical and Puritanical society, one in which there is, as the Apostle Paul would say, vessels

made for honor and for dishonor. Such sentiment is reflected in the work of John Winthrop, for example, who left England for the New World less than 40 years before the publication of *Paradise Lost*.

Milton's epic is indisputably filled with militaristic imagery and action, but it is a willing act of individual martyrdom that will be recognized among the most heroic acts of Christian history and of *Paradise Lost*. In Book III, Milton's God asks for one of the Heavenly hosts to act as an acceptable sacrifice on humanity's behalf even before the temptation and the Fall. In a scene paralleling the Great Consult in Pandemonium in Book II and Beelzebub's call for someone to undertake the perilous adventure, God is greeted with silence as "all the Heavn'ly choir stood mute" (l. 217). This silence comes not because of any lack of courage on the part of the angels—"for one thing, they do not know how to die"—but it is a silence brought about by the anticipation of the revelation and "dramatizing of the Atonement," which to them is "a greater mystery than anything they have encountered before" (Frye 447). To the Christian reader, of course, there is no great surprise or mystery surrounding the fact that Jesus Christ, the Son, will take up the challenge and sacrifice Himself for humanity's sake.

Literary conceptions of Christ shifted continuously and dramatically from the Anglo-Saxon period to the Seventeenth Century in Britain. When the Anglo-Saxons poured out of Germany and Denmark and established permanent settlements on the island in the fifth century, they would profoundly influence the development of English literature; most importantly, the Anglo-Saxons brought a tradition of oral poetry with them, a tradition reflected in the great epic *Beowulf*. In much the same way that the Anglo-Saxons influenced how English poetry would develop, they would also take Christianity and

adapt it to their heroic, warrior ideals. As they did so, it was only natural that their heroic values and images would translate to their depictions of Jesus Christ, as in the poem *The Dream of the Rood*. After 1066, when the Anglo-Saxon period came to an end, the image of Christ would again affect a shift based on the political and literary climate. About this time in France, a genre of literature developed known as the chivalric romance, one which told stories of knights and nobles, high adventure and love. The genre had great popular appeal in England, and poets soon began to sing songs of the great English hero, King Arthur, and his knights. It would not be long before Christ Himself came to be associated with courtly and chivalric virtues, and He was depicted in literature as both a knightly warrior and a courtly lover. In the same way that the tribal warrior image of Christ appealed to the war-like Anglo-Saxon culture, a society shaped by tales of courtly romance and fighting for Christendom depicted Christ in equally appropriate terms for its culture.

Milton, with his great interest in the Arthurian legends and his vast knowledge of the history of his people, was certainly well-versed in these developments, and though Milton later rejected the historicity of King Arthur, there is little doubt that Milton's Christ displays both Arthurian chivalric and monarchical tendencies. In a way, the Son is the ultimate chivalric warrior, for in Him dwells "the fullness of divine love" (III.225). Whereas the Arthurian knights competed and warred for secular and carnal reasons, Christ exhibits the perfection of Divine love, and He agrees to His own death for spiritual rather than earthly reasons. Christ describes Himself, in anticipation of the future victory of His Resurrection, as a victorious warrior, in language reminiscent of *Piers Plowman*. The Son proclaims that He shall "subdue / my vanquisher" and leave him "spoiled of his

vaunted spoil" for "Death his death's wound shall then receive (ll. 250-52). Furthermore, He declares that He "in triumph high / shall lead Hell captive maugre Hell, and show / the powers of darkness bound" (ll. 254-56). A similar scene is found in *Piers Plowman*, for after Christ jousts with Death in Jerusalem, He appears in the guise of the Christ-Knight before the gates of Hell, and with a "breath hell broke along with Belial's bars" (XVIII.321). Lucifer protests that Christ is robbing him "by force / for by right and by reason the race that is here / body and soul belongs to me" (ll. 277-79), but Christ's victory is irreversible, and He binds Lucifer as the other demons scatter throughout Hell. In *Paradise Lost*, however, this victory is promised but remains as yet unfulfilled.

The scene in Heaven after Christ's acceptance of the task His Father placed before Him is followed by an occurrence which demonstrates the influence of Anglo-Saxon literature on Milton's writing. After bowing low and casting their crowns on the ground in front of the throne, a picture quite possibly inspired by the Book of Revelation, the angels break out in hymns, and though he does not record their exact words, Milton's narrative voice relates the subject of their worship. Although the narrative voice is a constant presence in *Paradise Lost*, perhaps rivaled only by Dante in this respect, Milton's most important role in relation to the poem is that he has made himself the scop of Heaven with God as his lord. It should be little wonder that Milton would return to the Old English tradition of the scop since the scop was generally used in epic poetry and the recording of heroic and at least partly historical events. In Book III, Milton shares the role of scop with the heavenly choir as the good angels sing a song of praise to God and the Son for their past actions and the hope of their future actions.[5] What Milton describes

[5] The use of angels as a kind of scop in Heaven is yet another parallel that the celestial city has with Hell, as in Book II, when Milton describes some of the fallen angels singing songs of their rebellion and defeat.

at this point in Book III is reminiscent of the feast at Heorot in *Beowulf* where the narrative is interrupted by the scop who sings of the hero Sigemund, though in Milton's case, the song recalls the great deed of the Son who will rescue humanity from sin. Milton, therefore, sets the Son's triumph among the great traditions of national heroes and valorous deeds.

At various points during the Middle Ages, theologians proposed three main theories about the nature of grace and salvation in Christ. Before the fifth century, the dominant scheme of salvation was the ransom theory, which held that Jesus served as God's ransom or payment to the Devil, for the Devil had a legal right to those souls in Hell because of Adam and Eve's trespass in the Garden of Eden. Later, this was replaced by a completely incompatible notion referred to as sacrifice theory, and this removed Satan from the process all together by arguing that humanity, in need of a sinless sacrifice, handed Christ over to God. Even though his language is often quite similar to that of ransom theology, as when the Son says "now to Death I yield, and am his due" (III.245) and that His death will result in "that debt paid" (l. 246), Milton falls in more closely with the final Medieval salvation philosophy, the satisfaction theory espoused by St. Anselm. Briefly stated, satisfaction theory says that "God created humanity in a state of harmony and justice; we shattered the harmony; God could leave us alienated from Him, for in strict justice he is under no obligation to save us. But his mercy and love make it inherent, fitting, and proper in him to do so. God therefore chooses to save us" (Russell 170). Although ransom has never completely been repudiated, satisfaction theory has generally been dominant since the thirteenth century, and it is this view which Milton holds. There have been other attempts at determining Milton's position on the

theological spectrum, as when Hunter argues that Milton's Satan gives voice to the "Covenant of Grace, a doctrine of salvation especially emphasized in seventeenth-century Puritan theology" (21), and McManus says that Milton's is a "subordinationist Christology" (271) which emphasizes submission to God. What Milton wants to project about God in *Paradise Lost*, more than anything else, is the grace and goodness of God. Though Milton's God is certainly powerful and worthy of obeisance, the dominant impression one is to have upon reading of Christ's sacrifice is joy and hope and an overall sense of the love of God, that God would so generously offer salvation to Man despite Man's crime.

Though it can scarcely be said that the Father and Son of *Paradise Lost* have any material differences, it is Milton's God that has been most savaged by the critics. Whereas Eve has been sympathetically shielded from attack, and Satan has been romanticized and rehabilitated to almost mythic status, God has been treated with a mixture of varying degrees of disdain and contempt. Northrop Frye in particular has assailed God and questioned the effectiveness of His role in the poem, going so far as to say in *The Garden Within* that God speaks with such "disastrous consequences" that "the rest of the poem hardly recovers from his speech" and that "whenever he opens his ambrosial mouth, the sensitive reader shudders" (446). Frye even claims that God and Satan often do not seem entirely distinguishable from one another and that "insidious corruption of power could hardly have found a better image" (447). This critical reception of God as a heavenly tyrant or as a God who tantalizes humanity with the promise and the hope of Paradise only to allow them to be cheated out of Paradise and immortality cannot be what Milton intended for his "sensitive readers."

Not surprisingly, C.S. Lewis viewed God the Father through a somewhat more sympathetic lens than most, saying that "many of those who say they dislike Milton's God only mean that they dislike God" (130). While Lewis acknowledges that Milton's God is not a perfect creation, going so far as to admit that "in depicting the Messiah, Milton is much more successful" (131), he further states that part of the problem is that Milton did not show sufficient "poetical prudence" (130) when describing God. Some, like Frye, believe that the character of the Father severely hampers the poem or destroys the poem as a work of religious significance, but Lewis is quick to point out that *Paradise Lost*, in many ways, is not a religious work, at least not in the same sense as the *Divine Comedy*. Whether one thinks of Milton's God as an essentially flat character or not, especially when compared to the dynamic and appealing aspects of Satan, His characterization is quite appropriate to the military and political imagery which abounds in *Paradise Lost* and establishes God as Satan's direct counterpart (which is, of course, also sound theologically). In the same way that Satan is portrayed as a rebel chieftain attempting to usurp the royal throne, God is the powerful monarch protecting His lands and His rightful position from being taken over by an illegitimate and unlawful opposing army.

Though some critics like Frye have chosen to take God to task over the issue of free will--that God, with His foreknowledge of the Fall, did not attempt to prevent it--God's position on free will is a common Christian notion. Milton seems to derive his concept of God's role in the Fall and the free will debate from St. Anselm. In "On Free Will," Anselm effectively defends God from blame by saying that "nothing is more impossible than that God should take away the rectitude of will. Yet he is said to do this when he

does not impede the abandonment of this rectitude" (187). Though Frye has sought to cast aspersions on Milton's God for His "pseudo-logic" (447) regarding God's contention in Book III that "I else must change / their nature, and revoke the high decree / unchangeable, eternal" (ll.125-27), that argument is not so thoroughly far-fetched. Milton's view is not so different from that of many other Christian philosophers who also struggled with the nature of free will and the implications thereof.

The entire purpose of Milton's poem, as stated in Book I, is to "justify the ways of God to men" (l. 26), and at various points in the text, the narrator will let his voice be heard in defending God from any criticism of His actions. Near the beginning of Book I, for example, Milton's narrative voice begins the process of justification by trying to deflect from God any censure for allowing Satan to operate in this world: the "high permission of all-ruling Heav'n" (l. 212) has let Satan pursue his nefarious designs because it will ultimately cause the rebel angel to "Heap on himself damnation" (l. 215), as well as allowing God "to bring forth / Infinite goodness, grace, and mercy" (ll. 217-8) upon humanity. This argument is not all-together dissimilar from that proposed by Langland in *Piers Plowman* when Peace, one of the Four Daughters of God, says that "God of his goodness [. . .] suffered [Adam] to sin so that he might know sorrow / and thus know what well-being is – to be aware of it naturally" (XVIII.218-21). If the reader balks at the idea of the "fortunate fall," the notion that some greater good comes from humanity's Fall, Milton reminds his readers that God still does not deserve censure for the Fall: Adam and Eve were given sufficient ability and warning to resist temptation; they were not predestined to fall because they were given free will. If the First Parents chose to be disobedient to God, it would be because "they themselves decreed / their own

revolt" (III.116-7), and God cannot interfere with their decision lest he rob them of their free will.

Though Milton, in many ways, espouses traditional Christian positions, he does make at least one serious departure from the Medieval tradition regarding the nature of Christ and the heavenly triumvirate. Namely, Milton denies the Trinity, a cornerstone belief of Medieval Catholicism. William Langland wrote a wonderfully evocative analogy of the Trinity that serves as a sufficient representation of the Trinitarian perspective:

> For to a torch or a taper the Trinity is likened,
> As if wax and a wick were twined together,
> And then a fire flaming forth from both.
> And as wax and wick and warm fire together
> Foster forth a flame and a fair blaze
> That gives light to these laborers when they labor at night,
> So do the Sire and the Son and also *Spiritus Sanctus*
> Foster forth among the folk faith and belief
> Which makes all kinds of Christians clean of their sins. (XVII.206-14)

Milton, however, disputes this notion. Lewalski notes that "Milton holds that the Son is not omnipotent, or omniscient or eternal, or immutable, but was generated at some point in time by an act of God's will, and that he enjoys whatever Godlike powers he has by God's gift" (473). Though extremely problematic from an orthodox viewpoint, Milton's Arianism did allow him to portray Christ "as a genuinely dramatic and heroic character, whose choices are made and whose actions taken freely, in a state of imperfect knowledge." When writing *De Doctrina Christiana*, when Milton expressed the same unconventional position, he was aware that his "approach to the Son [was] unorthodox, and as a result, dangerously provocative" (Lehnhof 237), yet Milton unreservedly paints the same picture of Christ in *Paradise Lost*. His acceptance of these radical notions freed

Milton from some of the religious scruples that restrained his Medieval predecessors from using Christ in a literary way in their works.

Along the same lines of unorthodox, if not heretical, beliefs on Milton's part, there is a seeming inconsistency in his text about the time and nature of the Son actually being created by God. In Book V, God announces to the angelic hosts that "this day I have begot whom I declare / My only Son" (ll.603-4). At issue, of course, is the long held orthodox Christian position that Christ existed alongside God from the beginning of time, and the textual problem that later in the same book, it is said that the Son created the angels, a belief also extant in the Middle Ages.[6] Though some, according to Hugh McManus, have read "begot" as a metaphorical term, McManus attempts to removes these theological difficulties by asserting that Milton's position is that the divine nature of the Son did exist from time immemorial and that what Milton is referring to in the above quotation is the creation of the Son's human nature in Heaven, a position he admits "would seem outlandish, no doubt, to most Christians of our time" (272). Be that as it may, McManus claims that such a belief was fairly common during and before the 17th and 18th Century, citing such diverse sources as 2nd Century heretical Gnostic writings, Jewish messianic tradition, and the beliefs of Plato. McManus' point is that "Milton could not help but to have been aware of" the many different strains of pre-existent thought which had been proposed (276). The strongest argument that McManus has for this view is that only with a human elevated to God's "only Son" could Satan have "a believable and convincing motive for his defection, namely, resentment at subordination to a human being" (279). McManus says that his argument is "admittedly a novel

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[6] Cf. *Piers Plowman*, I.105, for example.

hypothesis" (282) but one that does seek to clean up some of the problematic issues in *Paradise Lost*.

If McManus' conclusions do provide some clarity to certain issues surrounding Satan's motives for rebellion or the textual inconsistency of the begetting passage, that does not mean that his proposition is without flaws. He does not, for example, deal with the issue of the Incarnation of Christ. If Christ assumes His human form while still in Heaven, what of the Immaculate Conception and the virgin birth? Would McManus' theory not cause serious theological problems in that area? More importantly, though, his theory seems quite at odds with the text itself, for at the time that Christ is being revealed before the angels, humans have not yet been created. It is made clear in Book III that it was the angelic rebellion which necessitated the creation of Man, for God, in order "to repair that loss / Created this new happy race of men / to serve Him better" (ll. 678-80). It would seem that two things are going on in V.603-4. First, Milton is speaking metaphorically and not about a literal begetting of the Son. Second, and perhaps more pertinently, Milton is using the language of Psalms 2:7, which states "The Lord has said to Me / you are My Son / today I have begotten You." That seems the most plausible explanation for Milton's supposed inconsistency.

It is also important, when considering Milton's views on Heaven and salvation, to notice what Milton believed were barriers toward attaining the bliss of Heaven. Two such spiritual impediments that are closely related are vanity and the desire for fame. When Milton is describing the Paradise of Fools, "the sterile void of false theology and philosophy" (Martin 23) in Book III, his narrative voice singles out for special scorn those "who in vain things / Build their fond hopes of glory or lasting fame / Or happiness

in this or th' other life / All who have their reward on Earth, the fruits / Of painful superstition and blind zeal / (Naught seeking but the praise of me), here find / Fit retribution empty as their deeds" (ll. 448-54). The rather lengthy passage regarding the Paradise of Fools (ll. 444-97) is quite possibly the most anti-Catholic portion of Milton's epic, but denominational differences aside, it does show what Milton obviously believed were quite significant spiritual defects. One can also see in these lines the influence of the great Medieval philosopher Boethius, who in his *Consolation of Philosophy* came to recognize the fleeting nature of wealth and honors, which are "gifts of Fortune" that are "merely of the moment and doomed to fall away" (34). Those destined for Milton's Paradise of Fools never learned that nothing in life is permanent and have allowed themselves to become spiritually degraded, losing the eternal good of their soul, for the transitory rewards of earthly goods.

Milton's Heaven is, to some extent, a paradoxical place. It is where Man's Fall was announced, yet it is also to be the place of Man's reconciliation with God and his final redemption following the disobedience in the Garden. Theologically, Milton's conception of Godhead is borderline heretical, while at the same time, his defense of God and free will is entirely in keeping with many orthodox Christian theologians. Also, Milton's Heaven is a place far removed in time from 17th Century England, yet part of the poem is meant to instruct those living in Milton's time, and the influence of that culture can occasionally be seen in *Paradise Lost*. Whatever contradictions may be found in Heaven, it is undoubtedly the model for a more perfect Christian society, one in which obedience to God and a return to proper living are at the forefront.

Conclusion

Harold Bloom once said that the Divine Comedy served as a "Third Testament" to the Bible, a summation of both the Old and New Testament in one epic poem (5). Despite his obvious admiration of Dante, John Milton certainly did not want his Medieval counterpart to have the final theological word on the Christian afterlife or on Christian religious history. Paradise Lost, written approximately 150 years after the end of the Middle Ages, represents a final, decisive break with the Medieval tradition which dominated Europe from the 5th Century AD until the beginning of the Renaissance in the 16th Century.

Though much of the attention surrounding Milton and *Paradise Lost* is focused on how his work would influence later writers, there is no denying that Milton was heavily indebted to the authors of the Middle Ages. Without Milton's extensive reading in the literature of the past, and without the Protestant Reformation and split with the Roman Catholic church, Milton's great poem most likely would not have taken the final shape that it did. At a time of great political and religious turmoil in Europe, Milton hoped that the instruction he offered in the verses of *Paradise Lost* would lead his countrymen to become better Christians and better Englishmen, exhorting them to obedience to God and establishing a model Christian community on earth. Although Milton admires the poetic art of his Catholic predecessors, it is time, in his view, for England to finally cast off Catholicism and the mistakes of the past and embrace the future, one free of the errors of the Middle Ages.

If one were to explore every theme, examine every image, and approach *Paradise Lost* from every angle imaginable, a lifetime would be insufficient to uncover all the many

layers present in Milton's great epic. Despite the often difficult nature of the text and intricacies of Milton's creation, it is one to which thousands of scholars continually return. All of the characters of *Paradise Lost*, from the First Parents to Satan and Fallen Angels, are extraordinarily human, and that, perhaps, goes far to explain the appeal that Paradise Lost has enjoyed for so many centuries.

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