Milton's Ironic God:

Paradise Lost and the Trials of History.

A Thesis

Submitted to the Faculty of Graduate Studies,

University of Manitoba,

in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree of

Master of Arts

by

Martin Dawes

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A Thesis/Practicum submitted to the Faculty of Graduate Studies of The University of Manitoba in partial fulfillment of the requirement of the degree

Of

MASTER OF ARTS

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INTRODUCTION

While conceding that "Milton's theology has political . . . implications," a recent editor insists that, "other than a general comparison between Satan and Charles I, or between the parliament of Pandemonium and the English Parliament, not much can be said" about Paradise Lost (1667) as an intervention in English politics (Flannagan 307, 303). But Milton's being "more closely involved in . . . politics and diplomacy than was any other . . . epic author" (303) renders such a pronouncement as counterintuitive as it is hasty. Moreover, the years of composition (c. 1658-63) could hardly have been more politically turbulent, spanning the death of Oliver Cromwell, the collapse of the Good Old (republican) Cause, the Restoration of the monarchy, and Milton's going into hiding, imprisonment, and ongoing dissent. As David Norbrook remarks, "The centre of gravity of the poem, its major creative impulse, belongs in the revolutionary period" (434).

Meanwhile, a prominent critic contends that "[God's] first speech . . . is harsh and mean-spirited and remains the [poem's] most persistent problem" (Christopher 114):

> So will fall,
> Hee and his faithless Progenie: whose fault?
> Whose but his own? ingrate, he had of mee
> All he could have[.]
> (3.95-8)

My contention is that to vitiate this critical problem is at the same time to illuminate the poem as a political act. By reconciling the seeming vagaries of this God's 'trying' ways with the loving divinity that Milton celebrates elsewhere, my thesis will reveal an ironic theology that calls for the counter-Restoration of an English republic. For Milton, this was the *sine qua non* of Christian liberty, the earthly way to the ultimate 'republic of love' where "God shall be All in All" (3.341).

Christopher Hill (1977) has suggested that we are to apprehend the benevolent "King" of Paradise Lost in the contrastive context of English tyranny. For Britain in the 1630s had suffered "a renewal of the [early Tudors'] drive toward absolutism," as an emerging "national economic interest" strained against the monopolizing interest of the Crown (Kendrick 6-7). It was chiefly this oppressive "drive" that drove in turn the English Revolution, which in 1649 saw the royal driver unseated by a capital judgment that Milton was to justify officially and famously in his Defense of the English People (1651). But, despite books like Dennis Danielson's Milton's Good God (1982), the contrast between such mundane despotism and the divine bounty of "a being supremely wise and good" (On Christian Doctrine [c. 1650s] 151) remains in doubt. William Empson's (1965) portrait of a celestial Stalin who engineers the Fall of humankind still strikes a chord with many modern readers, to whom the poem appears to betray an "embarrassing" contradiction between God's "unitary will" and creaturely free will (Kendrick 115). And even those convinced by Danielson's thorough dissolution of this supposed aporia tend to feel that "Milton's treatment [of the Father] to a certain extent fails" for "mov[ing] too far from the rhetorical and logical tropes and schemes that enliven his other styles in the epic" (R. M. Frye 99).

Critics such as Stanley Fish and Anthony Low have accepted the stylistic critique, only to claim that this is as it should be: God ought to speak the unadorned truth. The "atonal formality of God's abstract discourse" naturally "represents the essence of Truth" (Fish 88, 83). To persuade is Satanic; to inform is divine (Low 25-6). But surely "whose fault?/ Whose but his own?" sounds anything but "atonal"; nor does information require the interrogative. Moreover, to take this 'a-rhetorical' view is to forget that "in

[Reformation] tradition God's words were assumed to be pugnacious and combative" (Christopher 109). However, Georgia B. Christopher's explanation of the apparent discrepancy between harsh words and supreme goodness – that the poet manipulates the Father's tone merely to reflect the evolution of the narrator/reader's faith (115-16) – seems equally untrue to Milton's creation of a coherent character with purposes of his own. Finally, Victoria Silver (2001) turns to irony to account for the discrepancy, yet falls into the same trap as Christopher by disregarding the drama internal to the epic. Milton the ironist, Silver claims, creates an unexpectedly Empsonian deity as well as an expectedly Danielsonian one in order to impress upon us the unknowability of God.

But what of God's readers within the dramatic frame? What if the Father, too, were an ironist? Danielson's defense of free will hints in several ways that Milton's God has even more reasons than a censored, reformist poet for harnessing the persuasive power of irony. Firstly, the aforementioned contradiction turns out to be illusory because "creaturely freedom involves a self-limitation of God," who has voluntarily "withdrawn his controlling power . . . from human freedom" (49, 53). Secondly, the Father on occasion will present "a limited view of reality" so as to elicit "further truths" (107). Yet Danielson's focus on Milton's theodicy leads him to characterize this primarily as a "theodical dialectic" designed to display a just God (108) rather than a pedagogical dialogue designed to engage God's 'students' in the realization of justice. I will argue that provocations such as "ingrate" are not falsehoods or cruelties but instructive ironies – salutary trials "ironic through and through," as Edwin Good (41) describes the Old Testament God's 'testy' attitude to Jonah. By means of irony, a self-limiting deity enlists his interpreters' aid in the hermeneutical process of creation without shortcircuiting their education with the overwhelming charge of total knowledge, or compromising their "freedom to choose" (Areopagitica 1010) with the 'monological' decrees of a Caroline monarch. The kind of justice sought by such a God depends on the creative and contentious responses of others.

In sum, reading Milton's God as *characteristically* deploying what Linda Hutcheon terms "irony's edge" both illuminates his words and ways in the light of love, and clarifies the poet's political portrait of a leader so eager to abdicate that he himself challenges his subjects to become citizens. The Father of Paradise Lost can then be seen not just as the antithesis of Charles I or II but as a caretaker-king differing from the Lord Protector whom Milton once had hoped would "save free Conscience" ("To . . . Cromwell" l. 13). Whereas Cromwell and other "ambitious leaders in the Armie" (The Readie and Easie Way to Establish a Free Commonwealth [1660] 1140) had let down the Cause for the promise of personal power, the Father promises to help his creatures put an end to power. His self-limiting ways amount to a "Self-denying Ordinance" conceptually akin to that levelling edict (1645) of the Long Parliament of the 1640s, which transformed a Parliamentary army led by aristocrats into a meritocracy of careers open to the talents. Yet the less conservative (i.e., the Independents) in Parliament had merely recognized that a meritocratic army would 'outrank' an aristocratic one; i.e., a New Model Army was more likely to defeat the royalists decisively than an old-fashioned hierarchy led by its own noble Members. In the case of Milton's God, authority itself is to be collectively dismembered for the sake of "Rational Libertie" for all (12.82; cf. 3.311-41). The ultimate goal of universal "harmonie" expressed in the biblical "All in All" (1 Cor. 15) awaits those who dare to answer the call of the Father's irony.

Danielson and Hugh MacCallum have only hinted at this argument, while Brian Johnson more generally applies his version of it to "the death of the author," and Douglas Reimer and Martin Kuester more specifically to Raphael's lessons for Adam and Eve. My thesis, however, will differ in theory and in scope, particularly in its translating theology into history, and revolutionary reading into Revolutionary politics. Previous criticism has tended to see irony as a strategy of "dual terms" (Kuester), a mask of "doubleness" (Reimer) beneath which lies the one true meaning. But, by drawing on Hutcheon's recent theory of irony as relational and inclusive as well as differential – in conjunction with Kenneth Burke's "humble" irony, which admits a "fundamental kinship with the enemy" (Grammar 514) – I will unfold a dramatic theology whereby God and free creatures always already contain "the enemy" within as the condition of moral agency. The Father's ironic meaning is not a ready-made unsaid behind his words, but rather an unfixed 'both/and' that "happens in the space *between* (and including) the said and the unsaid" (Hutcheon 12; her emphasis). Thus, it is up to God's interpreters to exercise that agency so as to produce this "composite" meaning and to nurture its transformative potential. 'The Father's ironic meaning' is less his own achievement, then, than it is the ongoing moral creation of his creatures. And this is why humble irony is such an apt instrument for a *deus absconditus*, for the abdicating, "self-denying," republicanizing Pedagogue of Paradise Lost. For all its "edge," such irony, as J. Hillis Miller insightfully observes, "cannot be used as an instrument of mastery. . . . He who lives by this sword dies by it too" (105-6).

A comprehensive exposition of Milton's self-d(en)ying God would surely require a book-length study. With the modest aim of holding a preliminary hearing, however, I begin by tracing the trial-by-irony of God's creatures in Paradise Lost to the pamphlet wars of the 1640s. For here Milton develops, practices, and preaches the readerly work ethic of the "laborious gatherer," basing his radical hermeneutics on the crucial insights that "Christ meant not to be tak'n word for word," and that only trial "by what is contrary" confirms us in virtue (950, 1006). Going on to survey some ancient precedents for such dialogical empowerment, I explicate with Burke's and Hutcheon's help the genesis of a God whose irony calls us to the drama of history and the agony of spiritual becoming. I then bring this conception to bear upon the words and ways of the Father in Paradise Lost, emphasizing like Hutcheon the moral act of making meaning, and its political implications. The Father turns out to be a champion of republican "Libertie" who urges us to cast off apathy and subjection to grow into responsive and "laborious" reader-citizens. The second chapter surveys direct exchanges with the deity, comparing and contrasting his various 'readers,' whose trials of reason and faith may caution or inspire the epic's readers. The co-operative ways of the Father, whereby "God with man unites" so that evil may be turned to good (12.382), lead us in the third chapter to such keynote ironies as the War in Heaven and the judgment of the fallen couple, who must learn to see beyond its bitterness to seize their *raison d'être.*

Finally, granted such an ironic God, the *raison d'être* of *être* itself becomes an issue. Why would a God who once was "All" seek to become "All in All" through self-limitation and the creation and nurture of *others* – fallible creatures upon whose moral choices everything depends? And what does the Father's example suggest to us, Milton's readers, about our own political acts of creation, our own 'paternal' or 'maternal' responses and responsibilities as makers of meanings and of worlds?

CHAPTER ONE

Trial by Irony.

When he hath tried me, I shall come forth as gold – Job 23:10.

In Book VIII of Paradise Lost, a smiling God directs a solitary Adam to "Find pastime" with the animals (8.375). But Adam yearns for mutuality; only "conversation with his like" can meet his need for "All rational delight" (8.418, 391). Thus, with "freedom us'd/ Permissive" (8.434-5), the first man pleads with his creator for "Collateral love," thereby earning his "hearts desire" together with an immediate lesson in God's lessoning (8.426, 451): "to try thee, *Adam*, I was pleas'd,/ And finde thee knowing not of beasts alone,/ . . . but of thy self" (8.437-9). In this, the primordial encounter of divine with human being, God always already nurtures freedom and self-knowledge both by "trying" Adam and by elucidating "trial" explicitly (8.447) as a pedagogical method – by implication, a method that his creatures should henceforth expect and indeed welcome.[1] Adam learns that "Expressing well the spirit within [him] free" means exercising well his creative capacities for reasoning and choosing (8.440). For the Father affirms that the course of human freedom demands not just Adam's obedience but his willingness to "judge of fit and meet" (8.448) in a trial that turns out to be his own. In order to 'be all he can be' and to 'make history,' Adam must dare to *interpret*, no matter who is speaking or acting, just as Milton in Eikonoklastes dares to dispute the "martyred" monarch of Eikon Basilike.[2]

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[1] I use "pedagogical" after Martin Kuester, who points out that God "admits that his stubborn behaviour was just a pedagogical strategy" (266).

[2] Eikon Basilike, first issued on the day of the king's execution (30 Jan., 1649), portrayed Charles I visually and verbally as a Christian martyr, and was in fact ghost-written by a royalist cleric, John Gauden (Riverside Milton [Roy Flannagan, ed.] 1077). I return to Eikonoklastes (Oct., 1649) and its readers below, p. 16. (All italics are original unless otherwise indicated; and 'p/pp' and 'my n' refer to my own text and footnotes.)

And yet what if the suggestion to "Find pastime" with the beasts merits consideration nonetheless? While God does concede that for deep "fellowship" they are "unmeet" (8.442), he has certainly provided for interspecific communication on some level: "know'st thou not/ Thir language and thir wayes," he enquires of Adam, adding that "they also know" (372-4).[3] After all, to say "with these/ Find pastime" is hardly to say "among these/ Find a wife." What his creatures must interpret, then, are not God's white lies – the suggestion is not a strategic falsity concealing the one "true" meaning – but are best understood as God's pedagogical ironies.[4] Although Renaissance readers of the classical rhetoricians had established *ironia* in just such oppositional terms of saying *versus* meaning, the pedagogical irony of Milton's God transcends mere opposites.[5] Were his irony so confined, his tests would tend to have all the subtlety of propaganda. Instead, this is an irony dialectically pregnant insofar as it typically presents 'nothing but the truth' while stopping so provocatively short of 'the whole truth,' or steering so pointedly clear of the telling truth, as to serve God's creatures with a hermeneutical challenge. In brief, Milton's God primes the co-operated engine of history for his own and his creatures' sakes by challenging them to engage with him freely in *trial by irony*.[6]

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[3] The Fall would change all this. Milton's is a Fall that (like the Revolution's failure) deepens hierarchy, rupturing also the prelapsarian mutuality of the human sexes: "hee over [shee] shall rule" (10.196).

[4] Milton thus avoids contradicting Titus 1:2 and Hebrews 6:18, which agree that God cannot lie at all (cf. Danielson 26). In On Christian Doctrine, he quotes these passages himself to argue that even omnipotence observes the law of non-contradiction. And, in a rare use of the term, he explicitly distinguishes pedagogical "ironies" (unfortunately, without further comment) from lies: "the various uses of irony [*ironias*] . . . are calculated not to deceive but to instruct" (761).

[5] Quoting Quintilian's Institutio Oratoria, Sharon Achinstein assumes that "[i]rony presents language by which we understand 'something which is the opposite of what is actually said'" (Milton 161), a strategy characteristic of the anti-/royalist propaganda (and still the most popular formulation). Cicero in fact distinguished between this kind of irony (*antiphrasis*) and that of "saying something *other* than one means" (N. Knox 10; my emphasis). Both definitions tend to posit a said-unsaid binary whereby the unsaid *in itself* constitutes the intended or ironic meaning. Critics alert to the irony of Milton's God (e.g., L. D. Reimer and Kuester) have discussed it mainly in such terms, which are in this case simplistic.

[6] As noted in my "Introduction," Dennis Danielson hints at this conception: God presents "a limited view of reality" so that "questions are raised" (107). But Danielson does not arrive at the pointedness of irony or

Milton's conception of trial-by-irony in Paradise Lost has its origins, however, less in classical theories of irony, or even in Biblical precedents, than it does in the 'co-operated engine' of the English Revolution, where the budding poet would engage in the agonistic clamour of the pamphlet wars in the hope of fulfilling the divine will in history. As David Loewenstein observes, there is a striking "imaginative continuity between these two stages of Milton's literary career" (1). Ideas forged in the heat of rhetorical exchange underpin the epic verse of his maturity. In order to fathom the radical hermeneutics of Paradise Lost (1667, '74), we need to go back to the divorce tracts of 1643-5, and to Areopagitica (1644), "For the Liberty of unlicenc'd Printing," to see how profoundly Milton's career as a controversialist would affect his reading practices. The marriage crisis of the previous year had evidently brought Milton's studies 'home' – and most forcefully his readings of the Bible, the very words of 'the great dictator' to his faithful scribes. In the impassioned textual wrestling that resulted, the personal became political in public.[7]

Before this crisis, Milton's Biblical rhetoric seems relatively straightforward. His first foray into politics, Of Reformation (1641), indicts the lordliness of unelected church officials by invoking the "plainnes and perspecuity" of scripture on the matter. He dips his arguments in its "transparent streams of divine Truth," which cleanse "not only the *wise*, and *learned*, but the *simple*, the *poor*, the *babes*" (886-7). Likewise, the voice of

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trial, perhaps because he sees the purpose as mainly "theodical" (to justify providence to creatures/readers) rather than broadly pedagogical (to engage them/us in justice). Similarly, Hugh MacCallum observes a "process of education by disputation with God" (100), but does not characterize God as ironic. My phrase "the co-operated engine of history" is inspired by a passage in the Doctrine where Milton excludes from God's "general decree" those "things . . . which God performs *in co-operation with others*, to whom he has granted, by nature, freedom of action" (153; italics mine).

[7] "Marriage crisis" refers to the ill-advised union of 1642 with Mary Powell, 'quite contrary' in that her family took the royalist side and Mary left Milton's home just a month after the wedding. It would take three years and the collapse of royalist fortunes for her to return (Parker 229-31, 297-300).

Reason of Church-Government (1642) wishes "to be reckon'd among those who admire and dwell upon [the scriptures] for their clearnesse" (904).[8] Even so, Milton already allows that we had better read intelligently, with "that intellectual ray which God hath planted in us"; and, until that ray is spiritually "purged," "some Books, and especially some places in those Books[,] . . . remain clouded," notwithstanding "the explanation of the Fathers," who all too often thicken the clouds (886). Here, aligning himself with Reformation hermeneutics, the pamphleteer dissolves the tension between transparency and cloudedness by insisting that "that which is most necessary to be known is most easie." When it comes to our salvation, God issues clear "commands," not satanic "snares." But Milton was soon to learn to what extent the gift of "Reason" and "Conscience," or God's "attributing to all men, and requiring from them the ability of searching, trying, examining all things" (886), redounds upon scripture itself. Living the word required what irony invites: creative interpretation – a questing beyond the inconclusive call of excerpted words.

Milton's academic training probably predisposed him to such a 'critical' Christianity, since, having just described scripture as "most easie," and God-given understanding as "proportionable," he nevertheless ridicules the Canterbury clergy as "illiterate" (897). In any case, it was the topic of marriage that would soon lend urgency to Milton's sense of the need for commentators of his literary abilities to clarify what apparently was clouded, to harmonize what seemed discordant, in the book of books. What was most difficult in scripture was "necessary to be known" after all. Of course, Milton was hardly the first reader of reason to test the letter of the text. According to his

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[8] "Those" would include the Reformers generally. For Luther, the Holy Spirit is "the best rhetorician and logician, and therefore speaks most clearly"; and, similarly, William Whitaker maintains that "Scripture

Confessions (c. 397-8 A.D.), Augustine's conversion would never have been completed had he not followed Ambrose in unearthing "the spiritual meaning of texts which, taken literally, appeared to contain the most unlikely doctrines" (116). In other words, "all can read [scripture] with ease, but it also has a deeper meaning" (117) – the "deeper" meaning consisting of layers of allegory and symbolism (as in Thomist and Dantean theory), which form a "narrow mesh" of "profound mysteries" through which only the few may "pass safely . . . and come to [God]" (118). But, while Milton draws upon this hierarchical and allegorical hermeneutic, his divorce tracts begin to demonstrate a way of reading that treasures the level of the letter even as it checks and balances the words. If Luther and Calvin had "shifted the locus of religious experience from visual symbol and ritual action to verbal action" (Christopher 4), Milton likewise displaces the dualism that would have scripture merely point towards a spiritual reality. Instead, he develops a *monistic* practice of spiritual becoming whereby, given conscientious interpretation, the holy words themselves act upon the active reader to internalize or incarnate the truth.[9]

Realizing the risks in 'checking and balancing' a sacred text, Milton in the expanded (1644) edition of The Doctrine and Discipline of Divorce launches his assault on the status quo by linking "Custome" with "Error," fodder for a privatized "industry of free reasoning" (930).[10] The deserted husband now declaims his duty as an "*instructed* Christian . . . to be the sole advocate of a *discount'nanct* truth" (italics added), a far cry from his earlier emphasis on the plainness of gospel truth. Thus, industry and instruction

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itself . . . is its own faithful and clear interpreter" (qtd. in Christopher 15, 11-12; cf. my n. 9).

[9] For useful discussions of these overlapping hermeneutical traditions, see Eleanor Johnston on "the Reformation of Augustinian Aesthetics" (16-88), and Christopher on "Milton's 'Literary' Theology" (3-30). In their view, this "reformation" was seeded by Erasmus, who in his 1516 New Testament "translated *Logos* . . . as *sermo* (speech) rather than as *verbum* (reason)" (Christopher 3).

will be indispensable to the new method of interpretation, boldly introduced with a challenge to "Let the statutes of God be turn'd over, be scann'd a new, and considered" (933). Creative interpreters will not be "quotationists" (933), or parroting conservatives of "obstinate literality" and "alphabeticall servility" (949), but "men of what liberall profession whatsoever," those of "diffuse and various knowledge . . . able to ballance and define good and evill," and hence to "shew us the waies of the Lord, strait and faithfull as they are, not full of cranks and contradictions" (933). Such bold and learned balancers will imitate "our Saviour," who upheld his "doctrine of Charity against the crabbed textuists of his time" (933).[11]

The line from the law of Moses to the words of Christ on divorce (i.e., from Deut. 24:1 to Matt. 5:32) certainly appeared to run otherwise than "strait." Here was something clearly "necessary to be known," yet seemingly far from "easie" to read. Nevertheless, unlike the literalist, the balancer cannot be satisfied with Christ's diktat as the last or self-sufficient word. Milton makes a decisive critical leap to argue that, by means of contextualization, "we may plainly discover how Christ meant not to be tak'n word for word" (950). What is more, that this should hold for no less an authority than Christ must imply that no isolated words can be allowed authority *a priori*; readers' hermeneutical labour should earn them shares in the authority that they in fact accomplish. In subjecting the letter to the judicious interpreter, Milton's method thus underwrites the political radicalism that would soon subject a king to trial. Yet this is not

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[10] Flannagan sums up the high Anglican status quo as forbidding divorce "except on the bases of failure to consummate the marriage, adultery, or impotence" (926). Milton would add (privately determined) incompatibility to this short list; but his *method* is my focus here.

[11] The "creative" or "active" Miltonic interpreter should be contrasted sharply with the more "passive" literalist, but I concede that no reading practice could be absolutely passive. Incidentally, "man/men" in Milton often refers to people in general, though here he seems to have male "professionals" in mind. See

to say that readers thereby escape scrutiny, for in their labour lies their own trial by the text.[12]

Milton in the role of judicious interpreter will both demonstrate and describe this testing labour, which I term "contextualization." First of all, charity is the "command above all commands" (976), the "*interpreter* and guide of our faith" (935; my emphasis). Together with "nature and reason" (937), charity thus crowns the "Hierarchy of upper and lower commands, which for want of studying in right order, all the world is in confusion" (944). Secondly, when "doubt arises from the letter" – i.e., when the letter seems uncharitable, unnatural, and/or unreasonable – we are also to "consider[] upon what occasion every thing is set down" (950). In other words, rhetoric is situational, aimed at specific audiences on specific occasions. Thirdly, then, one "must compare the words he findes, with other precepts, with the end of every ordinance" (969).[13] Noting, for example, that "the word *fornication* is variously significant in Scripture," Milton reasons that Christ, who would not privilege the body over the person (cf. 948), allows

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Mary Nyquist on the Pauline male chauvinism built into Milton's views on divorce (again, an issue no more than tangential to my discussion of his evolving hermeneutics).

[12] This model of two-way trial – text/author by reader *and* vice versa – reflects that of Wolfgang Iser, whose theory provides Brian Johnson with a commonsensical 'third way' between readerly and authorial control: "Rather than locating absolute power with either the author or the reader, Iser anticipates Bakhtin's notion of dialogism by imagining a democratic union of wills in the creative act of construing meaning in a text" (67). Johnson, however, tips the balance towards the author, underestimating the risk involved in God's creating free-willed readers, who will not necessarily be "constrained" by his authorship (65). Analyzing Milton's way of "reading God," Michael Lieb calls this third way a "hermeneutics of reciprocity." If "they understand best what God is like who adjust their understanding to the word of God, for he has adjusted his word to our understanding" (Doctrine 136), then God as "author reaches down; the reader reaches up"; and "[r]eading is sharing as well as believing" ("Reading God" 227).

[13] Theodore L. Huguelet suggests various possible sources for the "rule of charity," including Erasmus and Hugo Grotius, and notes that the hierarchy of axioms and particulars ("higher and lower commands") reflects the logic of Peter Ramus, which according to Christopher Hill was "dominant at Cambridge in [Milton's] day" (33; unless otherwise indicated, I cite Hill's Milton). See Ernest Sirluck (145-58) on the ways in which the weightings and applications of these principles shifted over the various divorce tracts (and editions). But Sirluck discusses the second and third as one and misses the significance of "not to be tak'n word for word." Milton seems to have retained them; e.g., "[that God has no beginning and no end] can be seen . . . from the following passages; not, indeed, from each of them separately, but from a comparison of the several texts" (Doctrine 143).

metonymically for "other matrimoniall transgressions . . . besides actuall adultery" (968-9). Moreover, a situational reading would seem to confirm that Christ meant not to be taken literally and universally but intended no more than to "lay a bridle upon the bold abuses of [the Pharisees]" (950). Above all else, was the messiah not emphatic that "he came not to abrogate from the [Mosaic] Law *one jot or tittle*"?

Most significant for Milton's discovery of pedagogical irony, however, is the new conviction that "Christ meant not to be tak'n word for word," together with its corollary that "*Christ gives no full comments* or continued discourses, but . . . speaks oft in Monosyllables, . . . scattering the heavenly grain of his doctrine like pearl heer and there, which requires *a skilfull and laborious gatherer*" (969; my emphases). For the irony of Milton's God will urge us to *earn* enlightenment; the ironist cannot confer it. Unready for "full comments" ('too much information'), we creatures are necessarily goaded by "monosyllables" to transcend the passivity of literalism and fulfil our roles in the creator-creature dialogue as hunter-gatherers of the truth.[14] This ultimate challenge Milton claims to have met himself on the field of Divorce: "through the help of that illuminating Spirit," coupled with the light of learning, he has overcome "the extreme literalist" to bring superficially conflicting scriptures into "consent between each other" (970). Intriguingly, Milton imagines the dialogue that might (or should) have taken place had the Pharisees likewise risen to the pedagogical occasion: "What if they had thus answer'd, [']Master, if thou mean to make wedlock as inseparable as it was from the beginning, let it be made also a fit society[']"; "Doubtlesse our Saviour had applauded their just answer" (960). For, according to Milton, it was but "to lay open their ignorance and shallow understanding of the Scriptures" (959-60) that he wielded the figure of metonymy with such (ironic) severity. The disciples, too, "ere Christ had finish't this argument, . . . might have pickt out of his own concluding words, an answer more to their minds" (960). For Milton, this laborious "picking out" and "gathering" is a Christian duty too often shirked in favour of slothful custom, to which we cling slavishly "for feare of disquieting the secure falsity of an old opinion" or a venerable authority (971).

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[14] MacCallum also relates the "gatherer" to Paradise Lost, though in the more specific context of the archangel Michael's education of Adam, which depends upon the latter's readiness to assume the role (201-2). With regard to "no full comments," Milton reiterates in Areopagitica (among other places) that "such is

While the revolution's failure would obviously exacerbate Milton's fear of the slothfulness that seemed to prefer deferential obedience over conscientious citizenship, Divorce already practises and preaches an uncompromising readerly work ethic that places hermeneutical trial at the heart of virtue. Yet such trial demands the opportunity to see it through as much as the willingness to undergo it. Dragged through the political mud in the wake of his divorce tracts, Milton felt the need to sound again the horn of Christian liberty, going on to champion in Areopagitica the reader's exercising of conscience against the censor's preempting of that due process.[15] Not just the Bible but all books, and indeed "what ever thing we hear or see," will enable "the triall of virtue, and the exercise of truth" (1010), providing we dare to risk uncensored encounter. In one of the best-known passages of his tract on "unlicenc'd Printing," Milton elaborates on this moral need for open trial:

> I cannot praise a fugitive and cloister'd vertue, unexercis'd & unbreath'd, that never sallies out and sees her adversary, but slinks out of the race . . . . Assuredly we bring not innocence into the world, we bring impurity much rather: that which

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the order of Gods enlightening . . ., to dispense and deal out *by degrees* his beam, so as our earthly eyes may best sustain it" (1023; my emphasis).

[15] Hill explains that Milton was "denounced as a licentious libertine" before the House of Commons, and even summoned by the Lords (131). He answered this "hard censure" (1026) in Tetrachordon (1645), another demonstration of painstaking exegesis.

> purifies us is triall, and triall is by what is contrary [from *contra*: against; i.e., not just opposite, but opposed, different, unfavourable, resisting]. (1006)

On the question of divorce, Milton had essentially contended that Christ meant to "purify" or "try" the Pharisees ("lay open their ignorance") by teaching what seemed "contrary" to the law that they abused. But, instead of renewing their commitment to that law by meeting their "adversary" with the "just answer" that Milton proposes ("Master, if thou mean..."), Christ's audience stood stupidly rebuked by the letter. Without a defense, without a dialogue, there is then no trial, nor is there justice; there is only a sentence.

What makes the conclusion of Areopagitica so stirring is the move from readership to citizenship. The inspired readers for whom Milton calls – those who, unlike the Pharisees, welcome freedom's burden of creative dialogue – must in that personal and collective process (or trial) become "a Nation of Prophets," busy with the "reforming of Reformation it self" (1019). Without such dialogue, "dull ease" and "fine conformity" hold sway, and the nation's "quick, ingenious, and piercing spirit" deserts the "mansion house of liberty" (1016, 1018-19). In short, the good citizen must be among other things the good interpreter, "disputing, reasoning, reading, inventing, discoursing, ev'n to a rarity" (1020). And, at the end of the Revolution's beginning, Eikonoklastes both calls upon and coaches just such good citizen-interpreters to weigh with Milton the glittering icon that was Charles I.

As Achinstein observes, Milton "presented to his readers an education in reading and resisting propaganda" (Milton 137) – just as he had offered them a similar lesson in Biblical exegesis. In the case of a king so lately present, however, the "laborious gatherer" should not only compare his sayings "with other precepts" and the dictates of charity (as in Bible reading), but also weigh "his fair spok'n words" against "his own farr differing deeds" (1081). Whereas the king had claimed that "God [was] his authority and judge," Eikonoklastes thus "substitutes the English people as judge" (Achinstein 168). But judges are made, not born; hence the need for education: "for their sakes who through custom, simplicitie, or want of better teaching, have not more seriously considered kings, then in the gaudy name of Majesty, . . . I shall make no scruple . . . to take up this Gauntlet" (1078). Countering the common charge of intellectual elitism, Achinstein argues that Milton's ambivalent images of the people reflect "what he wanted – or feared – [them] to become" (16). While his own teaching exemplified what he wanted – i.e., revolutionary readers willing and able to undertake "the paines of well-judging" (1079) – what he evidently feared was "a credulous and hapless herd, begott'n to servility" (1095). Nevertheless, Milton labours to realize his hopes by demonstrating and proclaiming to all that, "in words which admitt of various sense, the libertie is ours to choose" (1080).

And yet, what if the words of "Majesty" are God's? If taking an English king to task seemed daunting, how was one to muster the courage to wrestle with the king of heaven? Never does Milton doubt our duty in this; as we have seen, his developing oeuvre maintains that we are undone the day we cease "disputing, reasoning, reading," etc. Milton does not simply deny, however, that the gifts of reason and conscience come to us duty-free. As ever, he also looks to his traditions. When learning, justifying, and coaching the role of revolutionary reader in Divorce, for example, Milton is prompted by the Biblical tradition of readers such as Abraham, who take up even their maker's challenges:

> [God] hath taught us to love and to extoll his Lawes, not onely as they are his, but as they are just and good to every wise and sober understanding. Therfore *Abraham*, ev'n to the face of God himselfe, seem'd to doubt of divine justice, if it should swerve from that irradiation wherwith it had enlight'ned the mind of man, and bound it selfe to observe its own rule. (955-6)

For Milton, Abraham's example teaches that the lofty source of justice must not deter us from weighing its verdicts against "its own rule" of goodness. Still, Abraham only "*seem'd* to doubt of divine justice." Applying the "rule" that it is wrong to slay the righteous with the wicked (Gen. 18:25), Abraham has dared to do what the Pharisees should have done. He has reasoned that God cannot mean quite what he appears to be suggesting, and then dutifully and dialogically has bridged that gap, thereby participating in the administration of justice. Not without trepidation ("I have taken upon me to speak unto the Lord, which am but dust and ashes" [18:27]), yet not without reward, Abraham proves our human capacity to contend with God.

As I have suggested (p. 8), it will likewise be characteristic of *Milton's* God not just to stop short or steer clear of the whole truth, but to do so provocatively or pointedly – with what Linda Hutcheon calls "irony's edge" – in order to incite interpretation.[16] Admittedly, as God's creatures grow, their trials gather subtlety; and a few fail sometimes to 'receive' their summonses and let go of literalism. Yet it would be just as difficult for Milton's Adam, as we have seen, to rest content with animal society as it would have been for Abraham to stand burning with injustice beside the fires of Sodom. Thus, while in Areopagitica we are to pursue the trial of truth by every conceivable 'text' ("what ever thing we hear or see"), the irony of Milton's God makes his discourses the trying texts *par excellence.* And, after all, interpreting God is a matter of eternal life and death. As far as the conception's origins are concerned, however, the process of trial-by-irony, along with the revolutionary reader that it requires, clearly emerges in Milton's pamphlets out of the process of grasping and resolving contradiction both in scripture and in politics.

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[16] Without mention of irony, Lieb cites Milton on Abraham to argue more specifically that "the [Old Testament] spirit of contentiousness . . . is . . . very much a part of the way that Milton conceived the dialogue in heaven" ("Celestial Dialogue" 233-4). See below, Chapter Two, for a detailed discussion of the dialogue in question (3.80-343).

Indeed, a central biblical tradition of trial-by-irony was available to Milton, as to other revolutionary readers, in the tales of other 'wrestlers' such as Jonah and Job – a tradition made central by God himself, who through Jacob named his Chosen People Israel (Gen. 35:10-11), meaning 'he who contends (or wrestles) with God.'[17] E. M. Good describes God's attitude to the evasive Jonah, for instance, as "ironic through and through" (42). Markedly evident in God's rhetorical question, "Do you do well to be angry?" (4:4), such an attitude lays upon Jonah "the burden of recognition, the discovery of the relation between the ironist's 'is' and his 'ought'" (Good 31). This "burden," of course, amounts to the "skilfull and laborious gathering" of interpretation. Similarly, God's ostensibly tough attitude to Job

> turns out to be the irony of love. For . . . the result is reconciliation. . . . God's distance from man is maintained, for man cannot control God by being good. But his nearness is also maintained, for Yahweh came to speak to Job . . . to draw him back to himself. (Good 239)

Going only so far as to "draw" (rather than, say, claw) Job back, this God, like that of Milton, places the onus of discovery upon the creature.

What Good remarks of the ironist's method in general – that it "forbids his coming right out and saying, 'What you say or think is wrong; here is what is right'" (31) – brilliantly illuminates the aptness of irony for God's pedagogy in particular. For God's

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[17] Moses, too, is often cited as such a wrestler. See J. E. Parish on this tradition.

"coming right out" would likely spell apocalypse (cf. my n. 14), skewing the course of creaturely freedom by disturbing that "distance from man," which is above all a gulf of knowledge.[18] Northrop Frye echoes Good's perception of irony and its hermeneutical "burden": "all teachers from Socrates on have found [irony] essential," because "[t]o answer a question . . . is to consolidate the mental level on which the question is asked." That is to say, "[u]nless something is kept in reserve, suggesting the possibility of better and fuller questions, the student's mental advance is blocked" (xv). Even so, as much as Milton's God likewise 'advances' the history of his Chosen People through pedagogical irony, there are several reasons why the Early Modern poet never characterizes the teachings of God or Jesus explicitly and globally as ironic.

Frye (among others) points out that "the parables of Jesus were *ainoi*, fables with a riddling quality" (xv) – as '*para*bles' might suggest, fables aiming 'beside themselves.' But parables invite perceptions of similarity (e.g., 'A is to B as X is to Y'), whereas irony is fraught with difference. While pedagogical irony appears to be a recurring strategy in the Old Testament, the fact remains that seldom before the days of Defoe and Swift did 'irony' describe a mode of discourse (Muecke 16). Quintilian's three units of irony could include "an entire speech or case" between "a brief figure of speech" and "a man's whole life" (N. Knox 5), but in Milton's time the brief figure was most common, with said/unsaid as opposites. More rarely, irony might refer to the Socratic style of "ironic self-depreciation, often accompanied by ironic praise of someone else" (D. Knox 141). Socrates had epitomized Quintilian's "whole life" of irony, but his peripatetic way with words was now "translated more commonly as *dissimulatio* than as *ironia*" (142). For the emphasis on *ironia* as a figure had to some extent estranged it from the ways of the *eiron*, the smoothly dissimulating "fox" of Greek comedy who – not unlike Socrates, but quite unlike Milton's God – makes fools by playing the fool. For Plato, irony was thus akin to dissimulation, "denot[ing] devious pretense" (D. Knox 139); and Aristotle stocked it in his arsenal of rhetoric only "with some distaste" (N. Knox 4). Although Milton's God shares with Socrates a reliance on dialectic, his careful nurturing of creation has little use for self-depreciation; God's irony neither plays the fool nor undercuts his praise when creatures come through trial. In sum, with such dubious origins and restricted applications, it is hardly surprising that Milton had little use for irony as a term.[19]

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[18] For "gulf of knowledge," I am most indebted to Danielson's discussion of "epistemic distance" (119-20; cf. also my n. 6), though he takes the phrase from John Hicks. In this context, it is worth recalling that

Nevertheless, the irony of Milton's God by any other name would have its "edge." According to Linda Hutcheon (11, 37), irony may vary in conspicuousness and tone, depending on its design and reception, but invariably displays "by conflictual textual or contextual evidence" a critical edge that 'wants' interpretive attention. This wanted attention, which 'hears' such evidence (a smile, an inconsistency, etc.) as its cue to move beyond the letter of the text, will be akin to Milton's method of "contextualization." In the case of Milton's God, the want is both desire and lack: as a being "self-limited" for having created free-willed agents (Danielson 49), God *depends* on their "laborious gathering" of history, a process he can foresee but not determine

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'apocalypse' is rooted in the Greek *apokalyptein*, 'disclose.'

[19] The pamphlets reveal how deeply Milton found these applications, i.e., the mode of *dissimulatio* and the figure of *antiphrasis*, literarily and morally distasteful. In the Apology (1642), for instance, Milton praises Dante and Petrarch, "who never write but honour of them to whom they devote their verse, displaying sublime and pure thoughts, without transgression" (890). In praise of plain speaking, he goes on to proclaim that, "although I cannot say that I am utterly untrain'd in those rules which best Rhetoricians have giv'n, . . . yet true eloquence I find to be none, but the serious and hearty love of truth" (948-9). Milton's knowledge of irony, however, probably surpassed that of most Renaissance students to embrace further applications, as indeed his positive mention of "ironies" in the Doctrine would suggest (cf. my n. 4).

monologically. For "there can be no absolute decree" about those things "which God performs in co-operation with others, to whom he has granted, by nature, freedom of action" (Doctrine 153). As the Father in Paradise Lost will insist, "I formd them free, and free they must remain" (3.124).[20] Thus, King Charles's "drive towards absolutism" in the 1630s (Kendrick 6) can be seen as breeding revolution by its dehumanizing denial of such interdependency, its forced attempt to "perform" history by fixed and "absolute decree" instead of "in co-operation with others." By contrast, God's irony is dynamic and dialogical insofar as it aims not to perform but to be performed, and hence transformed, "with others." Like Milton's pamphlets, it hails but must *await* the revolutionary reader.

If, as Hutcheon contends, "*interpreters* 'mean' as much as *ironists* do," then theories grounded in the latter are inadequate (12; her italics). "[I]rony happens as a part of a *communicative process*; it is not a static rhetorical tool to be deployed, but itself *comes into being in the relations* between meanings, but also between people and utterances and, sometimes, between intentions and interpretations" (13; my emphases). Admittedly, the cruder kinds of irony can always serve the putative 'one-track' process of propaganda. But even straightforward *antiphrasis* takes a certain risk by airing the 'other' view in the form of the 'said,' which it can only implicitly, if bluntly, reject. How much more does Milton's God risk, then, by subtly rationing instead of simply reversing the truth. Unless his creatures are indeed "Skilfull and laborious" as well as faithful in the "communicative process" of trial, the "relations" and "intentions" go unrecognized and undeveloped, God's ironies do not "come into being," and, at best, Satanic or Caroline solipsism becomes the rule as the market for shares in authority collapses with the experiment in freedom.[21] At worst, cosmos fails.

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[20] Although Milton's God has often been associated with Calvinistic determinism – and especially the view of the Fall as both foreseen and designed – Milton consistently and explicitly rejects any form of predestination. Moreover, as we shall see, God's "reliance upon the art of persuasion helps convince us of . . . His creatures' freedom: He does not force anyone to save man; He only persuades someone to do so" (Blessington 55). See Danielson (59-62, 75-7, 80-91) on Milton's more or less Arminian (as opposed to Calvinistic) convictions and their distortions in the critical literature (cf. also 131-63).

That Milton's foreseeing God has not already scrapped creation should perhaps be cause for optimism. In any case, the risk of misunderstanding that always accompanies irony – "nothing is ever guaranteed at the politicized scene of irony" – problematizes the "transideological" nature of irony that Hutcheon and other theorists assign to it (Hutcheon 15, 10). Although "irony can and does function tactically in the service of a wide range of political interests" (10), its indirection always admits (an)other perspective(s) as at least conceivable. As Hutcheon points out, irony inevitably "remove[s] the semantic security of 'one signifier: one signified'" (13). For the sake of "semantic security," the kind of totalitarian, absolutist or single-party politics that relies on enforced ignorance would surely tend to aim for 'monological' messages, avoiding "irony's edge" altogether or, like Charles's supporters, restricting it to *antiphrasis* in propaganda. Thus, if measured irony is *characteristic* of Milton's God, then William Empson's vision of a divine Stalin or Big Brother on high seems more implausible than ever. As we have seen (cf. p. 5), genuine irony "cannot be used as an instrument of mastery."

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[21] The Satan-Charles connection is now quite well established. See Joan S. Bennett on "the consistency . . . between Milton's interpretation of [Charles's] monarchy and his portrayal of the tyranny of Satan" (441). David Norbrook supplements this connection with the claim that, "[i]n giving a semi-republican rhetoric to Satan," the disillusioned Milton "was linking him more closely with Cromwell than with either Charles." Like Lucan's Caesar in the Pharsalia (or Civil War), Satan "demonstrates how republican ideals can become corrupted by personal ambition," just as they did in Cromwell's case (442).

Yet Hutcheon's theory shows that even the irony of opposites is more complex than previously supposed. In propaganda of this kind, for example, the unsaid but advocated side rests its case mainly on the shortcomings of the said. To exclude the said from the overall meaning therefore seems shortsighted, and especially so in cases more subtle than *antiphrasis*. As Hutcheon explains, irony is "inclusive and relational"; it "happens" in interpretation, "in the space *between* (and including) the said and the unsaid," both of which "literally 'interact' . . . to create the real 'ironic meaning'" (12; her emphasis). Crucially, however, the interpretive "oscillation" between said and unsaid is tilted towards the latter by "the evaluative force of irony's edge" (66). In the crudest *antiphrasis*, the oscillation may be polarized and the unsaid overloaded, but meaning is still made, albeit coercively, by an interaction of perspectives.

In God's carefully graded irony of 'partial truths,' typically far removed from *antiphrasis*, the interaction of perspectives gathers complexity and connotative richness, resulting in deeply challenging, and hence genuinely free, trial "by what is contrary." Adam's dialogue with the deity, for instance, suggests more than the song that 'people need people.' The proposal of human-animal relations, apparently still untried despite a common language, interacts with that of human relations to distinguish "pastime" from "all rational delight," yet also to imply a critique of Adam's restricting "harmonie" to human mutuality (8.384). From God's subsequent approval, it might seem obvious that Adam has passed his test, yet his understanding still has its limits, as of course the "gulf of knowledge" demands. Indeed, the archangel Raphael, to whom Adam relates this story, has already proved unable to allay Adam's curiosity about hierarchy (cf. 8.70-5), which now ranges from celestial to domestic matters: "Among unequals what societie . .

.?" (8.383-4). Adam's own conclusion to what he means to ask God rhetorically – i.e., that such society must "soon prove/ Tedious" (8.388-9) – remains a partial truth. Only the wisest of interpreters could possibly have 'heard' the said/unsaid oscillation's rippling outwards through the potential "harmonie" of the cosmos.

Nevertheless, trial's resistance to closure still allows for provisional verdicts; and this time, at least, Adam succeeds. Of course, irony "potentially excludes: . . .there are those who 'get' it and those who do not" (Hutcheon 54). But the trials of Milton's God are inclusive insofar as 'success' and 'failure' always lead to further trial. The existence of hell argues, perhaps, a point of irretrievability beyond which further trial is useless because all freedom has been given over to enthrallment; yet even the fallen Satan suffers the activity of conscience (e.g., "Ah wherefore! [God] deservd no such return/ From me" [4.42-3]), as if he were not conclusively fallen but continually falling.[22] In any case, God's trial of Adam exemplifies his most characteristic mode of relation with those who remain free creatures, a mode that Hutcheon calls "aggregative" irony. By virtue of its powerful "affective charge," all the more powerful with an all-powerful (if "self-limited") ironist, such irony can create "'amiable communities' . . . between ironist and interpreter" (54-5). More accurately, it builds community out of some pre-existing commonality (such as shared knowledge), without which ironic intentions go undetected. And this aggregative irony is what Kenneth Burke, the source of Hutcheon's crucial concept of "interacting" perspectives, refers to as "true irony, humble irony" (Grammar 514).

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[22] Milton stresses in his Doctrine (I.8) that God watches and "preserves" *all* created things (326-9). Danielson explains that, "[i]n a Christian view, . . . there is but one road, . . . which can be travelled . . . toward heaven or toward hell"; and, "given the availability of [God's] help, everyone is free to choose one's direction" (65). Satan seems both to symbolize a state ("hell") that people only approach – i.e., paradise lost for good to (self-)enthrallment – and to represent those who are busy approaching it.

Humble irony reaches for other perspectives by inviting mutual recognition of a certain artificiality in the barrier between the self (the ironist) and others:

> [I]rony that really does justify the attribute of 'humility' . . . is not superior to the enemy. . . . [It] is based upon a sense of fundamental kinship with the enemy, as one *needs* him, is *indebted* to him, is not merely outside him as an observer but contains him *within*, being consubstantial with him. This is the irony of Flaubert, when he recognizes that Madame Bovary is himself. (514; italics in original)[23]

"Fundamental kinship" is not identity, but derives from "consubstantiality" at the level of the partial and potential – i.e., "contains within" differs significantly from "is." Thus, it is the desire or need to develop or realize consubstantiality that in Burke's view motivates not just irony but rhetoric in general (Rhetoric 22). Flaubert's irony admits that he 'has it in him' to be Madame Bovary. And yet, while he recognizes a "debt" to his character for knowledge of where one aspect of himself could lead, the "kinship" he would *develop* is not with her but through her with his readers, whom he invites to acknowledge her 'aspect' within themselves.

The case of Milton's God is special insofar as a being who creates *ex deo* – out of himself, not from nothing or chaos – has a truly "fundamental" kinship with everything and everyone, even with Satan ("the enemy"), and a responsibility equally fundamental. Indeed, Milton's monism 'contains' this concept of universal kinship; and the agnostic may wish to read this monistic God as a 'figurehead' for such kinship.[24] However, in order to realize consubstantiality with all, and to realize it meaningfully in the condition of freedom; in order to "confront the implications of division," for Burke (22), the true mission of rhetoric – God offers trial-by-humble-irony to all.[25] And, when trial is done, when history is ended, when authority is shared out among others, when consubstantiality is freely and fully realized, then and only then, "God shall be All in All" (3.341). By virtue of "the attribute of 'humility'," the God who once was merely "All" escapes from solipsism into relationship; and his "self-limiting" leads ironically to his self-transcendence. Perhaps "absolute freedom of action" could always accompany God's "internal necessity to do good," as Milton insists (Doctrine 159), but the task of bringing kinship to fruition is the trial that finally 'humanizes' Milton's God – the trial whereby, in communion with free creatures, he comes to experience, not just to know, the tried and true nature of 'uncloister'd' freedom.

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[23] Hutcheon also quotes from Burke to clarify aggregative irony (54-5); and Reimer (62-5) applies this passage to Milton's God. But (cf. my n. 5), writing before Hutcheon, Reimer otherwise treats irony in terms of "doubleness" and "opposites," with truth "*behind* the ironic mask" (i; my emphasis), missing the inconsistency between these terms and those of Burke's "true irony." For Burke, the "mask" is a valid "sub-perspective" integral to the meaning, and hence neither "precisely right [n]or precisely wrong" (512).

[24] Such universal kinship holds neither in the case of a Platonic God, who imposes his will on a pre-existing chaos that is tamed without instead of contained within, nor in that of the orthodox, Augustinian God, who creates *ex nihilo* (out of nothing) so that creation is inherently *naughty*, corruptible, again 'other' to God's absolute being. See Danielson (25-6, 29-30, 38-41) on these dualistic theologies. On the poem's *ex deo* alternative, see Danielson (43-57) and D. Bentley Hart, who shows that Milton's monistic God is so

Even so, "nothing is ever guaranteed at the politicized scene of irony" (cf. p. 23). Building "amiable community" by aggregative irony depends as much on the interpreter as the ironist, as much on mutual trust and desire as hermeneutical competence, to surmount the self/other barrier. What happens when the ironist is 'othered' and consubstantiality seems undesirable? A vicious circle may set in as denial of the commonalities that enable irony's "interaction of perspectives" leads to distorted readings that lead to greater division. God may still be perceived as anything from an "inclusionary" communitarian to an "exclusionary" elitist, i.e., "a kind of omniscient,

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"immediately involved in the created universe" that "the divine story . . . *contains* human history" (23, 25; my emphasis).

[25] "Creation" could substitute for "division" in rhetoric's mission – thus, "to confront the implications of creation" – as Milton describes *creatio ex deo* in terms of "God's divorcing command" (947) or God's "retiring" himself (7.170). One might also substitute "the implications of freedom," since God in this "retiring" has "withdrawn his controlling power from Chaos and from human freedom" (Danielson 53).

omnipotent god-figure, smiling down – with irony – upon the rest of us," in Hutcheon's ironic phrasing (54). Milton's ironic God nonetheless leaves it up to you, the reader, to take his texts to task. But the reader of Milton's dreams will neither turn selfwards in rebellion, nor bow in self-effacement to the letter of the text – the two sides, both of them barrenly monological, of one worthless coin of enthrallment. The revolutionary reader will meet the dialogical challenge to turn otherwards, to look homeward, to gather "skilfully and laboriously" the seeds of co-operation.[26]

The succeeding chapters will show that this division of attitudes towards God's trials continues to divide the critics, as glimpsed already in Empson's celestial Stalin. But some perspectives are made 'more equal' than others. For Milton, too, proves to be pedagogical: just as the pamphlets aim to train up revolutionary readers, so Paradise Lost 'models' good and bad interpretations and their consequences. Satan, for instance, will be willfully the worst of readers, so terrified of consubstantiality as to insist that he is "self-begot, self-rais'd" (5.860). And not only in his followers but also in those good yet all-too-passive angels Milton's own fear of what the English people might become will surface once again. In sum, Hutcheon's emphasis on the interpreter will bear much fruit, as the 'leading lights' of the poem itself, together with those who have read and written before, illuminate our reading.

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[26] In granting the fallen Adam a preview of the painful history whereby "God with man unites" (12.382), Michael also conjoins these twin temptations of slavery to the self or to another (the two sides of the 'coin of enthrallment'), though in terms of subjection within/without: "since [man] permits/ Within himself unworthie powers to reign/ Over free Reason, God in Judgement just/ Subjects him from without to violent Lords;/ Who oft as undeservedly enthrall/ His outward freedom" (12.90-4). By giving causal primacy to the servility "within," Michael assumes the "warning voice" of Milton's politics, with its tough but rousing (and ever-relevant) charge that people tend to get the tyrants they deserve. On the implications for republicanism, see Armand Himy, who points out that Books XI and XII insist upon "the [internal] virtue of the subjects" as the prime prophylactic against tyranny (121).

CHAPTER TWO

God's Words of Irony: Towards a Republic of Love.

Milton's theodicy, as we have seen, turns upon the willingness of his God to 'suffer' genuine *co*-operation. A God who embarks with us on trial-by-humble-irony is "justified because of his refusal to treat his subjects as mere puppets" (Norbrook 479). Moreover, even hostile critics such as Empson concede that this refusal of power will stop at nothing short of "abdication": "the democratic appeal of [this] prophecy of God is what makes the whole picture of him just tolerable" (137; cf. 3.317-41 and p. 27). But a reader as sympathetic to Milton's project as David Norbrook can still insist that creaturely freedom has its limits in Paradise Lost: "all speech-acts are ultimately echoes of the divine speech-act. They can either return that echo appropriately or be censured for . . . failing to recognize the terms of their existence" (479). The "echo" metaphor with its either/or limits creativity severely, as if God were some celestial Narcissus seeking only to hear a naïve echo of his own voice. In the dialogue of Book VIII, for instance (cf. pp. 7-8, 24-5), the meaning-making leaves "an uncomfortable residue of manipulation"; "[i]f Adam is an author, he has a ghost-writer" (487). In sum, Milton's "God is not a tyrant, but he is certainly not a modern democrat" (480). And Brian Johnson, despite his attending to God's irony and the reader's "creative choices," anticipates Norbrook in his claim that God's interpreters merely "fill the gaps" in *his* meanings and, "constrained" to "internalize" his will, become not co-authors but "the Author." Knowing that his pre-fabricated universe will go according to plan – i.e., according to his own monological blueprint – "[God] does not risk much by abdicating" (68).

This is surely a slippery slope towards the view that wrestling with Milton's God will always be a one-sided exercise, that irony can indeed be "used as an instrument of mastery" (cf. p. 23), that bringing kinship to fruition (p. 27) really amounts to pigeon-holing or even homogenization – in short, that what Milton calls creator-creature "co-operation" ultimately collapses into divine operation. Each of God's creatures would then be "a meer artificiall *Adam*, such an *Adam* as he is in the motions" (Areopagitica 1010); or, in Christopher Kendrick's terms, the poet would have failed to "buffer God's knowledge from his power" (113). What is more, restricting freedom to the choice of whether or not to 'go through the motions' of God's absolute will lends a spurious plausibility to Romantic readings of the rebel Satan as the poem's hero, readings that would doubtless have appalled its pious author.[27]

The possibility of such a collapse into monologism will thus provide a trial "by what is contrary" with which to "purify" the argument itself for an ironic God (cf. p. 16). For God, too, is on trial, as Empson (94), Hill (359), and other critics have remarked of Paradise Lost, and as the English revolutionaries must have felt ever more keenly through the 1650s and '60s as they wondered "[w]hat had happened to God's cause" (Hill 347), the so-called Good Old Cause. And perhaps their querulous anguish accounts in part for Milton's humbly ironic, and hence dialogically *dependent*, creator, whose foreknowledge is no product of predestining control but rather a producer of the agony and the ecstasy of 'overlooking' the vagaries of creaturely freedom.[28] In order to preserve and promote that freedom, Milton's God, no less than the poet himself, must rely on the unreliable –

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[27] Blake and Shelley set the tone for such readings. The former famously contended that Milton was of the Devil's party without knowing it, while the latter claimed that the poet "alleged no superiority of moral virtue to his God over his Devil" (qtd. in Empson 16).

rhetoric, the sweet science of dialogical persuasion, which, as Francis C. Blessington points out so perceptively, "has no real place in a deterministic universe" (55).[29]

It is only fitting that the first creature on whom the Father is seen to be dialogically dependent should be his 'right-hand man,' the Son.[30] For the Son's responsiveness shows every creature the way to "sonship" and its benefits, as Hugh MacCallum explains: "[h]is progress repeatedly demonstrates the nature of the filial relationship with the Father, providing a touchstone for true responses and a model for imitation." "True responses" transcend the passivity of correctness or the avoidance of evil to acknowledge and develop one's "relationships both with God and with other created beings" (6). Having been tempted in Books I and II by the fallen angels' estranging reactions to God – having heard their strident charges against the "Tyranny" (1.124) of heaven's "Torturer" (2.64) – the reader discovers in the Father-Son colloquy of Book III not just a salutary model for dialogical relationship "with God and with other created beings" but "the critical method by which we must read the events of the poem" (Reimer i).[31] That is to say, the colloquy or council introduces the words and ways of God's aggregative irony. As Armand Himy observes, Milton exploits an "ironical presentation of God as tyrant" to imply that "*human* monarchy . . . leads inevitably to

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[28] Adam will partake of this agony in Books XI and XII as he surveys the future of his progeny: "Let no man seek/ Henceforth to be foretold what shall befall/ Him or his Children" (11.770-2).

[29] It is much to Milton's credit that, despite the strength of his convictions and the violence of his era, he never advocated more violent forms of 'persuasion.' As a regicide, however, he did believe in capital punishment for what he saw as despotism.

[30] On the bases of both the poem and the Doctrine (I.5), most critics agree that Milton came to hold the Arian, anti-Trinitarian view of the Son as a creature, subordinate in knowledge to the Father as well as different in essence. See MacCallum on "Milton's Doctrine of Son and Spirit" (24-58).

[31] The notion of a "tempted" reader owes much to Stanley Fish, who has argued influentially that "Milton's method is to recreate in the mind of the reader . . . the drama of the Fall" (1). However, I would concur with Norbrook's comment that Milton's chief aim was not to "chasten" his readers but to foster "self-reliance" (479).

tyranny,"[32] and then affirms in the colloquy and its ultimate goal of abdication that "a commonwealth must be preferred to a monarchy," love to fear, participation to submission (120-1; my emphasis). Given the exigencies of the biblical theme and the poetical form, and especially those of censorship, Milton was in some degree constrained to smuggle in his politics.[33]

God's opening speech would seem to bear out the Satanic view of "Tyranny" on high. Often described as "harsh and mean-spirited" rather than ironic, it remains for many readers the poem's "most persistent problem" (Christopher 114). "Onely begotten Son," begins the Father, who nonetheless includes all the hosts of heaven (cf. 3.60-1, 344-5), "seest thou what rage/ Transports our adversarie, whom no bounds prescrib'd . . . can hold" (3.80-4). God is first and foremost a pedagogue ("seest thou"); and clearly the Son, like any other free creature, requires education through trial. And clearly far from over are the trials of Satan 'unbound,' who retains the freedom to lead others into temptation (cf. 1.211-13). Reaching for the said-unsaid relation (in light of heaven's civil war), the interpreters of God's irony ought to realize already that any or all of them may play the role of "adversarie," as consensual love alone "can hold" the free. The assumption of divine omnipotence might suggest that here the Father is being "sardonic" (Flannagan 418n), or possibly, as Empson would have it, that "this is the first of God's grisly jokes" (119). And yet, whose but his own is the bitter cup? After all, in creating free creatures God has knowingly invited potential adversaries to his table. While any democratizer must take this risk, surely for God the Father every adversary is a wayward child, spilling the blood of kinship.[34]

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[32] For example, Mammon's boast of "preferring/ Hard liberty [in hell] before the easie yoke/ Of servile Pomp" in heaven (2.255-7) clearly echoes Milton's indictment of the pomp and circumstance of human monarchy in such pamphlets as Eikonoklastes (cf. pp. 16-17).

[33] Norbrook suggests that Milton "delayed publication [by some four years] until a moment when he would be least threatened by censorship, at a time when the government was in disarray after the Great Plague, the Great Fire, and a mismanaged war with the Dutch" (435). Even so, and despite the poet's 'smuggling,' it beggars belief that the censor apparently smelled subversion only in 1.598-9, where Satan's ruined glory is likened to a solar eclipse, which "with fear of change/ Perplexes monarchs" (Parker 600-1). Just a few lines later (1.677), Milton compares Satan and his cohorts to "the Royal Camp"!

Surveying the inevitably crooked path of freedom, the Father knows that much blood will be shed. Here is the rub:

> For man will hark'n to [Satan's] glozing lyes,
> And easily transgress the sole Command,
> Sole pledge of his obedience: So will fall,
> Hee and his faithless Progenie: whose fault?
> Whose but his own? Ingrate, he had of mee
> All he could have[.]
> (3.93-8)

That humankind will "easily transgress" sets up a nice dramatic irony in the next book, where Adam dismisses the "pledge" lightly as "this easie charge" (4.421). But the quite different irony of "faithless" and "ingrate" – partial truths made unpalatable by what Hutcheon terms "irony's edge" – has grated on most readers. Christopher explains it as the voice of "God as the sinner perceives him"; God's tone shifts according to the narrator/reader's spiritual progress, which has barely begun (116). However, despite its resonance with Reformed theology, this theory reduces the Father from dramatic agent to admonitory reflection. Similarly, Victoria Silver's claim that the irony is all the poet's – that he splits God in two in order to remind his readers of the 'real' God's hiddenness (4) – robs the Father of his own pedagogical purposes together with any integrity of character.[35] Furthermore, such views tend to turn the subtle dramatist into Fish's knuckle-rapping schoolmaster, isolating God's direct effect on readers at the expense of the agonistic relationships within the poem. These inspire us rather by example, thus preserving in the poet-reader relationship the anti-authoritarianism that Milton preached in prose, and which motivates the "co-operative" irony of his God.

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[34] God's humble irony "is based upon a sense of fundamental kinship with the enemy" (Burke; cf. p. 26). The claim that God learns the taste of bitterness finds support in the Doctrine: "If [*God*] *grieved in his heart* Gen. vi. 6, . . . let us believe that he did feel grief" (135). And the modern theologian Nicolas Berdjaev agrees: "To deny tragedy in the divine life is only possible at the cost of denying Christ" (qtd. in Danielson 32). See Lieb ("Reading God") on Milton's conception of *theopatheia*, or the "emotional life of God" (227).

God further fuels the *agon* by turning from "ingrate" to the promise of "grace," challenging his listeners even by means of internal rhyme to fathom irony's "interaction of (sub)perspectives" (cf. p. 24):

> The [angels] by thir own suggestion fell,
> Self-tempted, self-deprav'd: Man falls deceiv'd
> By [Satan] first: Man therefore shall find grace,
> The other none: in Mercy and Justice both,
> Through Heav'n and Earth, so shall my glorie excel,
> But Mercy first and last shall brightest shine.
> (3.129-34)

This disables any allegorical reading of Justice/Father versus Mercy/Son, since "it is [the Father] who first introduces the concepts of mercy and love" (MacCallum 106).[36] The Father indeed "introduces" mercy as well as justice, privileging the former in the abstract but leaving the stuff of their relation largely 'unsaid,' i.e., to be realized with his creatures. Given that "ingrate" would have clashed with the angels' experience of divine love – "conflictual contextual evidence" signalling the possibility of irony (cf. p. 21) – the turn to "grace" should come to both listeners and readers less as an "abrupt *non*

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[35] Hill, too, sees two Gods in the poem, though his view is less misleading: because God seemed (by 1660) "incomprehensible," Milton "needed . . . the Son as the acceptable face of deity" (245). But I maintain that when we grasp his loving irony God becomes no less "acceptable" than the Son.

[36] The young Milton made four sketches for a drama on the Fall (Flannagan 309), of which the second had Justice, Mercie, and Wisdome debating our fate. In addition, as Labriola explains, an iconographic tradition had "the Father and the Son signify the opposing claims of Justice and Mercy," though a longer tradition based on Psalm 85 placed the latter pair among the daughters of God ("God Speaks" 25-6). Such allegorical contexts, however, can have little bearing on the poem's complex characters.

sequitur" (Reimer 8) than as a return to form. But this is nonetheless a (re)turn that 'wants' interpretive attention (cf. p. 21), and the Son rises to the ironic occasion.

Michael Lieb describes the Son's 'rising' as Act two of a five-act drama ("Celestial Dialogue" 218).[37]

> O Father, gracious was that word which clos'd
> Thy sovran sentence, that Man should find grace;
> ....
> For should Man finally be lost, should Man
> Thy creature late so lov'd, thy youngest Son
> Fall circumvented thus by fraud, though joynd
> With his own folly? That be from thee farr,
> That farr be from thee, Father[.]
> ....
> So should thy goodness and thy greatness both
> Be questiond and blaspheam'd without defense.
> (3.144-66)

The eldest Son emphasizes kinship (as if to advocate 'community justice'), looking out for his baby brother, the Father's "youngest Son." By describing him as "late so lov'd," the Son puts his finger on the "conflictual evidence" for the irony of "ingrate," in effect demanding confirmation of that irony and elucidation of the promise of grace. By having the Son echo Abraham's dispute with God ("That be far from thee," etc. [Gen. 18:25]), the poet underlines the contentiousness that marks the final phrase ("blaspheam'd"). And the Son's part in this deliberative trial is no less his own part, and no less challenging to the Father, for being foreknown by him. Critics who insist that the debate is "no debate at all, since the Son only utters what the Father already knows" (Belsey 69), overlook the gulf of knowledge between them and miss what Danielson calls God's "self-limitation." As we have seen, God's omniscience does not preclude genuine co-operation (including contention) with the creatures whom he himself endows with freedom, thereby "withdraw[ing] his controlling power."[38]

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[37] Lieb develops Irene Samuel's insight that "the council . . . show[s] in dramatic process the Son's growth" (241). As quoted above (p. 22), irony involves a "communicative process"; it "comes into being in the relations between meanings, but also between people," etc. Irony's "relations" are thus inherently *dramatic*, as Burke suggests (Grammar 511-12). Drama at 'the very top' becomes less surprising when we realize, firstly, that Milton sees the Bible as "the highest form of drama" (Lieb 219); and, secondly, that he builds on "a longstanding tradition of sermon-dialogue on biblical episodes," in which the preacher would give voice to the Father and other figures (Labriola, "God Speaks" 13). But "Milton's Divine Persons . . . deliberate more fully and interact more dramatically" (19).

Since God co-operates ironically, the drama can hardly lead to a 'fate' *accompli.*[39] On the contrary, God answers with a decidedly unrhetorical, yet for pedagogical reasons necessarily mysterious, question for all of heaven's 'contenders,' on whom he and his "youngest Son(s)" must now rely. For a God of freedom can do no more than "guide":

> And I will place within [man] as a guide
> My Umpire *Conscience*[.]
> ……………………………………
> But yet all is not don; Man disobeying,
> Disloyal breaks his fealtie[.]
> ………………………………………
> He with his whole posteritie must dye,
> Dye hee or Justice must; unless for him
> Som other able, and as willing, pay
> The rigid satisfaction, death for death.
> Say, Heav'nly Powers, where shall we find such love,
> Which of ye will be mortal to redeem
> Mans mortal crime[?]
> (3.194-215)

"Dye hee or justice must": with its cutting spondée (Dye hee) and hissing internal rhyme (*Just*ice *must*), the "edge" of God's irony smites us like an executioner's axe. Yet any sense of 'the whole truth' – the finality of a tyrant's decree devoid of ironic intent – is mitigated by "unless," which opens the meaning of "justice" to allow for a certain separation of sin from sinner, a merciful justice dependent on the ability and willingness of the community ("Som other able, and as willing") to bear the cost of sin. Notably, the role of redeemer is not offered directly to the Son as his "vocation," as Lieb implies (218). Instead, God's pointed casting call embraces all the "Heav'nly powers," to all of whom he grants, as Johnson observes, "the power to make divine decisions of the highest order" (69) – provided, that is, they dare to exercise that power.

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[38] The phrase is Danielson's; see my n. 25. Similarly, while parents can often predict their children's choices and/or words, children are not "puppets" – that is, provided the parents will (gradually) concede "controlling power" and contend with their children's freedom.

[39] Conversely, the council in hell is rigged; see especially 2.378-80 and Flannagan's n. 83 (391). That Satan's ways are monological – in political terms, monarchical – is also confirmed by the narrator after his

According to Lieb's summary, the Son's challenge "causes the Father in [A]ct 3 ([3.]167-217) to delineate his intentions further[,] . . . . set[ting] the stage for the Son's act of accepting his sacrificial vocation in [A]ct 4 . . . . followed by the Father's praise of the Son and prognostication of the future" (218). Yet Lieb underestimates the Father's dependence on "true responses." For all his talk of drama, by focussing on God's inner conflict as "*Deus agonistes* struggl[ing] with his own theology," Lieb reduces the role of the Son to mainly that of "infus[ing] the scene with a sense of energy and excitement" (226-7). Moreover, free will gets lost in Lieb's assertion that the Son "responds according to his nature" (235), as if he were but a 'love machine' awaiting activation. What Milton claims for Adam and for all of humankind – that "when God gave him reason, he gave him freedom to choose" (1010) – turns out to be all the more true of the Son. Rather than simply "accepting" what is his by birthright or "nature," for his part he determines it, as he alone dares to engage wholeheartedly in the trial.

In this trial not only the identity of the redeemer but the meaning of redemptive sacrifice remains to be determined. With so much at stake, the hermeneutical test becomes at the same time a test of trust or faith – faith in the merciful justice that promises eternal life (cf. 3.243-4, 5.609-11), and faith in the reason that descries that

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final speech: "Thus saying rose/ The Monarch, and prevented all reply" (2.466-7). We begin to see that Milton's hell is in one sense the sterility and stagnation of single-voiced monarchy.

promise within the words of death. Initially, "dye" means to be damned "without redemption," as the narrator makes clear to the reader:

> He ask'd, but all the Heav'nly Quire stood mute,
> And silence was in Heav'n: on mans behalf
> Patron or Intercessor none appeerd,
> Much less that durst upon his own head draw
> The deadly forfeiture, and ransom set.
> And now without redemption all mankind
> Must have bin lost, adjudg'd to Death and Hell
> By doom severe, had not the Son of God,
> In whom the fulness dwels of love divine,
> His dearest mediation thus renew'd.
> (3.217-26).

In clarifying this death's 'deadliness,' the narrator also underlines the absence of necessity or fate, i.e., the 'virtual reality' of the road not taken: "had *not* the Son" chosen to intervene, "mankind/ *Must* have been lost" for good. The moment of silence (how long "was" it?) lends weight to this abysmal possibility, the reiterations (e.g., "stood mute" and "silence was") perhaps expressing Milton's own sense of dismay and betrayal when so few raised their voices against the return of the king. For it seems to have gone unnoticed that the Son's finest hour marks an abject failure for heaven's angels, who "stood mute" just as hell's angels "sat mute" at Satan/Beelzebub's call to corrupt the new world (2.420). And one thing necessary for the triumph of evil may be for good angels to do nothing. The breakdown of trial at this point would at best leave God to wield all power himself, resulting in unilateral decisions, or 'justice' by unchallenged sentence, as when Christ's ironic teaching goes unanswered by the Pharisees (cf. pp. 14-16).[40]

The second "death" in "death for death" (3.212) clearly refers to the hypothetical loss of humankind that such 'monarchical' justice could exact ("Dye hee..."). But what of the first "death," that of the volunteer? The language of economics suggests that payment need only be equivalent; and might not the same payment that beggars a human being lie well within an angel's means? Without faith in creaturely reason as well as in divine justice, however, such phrases as "be mortal" may seem conclusive, meaning 'put off immortality' instead of 'take on a mortal aspect.' Thus, whereas fear lends authority to the literal letter and so may lead to submission or rebellion without engagement, such manifold faith submits the word to the authority of reason and so affirms or contests by contextualization, the "skilfull and laborious gathering" of said(s) and unsaid into relation so as to measure a response (cf. p. 14). And the results are dramatic – "aggregative" drama (cf. p. 25) that builds both character and community.

Unlike the timid angels, the Son has faith enough to contextualize God's irony, whatever the stakes:

> Father, thy word is past, man shall find grace;
> ....
> Behold mee then, mee for him, life for life
> I offer, on mee let thine anger fall;
> Account mee man; I for his sake will leave
> Thy bosom, and this glorie next to thee
> Freely put off[;]
> ....
> thou hast given me to possess
> Life in myself for ever, by thee I live,
> Though now to Death I yield, and am his due
> All that of me can die, yet that debt paid,
> Thou wilt not leave me in the loathsom grave[;]
> ....
> [I] with the multitude of my redeemd
> Shall enter Heaven[.]
> (3.227-61)

The Son's response may sound "assur'd," but still more striking is the sense of 'thinking aloud,' which implies the opposite: the Son is making it up as the trial goes along. "Skillfully gathering" the Father's sayings ("man shall find grace"; "life for life"; "Life

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[40] On the breakdown of trial, see also pp. 22-3: "At worst, cosmos fails."

. . . for ever") and trusting in his mercy ("thou wilt not leave me"), the Son *reasons* that the story does not have to end in "the loathsom grave." He can discharge the debt and yet escape the price of death eternal. Nevertheless, the Son's offer, by his own assurance "Freely" made, is truly sacrificial insofar as he lacks a guarantee that this is feasible. In the (chronologically) earlier episode of the war, God has already stressed the soundness of reason; e.g., the wicked are those "who reason for thir Law refuse,/ Right reason for thir Law" (6.41-2).[41] But knowing that one is within reason is not the same as knowing the implications, which God, as we have seen, has his reasons for rationing. It is the courage of the Son, then, the courage to co-operate with God in deed as well as to contend with him in word, that produces a fifth 'Act.'[42]

For "Admiration seis'd/ All Heav'n, *what this* [Act four] *might mean*, and whither tend/ *Wondring*" (3.271-3; my emphases). And well might the angels wonder what is to come, as the Son has crowned his offer with the suggestion that saving humankind will somehow, like the very act of creating other beings, save the Father from himself: "and returne,/ Father, to see thy face, wherein no cloud/ Of anger shall remain, but peace assur'd,/ And reconcilement" (3.261-4). The Son's mediation thus promises to alleviate the emotional burden of unilateral or monarchical justice. Above all, such "reconcilement" promises no less than to foster in freedom the goal of complete creator-creature reconcilement that lies behind God's humble irony. And, as we shall see, the Son can draw added confidence from his having heard tell of this ultimate goal before.

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[41] As seen in Chapter One (especially p. 10), a crucial element of Milton's faith, too, was his faith in God-given reason. The Doctrine equates reason with "Conscience," which "cannot be altogether asleep, even in the most evil men," and sees it as evidence for God's existence (132). Flannagan notes that "'[r]ight reason,' the Latin *recta ratio*, was a term associated with Stoic and scholastic philosophies. It meant something like 'self-evident reasonableness in judging all practical matters'" (508, 17n).

[42] The Son thus sets the standard for what Michael will offer to Adam as "the summe/ Of wisdom": "only add/ *Deeds* to thy knowledge answerable, add Faith,/ . . . add Love" (12.581-3; my emphasis).

That drama is music to God's ears is heard most clearly in Act five's gushing disclosures regarding this *telos* of reconcilement – i.e., the bringing of kinship to fruition (cf. pp. 26-7) – and the Son's potential role therein. Indeed, the Son's model response, modelled in turn on the hermeneutics of Milton's divorce tracts, earns everyone a mild respite from God's testing, ironic words in favour of 'straighter' talk of his ironic ways. These are the reconciling ways of what Albert C. Labriola calls "Milton's theology of humiliation" ("Christology" 41):

> O thou in Heav'n and Earth the only peace
> Found out for mankind under wrauth, O thou
> My sole complacence! well thou knowst how dear
> To me are all my works, nor Man the least.
> ....
> Thir Nature also to thy Nature joyn;
> And be thy self Man among men on Earth,
> Made flesh[.]
> ....
> As in [Adam] perish all men, so in thee
> As from a second root shall be restor'd[.]
> ....
> Nor shalt thou by descending to assume
> Mans Nature, less'n or degrade thine owne.
> (3.274-304)

As the Son has just spoken of the Father's "peace assur'd" (3.263), the first lines point to the interdependence of all beings, including God's own dependence on "all [his] works," by tracing that peace back to humankind through the humility of his Son the peace-maker. The notion of a humble "joyning" free of degradation confirms such universal kinship as it begins to flesh out the speculative reasoning of Act four. Again, such phrases as "the *only* peace" would seem not just to stress the dependence of humankind on the volunteer but to imply a political critique of those who volunteer so little. Despite their having resisted Satan's call to arms, the "mute" choir of angels appear nearly as undependable now as the people of England must have seemed to Milton when they let the monarchy grow back "as from a second root."[43]

It is therefore with justice ("By Merit") that the Father singles out the Son as the prime agent of his abdication as well as our salvation. The Son's "quitt[ing] *all*" moves the Father to cede "*all* Power," as he emphasizes (e.g., with "also" and "both") the levelling yet exalting power of humility:

> [Because thou hast] quitted *all* to save
> A world from utter loss, and has been found
> By Merit more than Birthright Son of God,
> ....
> Therefore thy *Humiliation shall exalt*
> With thee thy Manhood *also* to this Throne;
> Here shalt thou sit incarnate, here shalt Reign
> *Both* God and Man, Son *both* of God and Man,
> Annointed universal King; *all* Power
> I give thee[.]
> (3.307-18; italics added)

But God also predicts the true end of all such 'singling out.' Abdication will be fulfilled in trial, from which the just will finally emerge with no more need for 'royal' justice from on high:

> Then thou thy regal Scepter shall lay by,
> For regal Scepter then no more shall need,
> God shall be All in All.
> (3.339-41)

'Straighter' talk notwithstanding, an ironic God still prefers this sketchy provocation to the sort of overpowering disclosure that would quash co-operative choice. In the transfer of power, the angels seem to catch the scent of political devolution: "With solemn adoration down they cast/ Thir Crowns" (3.351-2). But who among them could apprehend the implications of "God shall be All in All"?

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[43] When Satan worms his way past the angelic guard in search of Eden, he earns Uriel's praise for his apparent eagerness "To witness with [his] eyes what some perhaps/ Contented with report hear onely in heaven" (3.700-1) – another hint of this political critique of apathy. Besides the English people generally, Milton may have had in mind those Parliamentarians of whom we tend to assume he approved for their anti-royalism. With regard to the Long Parliament of the 1640s, Hill contends that "most members would have preferred *neutrality*, and were more concerned to preserve their own property than to be *martyrs* for a cause" (Century 120; my italics). Although the angelic choir has taken sides, these terms are nonetheless suggestive of the contrast between them and the Son.

While God's creatures must go through trial after trial to earn enlightenment, the poem's readers have twelve books from which to 'gather' the import of this grand narrative in Miltonic terms. And, whatever else they may be, these Miltonic terms are always more or less *political* terms.[44] Christian readers would first have looked to the source: "For as in Adam all die, even so in Christ shall all be made alive. . . . Then cometh the end, . . . when [the Son] shall have put down all rule and all authority and power . . . . that God may be all in all" (1 Cor. 15: 22-8). The Son also shares some sense of this prophecy, since, upon assuming the power to resolve the (earlier) war in heaven, he refers to it in much the same terms as will the Father: "Scepter and Power, thy giving, I assume,/ And gladlier shall resign, when in the end/ Thou shalt be All in All, and I in thee/ For ever, and in mee all whom thou lov'st" (6.730-3). By all accounts, it is power that is to be resigned and not being, so that "in" would seem to signify mutuality or reciprocity rather than homogenization or dissolution. An omnipresent God is already "in All," and may yet through love become "All in All," but the "in" of relationship remains. Creation and its creatures will not be swallowed by the singular "All" that God once was, but rather brought in free co-operation to the "harmonie" (cf. pp. 24-5) of "All in All."[45]

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[44] Those readers who have gathered before me a political narrative of *abdication* include Empson and Johnson (cf. my p. 29), Norbrook (475), Donald F. Bouchard (see Johnson 66), and Hill (303).

[45] Citing Job 19 and other biblical sources, Milton affirms in his Doctrine that "in the end" there will be no such 'swallowing': "each man will rise [to God's presence] with the same identity as he had before" (620-1). Hill notes that the Doctrine also distinguishes between "dissolution" and the "perfection" promised in John 17:23 ("I [Christ] in them [humankind], and thou [God] in me, that they may be made perfect in one"): "The end of Christ's kingdom 'will not be one of dissolution but of perfection and consummation'" (303). The "emotional content" of the relevant passages in Paradise Lost (3.307-41), Hill adds, "recalls [the biblical commentary of the anti-Trinitarian reformer Michael] Servetus: 'All reason for ruling will then

Thus, comparing texts as Milton himself had learned to do in the divorce tracts, we should notice that, rather than "all rule and all authority and power," Milton's Son says "*Scepter* and Power," and his God says "*regal* Scepter" – regal as in regalia, on earth a manifestation of idolatry for Puritans such as Milton. It would nonetheless be misleading to conclude, with Roger Lejosne, that "[Milton] made monarchy in heaven justify republicanism on earth" (106). For this is to employ static rather than processual terms. Milton's theology rather enacts the 'republicanization' of what once was absolute, as God becomes the ironic Father, giving up soliloquy for colloquy, the sterility of monological power for the fruits of its dialogical diffusion. In short, Milton's theology presents a visionary republicanism embracing heaven and earth alike. Although his God is "ready to undergo sacrifice for the general good" (Norbrook 474), he is not so much "a king with distinct overtones of a republican founding legislator" (477) as he is a caretaker-king who *is* a republican, lowering gradually his "regal Scepter" to let his subjects choose to be themselves the founding legislators. And so, implies the poet as "unacknowledged legislator," let us abide by his example and build ("in England's green and pleasant land") a Christian republic free of subjection and idolatry.[46]

Hill's contextualization reveals that Milton was not alone in his socially subversive, indeed revolutionary, readings of prophecy. The more radical Protestants believed in "the perfectibility of man on earth, the possibility of all men becoming Sons

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end, all power and authority shall be abolished, every ministry of the Holy Spirit shall cease, since we shall no longer need an advocate or mediator because God will be all in all'" (303).

[46] Cromwell's role as Lord Protector would have provided Milton with an historical approximation of a caretaker-king. In his Second Defense of the English People (1654; cf. Hill 193), Milton warns Cromwell against the Satanic tendency for kingship to conquer the 'caretaker' dimension of the role. But, granted a more respectful tone, some of Milton's advice (672-4) – e.g., "You yourself cannot be free without us [i.e., without preserving the people's liberty]" – could just as aptly be addressed to the 'dialogically dependent' God of Paradise Lost.

of God" (302).[47] Gerrard Winstanley, for example, advocated in 1648 a brand of communism, or what Hill sums up as "participation in communal ownership and cultivation," based on the conviction that "Christ . . . is now beginning to fill every man and woman with himself" (qtd. in Hill 299). Stressing human fallibility and the difficulty of becoming not just the objects but the subjects of that 'filling,' the meritocratic Milton of Paradise Lost seems less optimistic regarding the achievement of an English "republic of love."[48] Nevertheless, the very writing of the epic must be considered a republican act of optimism, demonstrating the "fantastic daring" of those who "expressed their hard-won belief in the importance of human beings through the medium of theology" (Hill 305; cf. pp. 57-8 below). As Labriola has shown, if Milton's God is "attentive to [the angels'] dignity" by assigning to them in the Son a governor "who shares their nature," then he is no less attentive to the dignity of human beings ("Christology" 32-3).

And yet, for 'readers' *within* the story, the politics of God's "attentiveness" are undeniably ambiguous, stirring a debate so heated as to ignite a civil war. Meanwhile, for Milton's readers, the theory of republicanization just propounded is unlikely to bring critical consensus. But, just as God provides the "Umpire" conscience, so in numerous ways does Milton guide his readers, already armed with structural and contextual (e.g., biblical) 'foreknowledge.' One way is traditional: to begin *in medias res* and then to exploit the flashback. Thus, the colloquy of Book III to some extent prepares us for the (earlier) controversy over "the angels' dignity" in Book V – for them, a trial of unprecedented severity. "[Readers] are thus able to see more clearly than Satan [and the other angels] how God differs from a magnate trying to consolidate his personal power" (Norbrook 475). What is more, Milton's readers also have the benefit of Book IV, in which God further demonstrates how "how dear/ To [him] are all [his] works" (3.276-7).

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[47] See Hill's Chapter 23 (285-305). The 'more radical Protestants' included the Ranters, Diggers (led by Winstanley), and Quakers, who "blended Familist and Hermeticist traditions in a very democratic mixture," based on the notion of "discover[ing] the divine within" every believer (299-300).

[48] For example, Milton's God predicts that earth will not be "chang'd to Heav'n" until "by *degrees of merit* rais'd/ [Men] open to themselves *at length* the way/ Up hither, under *long* obedience tri'd" (7.157-60; emphases added). I borrow the phrase "republic of love" from the late novelist Carol Shields.

For here we find a God attentive even to the fallen Satan, revealing his "fundamental kinship with the enemy" (to recall Burke's insight) as well as with his latest "works," Adam and Eve. As noted above in passing (p. 25), the lone fiend still has the irony of God to contend with in the 'edgy' voice of conscience: "[God] deserv'd no such return/ From me, who he created what I was"; "against his thy will/ Chose freely what it now so justly rues"; "But say I could repent and could obtaine/ By Act of Grace my former state," etc. (4.42-3, 71-2, 93-4). If God's politics have been in question from Book I, this soliloquy, in effect an inner colloquy with God (or conscience),[49] strengthens by contrast the republicanism implicit in Book III. In contrast with both Father and Son, who will "Freely put off [glorie]" (3.240), Satan "Chose freely" to seek glory, hoping that "one step higher/ Would set [him] highest" (4.50-1). Moreover, he knows that he "could repent," that God's "Grace" has not entirely abandoned him despite his having done anything but "pay him thanks,/ How due!" (4.47-8). But repentance would mean emulating the Son by "putting off" the glory that he enjoys in his fellows' eyes, and giving up, like God, his "Diadem and Scepter" (4.90) so as to share in something infinitely greater. And this, for dependence on hierarchy and for "dread of shame" (4.82), the real monarchist will not countenance. Instead, Satan retreats from dialogue's (re)constructive criticism, the hard way to the republic of love, farther into solipsism –

"Which way I flie is Hell; my self am Hell" – and ultimately into despair: "So farwel Hope" (4.75, 108).

That this retreat is (self-)destructive and reactionary is underscored by the first human speeches, as the happy couple celebrate what the Devil has just dismissed. The "power/ That made us" must be "infinitly good"; this creative power shares its power, as evidenced in "signes of power and rule/ Conferrd upon us"; and hence "to him indeed all praises owe,/ And daily thanks" (4.412-14, 429-30, 444-5). Furthermore, Eve's opening narrative 'showcases' a loving creator willing to educate directly, as Milton has the Father's voice draw Eve away from the serious danger of narcissism towards partnership. As ever, God proffers partial truths; but the relative lack of "irony's edge" invites us to conclude that his trials are carefully graded according to experience.[50] "*Follow* me"; "*I will* bring thee"; "him *thou shall* enjoy" – no wonder that Eve remarks, "what could I doe,/ But follow strait[?]" (4.469-72). Eve remains free to favour her own image, but God guides her through this first test with a pledge: she will "beare/ Multitudes like [her] self, and thence be call'd/ Mother of human Race" (4.473-5). The foreknowing reader should detect irony from the previous phrase, "him thou shall enjoy inseparablie thine," since the Fall (and the subsequent bearing of "Multitudes" of *sinners* "like [her] self") involves the separation of a pair who are to be inseparable in sin. But Eve herself has no "conflictual evidence" for irony's interplay of said/unsaid. Because of her "unexperienc't thought" (4.457), this time the more taxing trial is the one meant for the reader.

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[49] The poet devises several ways of letting us hear God's 'part': e.g., by switching pronouns, as in "thy will" instead of "my will," so that conscience seems to address Satan; and by using the conditional, as in "say I could repent…" ("you could repent," urges conscience).

[50] Cf. Milton's Doctrine: "God is faithful and will not allow you to be tempted [from the Latin *temptare*: test] beyond your powers" (339; quoting 1 Cor. 10:13).

More often, as we would expect, the reverse will be true. Countering Satan's "Tyrant" with the caring, debating, republicanizing deity of Books III and IV, Milton has no wish to lose without a fight so many of his readers as God risks losing kin during the rigorous trial recounted in Book V.[51] According to the archangel Raphael, the Father's trial of the angels is all the more taxing for coming without warning, "on a day" (5.579):

> Hear all ye Angels, Progenie of Light,
> Thrones, Dominations, Princedoms, Vertues, Powers,
> Hear my Decree, which unrevok'd shall stand.
> This day I have begot whom I declare
> My onely Son, and on this holy Hill
> Him have anointed, whom ye now behold
> At my right hand; your Head I him appoint;
> And by my Self have sworn to him shall bow
> All knees in Heav'n, and shall confess him Lord:
> Under his great Vice-gerent Reign abide
> United as one individual Soule
> For ever happie[.]
> (5.600-11)

That the second line of this provocative pronouncement is quite unnecessary leads us to the antithesis of "Thrones, Dominations," *et al.*, versus "one individual Soule." Apparently, the erstwhile ranked and numbered angels are to enjoy a new "oneness" as equals, provided that they learn the humility to "bow" to a new kind of "Lord" – the lofty Son now become one of their own, a "Head" newly "united" with its angelic body. As trial is never an end in itself, to learn this lesson will also be to take a crucial step towards the goal of "All in All." Again, however, 'contextually advantaged' readers can here rely on reason over faith, while the listeners' test is (at least initially) weighted *vice versa*.

Indeed, the immaturity of the largely untried angels leads God to warn them of the consequences of disobedience or faithlessness, not of misinterpretation:

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[51] These 'losses' amount to some one in three of God's kin (5.710), although, for free creatures, 'failure' in trial leads to further trial (cf. p. 25). For Milton's readers, Satan's claims are not just countered by God's

> [H]im who disobeyes
> Mee disobeyes, breaks union, and that day
> Cast out from God and blessed vision, falls
> Into utter darkness, deep ingulft, his place
> Ordaind without redemption, without end.
> (5.611-15)

Although there will be greater scope for reason in the subsequent debate, God cannot yet expect any angel to piece together the puzzle of abdication. For the angels would have to sort out the ironic interplay of hierarchy/equality, construct the meaning of "begot," and so on, from experience alone. Nevertheless, given their experience of his "copious hand, rejoycing in thir joy" (5.641), God does expect the benefit of the doubt, and hence the continuing co-operation of his creatures in the "union" of trial. "Utter darkness" is 'long distance' from the deity,[52] the fate of those who lack the faith to listen further ('obey,' from the Latin for 'hear'), who leave the table of experimental dialogue only to trade co-operative trial for an operative verdict. In sum, the Father warns that to become in this sense socially 'unco-operative' is to fall into purposelessness, to be "without end." In the same, edgily ironic tone of "Dye hee or justice must," God's creatures are challenged to hear this message of encouragement, which tries their humility – can they admit their need for guidance? – even as it spurs them on to further trial.[53]

For Milton's readers, conversely, Book III has already established the pattern of what Labriola terms the "cycle of humiliation and exaltation" central to Milton's theology ("Christology" 31). Just as the Son will be humbled as a human being to be exalted together with his redeemed, so here in his "begetting" he is "humiliated, but the

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goodness, of course, but undermined in all sorts of ways (e.g., by means of imagery and allusion).

[52] As we have seen, this distance is at once "epistemic" and moral (cf. my n. 18 and n. 22).

[53] Empson's view of God's warning as a series of "harsh words" and "eternal curses" (103-4) neglects the rhetorical situation (e.g., the needs of God's audience) and reflects the "obstinate literalism" for which Milton had harsh words of his own in the divorce tracts. To mention only the most obvious contextual

angelic nature is exalted because it has been assumed by the deity" (32). Further contexts, such as the Reformers' interpretation of begetting as exaltation, which Milton develops in his Doctrine (MacCallum 79-87), and the Son's assuming angelic as well as human natures in the New Testament Apocrypha (Labriola 33-4), tend to reinforce this parallel reading. But many readers lack such reinforcements; and even the best-equipped will usually find God's irony inconclusive. The dramatist thus provides both the yet-unfallen angels and his uncertain readers with further opportunities to 'listen to reason.' Most importantly, Milton polarizes, and hence clarifies, the debate by inventing a loyalist, the Seraph Abdiel, to counter Satan's sophistries. Angels and readers alike are thereby guided in the moral choice of a politico-hermeneutical position. Nevertheless, as we shall see, Milton both distracts the censor and frees the reader by deploying not just supporting but (to a limited degree) *conflicting* subtexts and rhetorics.

This testing moral choice will carry the angels far along the "one road . . . travelled . . . toward heaven or toward hell" (cf. my n. 22). For readers, its politics will shape the lessons of another, full-scale drama. The "begetting" and its celebration arouse the envy of Satan (Act one), who conspires with his fellows as the Father and the Son confer (Act two). Satan then incites his followers to rebellion, which Abdiel denounces as the faithful prepare for war (Act three). Abdiel and Satan war with words and then with blows, and battle rages for two days (Act four). Finally, God empowers the Son to root the rebels out of heaven (Act five). This time, then, the dramatic 'rub,' the call of irony to healthy trial and moral growth, lies in the Son's begetting.

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problem: it simply does not square with the poet's unfailing conviction that God is "a being supremely wise and good" (Doctrine 151).

As portrayed by Satan, the begetting is nothing but "a divine power-play" (Johnson 73). "[N]ew laws thou seest impos'd," complains the great archangel to Beelzebub, harping on the change, "New laws from him who reigns" (5.679-80). Any (r)evolution threatens his conservative sense of 'entitlement':

> Thrones, Dominations, Princedomes, Vertues, Powers,
> If these magnific Titles yet remain
> Not meerly titular, since by Decree
> Another now hath to himself ingross't
> All Power, and us eclipst under the name
> Of King anointed[.]
> ....
> Will ye submit your necks, and chuse to bend
> The supple knee?
> (5.772-88)

Satan literalizes the discourse of hierarchy and monarchy that plays a necessary part (as starting point and sub-perspective) in God's *processual* language of republicanization-by-merit. Readers will realize, for instance, that "ingross't/ All Power" perverts the theology of humiliation delineated in Book III ("thou hast quitted all"; "all power I give [up]"). This allows him to present the angels as the disempowered objects of a royal eclipsing by the Son – hence Satan's preferring to dub him "King" instead of "Head."

But what if God were hinting that "magnific Titles" can be "eclipst" in a collective process for the good of all, as Levellers and other democratizers envisioned? And if "fear of change/ Perplexes Monarchs" then who is the real monarch here?[54] In fact, the 'later' soliloquy (Book IV) reveals that Satan sees through his professed view of divine despotism only too well. The Devil appears then to purvey a literalist hermeneutic solely as a means to power; when paying heed to conscience, he is fully capable of

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[54] I recall the passage that aroused the censor's suspicion (see my n. 33, and also n. 39 on Satan's monarchism). Satan complains tellingly of "dire change" on several occasions (e.g., 1.625, 2.820). On the Levellers, see Hill's Century (129-33).

Miltonic contextualization. By locating both hermeneutics within Satan – or rather, the one hidden within and the other displayed without – the poet thus drives home the point that good will (the benefit of the doubt, faith, trust, etc.) is a necessary, albeit not a sufficient, condition of any genuine co-operation. For it is not incompetence that makes a literalist of Satan; it is his will to power that makes him play the literalist. As ever, Milton insists that reading involves not only analytical decisions but moral and political choices.[55]

Evidently, Satan's speeches epitomize the "*obstinate* literality" that Milton rejects in his pamphlets (cf. p. 12). By contrast, Abdiel's "zeale" (5.805) or faith demands that in the spirit of reconcilement he publicly check and balance God's new words against his well-known ways:

> Yet *by experience taught we know how good*,
> And of our good, and of our dignitie
> How provident he is, how farr from thought
> To make us less, *bent rather to exalt*
> Our happie state *under one Head more neer*
> *United.*
> ....
> . . . nor by his Reign obscur'd,
> But more illustrious made, since *he the Head*
> *One of our number thus reduc't* becomes,
> His Laws our Laws, all honour to him done
> Returns our own. Cease then this impious rage,
> And tempt not these; but hast'n to appease
> Th' incensed Father, and th' incensed Son,
> While *Pardon may be found* in time besought.
> (5.826-48; emphases added)

This is a superhuman performance, perhaps one of the poet's least convincing inventions despite his claims for the power of "right reason." For, applying reason to experience with few contextual aids, the Seraph arrives at the 'right' reading in keeping with the prophecy of incarnation, which (chronologically) is still to come. Abdiel reasons that the Father's "bow" (5.607) is more metaphorical than literal, meaning to "do honour" in reciprocity rather than to cower in submission. The Son is in effect "reduc't," and for the greater good; he stoops to "exalt" and "unite" a republic, not to conquer an empire. That Abdiel is right in the poem's terms is soon confirmed both by the epic voice ("Among innumerable false, ... His loyaltie he kept" [5.898-902]) and by that of God ("single hast maintaind/ . . . the Cause/ Of Truth" [6.30-2]). But, while he may seem too personal a fantasy figure, Abdiel nonetheless models, after the Son, the true Miltonic interpreter. By "laboriously gathering" extra-literal meanings in the light of conscience, he punctures Satan's opportunism. In sum, Abdiel is the active reader who contends with "what is contrary" (cf. p. 16) and engages with God's words in spiritual becoming (p. 11).

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[55] Johnson also notes Satan's literalism, but lets him off the moral hook by having that literalism "lead" Satan to his "conclusions" (73). Satan then seems more incompetent than evil, "misreading" (74) rather

Besides modelling a method, exemplifying a faith, and purveying a politics, however, Abdiel dis/orients the reader in unwitting ways. On the one hand, his comments on the Son's humiliation as an angel 'echo' those of both the Father (Book III) and the Bible (e.g., Philippians 2) on the Son's humiliation as a man (Labriola 33). Such echoes strengthen the initial links between the two episodes as 'anti-royalist' stages in divine "reduction" and creaturely growth, i.e., as stages in republicanization. On the other hand, the debate between Abdiel and Satan also echoes Milton's pamphlets (Lejosne 107), but in such a way as to puzzle the reader and reassure the censor. For much Miltonic anti-royalism comes out of *Satan's* mouth, while Abdiel mixes rhetorics (hierarchy/equality) in defense of God's co-operative work-in-progress. Satan, for

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than choosing and advertising a self-serving way of reading. In order to avoid this pitfall, Satanic verbs should be clearly 'willful,' as in my previous paragraph (e.g., portrayed, literalizes, to present, preferring).

example, urges the angels to "cast off this Yoke" (5.786), while Abdiel ranges in a single speech from "his only Son by right endu'd/ With *Regal Scepter*" to "all Angelic Nature *joind in one,/ Equal* to him begotten Son" (5.815-16, 834-5; italics added).

Although such conflicting contexts/subtexts and rhetorics "refuse[] . . . readers any easy position of identification" (Norbrook 445) – and censors any easy target – the contest for the meaning of God's words should nevertheless confirm for hunter-gatherers of the truth the republican vision established in Book III. For this vision, as we have seen, is a processual one, whereby (as in the speech of Abdiel just quoted) hierarchy gives way to equality when power is bequeathed and accepted. Theologically speaking, the apparently incompatible rhetorics reflect different stages in the *telos* of "All in All"; historically speaking, they rehearse the transformation of the real English monarchy into the ideal Christian republic. Moreover, the text's approving of Abdiel while letting Satan aim Milton's pamphlets at God simply suggests that Satan can be as perverse in his choice of targets as in his choice of words. Thus, it is not so much that there is "a great deal of Milton in Satan" (Hill 367),[56] but rather that Milton employs at times the Devil as his advocate, exploiting Satan's "presentation of God as tyrant" to imply that "*human* monarchy . . . leads . . . to tyranny" (cf. pp. 31-2). In this respect, even as the poet concedes a certain "kinship with the enemy" he imitates his God by turning evil to good.

Insofar as the dramatist writes 'two-handedly,' however, he accepts the risk, again like his God, of losing readers along the republican way – and not only does he take this risk to confuse the censor but in order not to 'predestine' responses like some master puppeteer. That there will always appear to be too many or too few (or too many broken) 'strings attached,' however, seems certain, given that Milton could only write one

Paradise Lost, once and for all. God, by contrast, can ensure that his ironies are carefully graded according to experience, as we have seen especially in Book IV (cf. p. 47). This caring gradation, another argument for the ironist's love, also shapes the Father's 'commissions' of the Son, Raphael, and others. God's commissions may seem unilateral and low in irony, but turn out to be as dialogical as any other trials, whether the responses are offered in words and deeds or revealed in action alone.

Naturally, the Son is granted the most latitude in reading the Father's commissions. Increasingly (though far from entirely) free from the moral and epistemic limitations of distance from the godhead, the Son enjoys the greatest trust and endeavors the greatest trials. For example, the commission to end the civil war endows him with enough power to shatter the 'enemy' to smithereens:

> Into thee such Vertue and Grace
> Immense I have transfus'd, that all may know
> In Heav'n and Hell thy Power above compare[.]
> ……………………………………………..
> [B]ring forth all my Warr,
> My Bow and Thunder, my Almightie Arms
> Gird on, and Sword upon thy puissant Thigh;
> Pursue these sons of Darkness[.]
> (6.703-15)

The crucial irony that escapes the Son is that "these sons" are God's sons, and hence the Darkness is that of the Father himself, the "enemy" (in Burkean terms) "contained within" him. The Son is being tempted to forget his "kinship with the enemy" and to fall instead into a fratricidal frenzy. The Father is risking ruin by handing him the 'nuclear keys.' Thankfully, the Son checks his obvious eagerness ("my whole delight," etc. [6.727]) and begins to contextualize, reminding himself of the transitory nature of power in the history of heaven: "Scepter and Power, thy giving, I assume,/ And gladlier shall

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[56] Hill is careful to distinguish this admission from the Romantic view of Satan as the poem's hero (367).

resign" (6.730-1). And, in the actions that speak even louder (see Chapter Three), he passes the test to limit himself to 'conventional' weapons: "Yet half his strength he put not forth" (6.853). The irony is missed, however, as he 'others' the "sons of Darkness" in a classic us/them move, attributing his own hate to the Father as well: "But whom thou hat'st, I hate" (6.734). In short, since he fails to challenge the Father's terms, the Son's part in the drama leaves something to be desired. But we shall see in the next chapter that he responds to God's gifts of latitude with increasing maturity, as evidenced by his interpretation of "Mercie collegue with Justice" (10.59) in judging the fallen couple.

Conversely, in warning the unfallen couple, Raphael has more stringent guidelines to follow. The Father does not hesitate to enlist his co-operation on a mission of such importance, but demonstrates again "how dear to [him] are all [his] works" by gauging the task to his abilities. God neither determines his every word nor abandons him to his own devices:

> [A]dvise him of his happie state,
> Happiness in his power left free to will,
> ....
> tell him withall
> His danger, and from whom, what enemie
> Late falln himself from Heav'n, is plotting now
> . . . by deceit and lies; this let him know[.]
> (5.234-43)

Phrases such as "his happie state" and "His danger" leave room for further interpretation, despite God's outlining their primary meanings. In combination, for instance, they may apply ironically to Eve in her effect on Adam – as indeed the archangel comes to realize in dialogue with the latter ("take heed," he warns, "least Passion sway/ Thy Judgement" [8.635-6]). And, likewise, "Late falln himself" hints that an account of the war in heaven might be appropriate, but leaves it up to Raphael how to go about it without spoiling

Edenic innocence. Similarly, Michael's commission to evict, enforce, and educate demands creativity within limits. He is, for example, to unfold the future "As I shall thee enlighten" (11.115). But Michael's hermeneutical skills as well as his compassion are tested by the ironic extreme of "Without remorse drive out," juxtaposed with "Dismiss them not disconsolate" (11.105, 113). The challenge – as, again, the next chapter will make clear – is to imitate the Son by creating a form of "Mercie collegue with Justice."

Although he certainly fosters creativity, when it comes to commissions the initiator is normally God. The creator commissions; his creatures are commissioned. It therefore speaks volumes of Milton's "hard-won belief in the importance of human beings" (cf. p. 45) that Adam should commission God. In Genesis 1, God "created man in his own image, . . . male and female created he them" (1:27). In the second chapter, Eve again is entirely God's idea: "It is not good that the man should be alone; I will make an help meet for him" (2:18). But Milton's dramatization raises our special status as *imago,* and clearly *amor*, *dei* to daring heights. For Milton's Adam goes beyond both his biblical counterpart and such wrestlers as Abraham in taking the liberty of commissioning God to *create for him* a partner.[57]

But this is not to deny that God goes some way towards 'commissioning' the commission. For trial-by-irony invites just that – the taking of liberty – and, moreover, just as Eve will need little persuasion to enter into partnership, so Adam is formed as a dialogical being who craves the company of equals. Indeed, God's "youngest Sons" appear to be not just inquisitive social animals but "naturally, instinctually republican" (Norbrook 463), as Adam later reacts with vehement anti-monarchism to Michael's talk of Nimrod ("O execrable Son so to aspire/ Above his Brethren" [12.64-5]). That God intended us all to be republicans, that we 'fall' away from republicanism, would seem the obvious implication. In any case, the liberties that Adam takes with his maker, whom he reasons must be far above his equal ("some great Maker then,/ In goodness and in power præeminent" [8.278-9]), almost merit comparison with those taken by the Son (e.g., in Book III). And Adam's performance in this pedagogical drama is all the more impressive for its being his debut. In Milton's humanistic vision, humankind is always already Israel – a 'contender' (cf. p. 19).

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[57] Adam's commissioning of God as 'matchmaker,' I suggest, also goes beyond the normal sense of 'prayer,' *pace* MacCallum (123). To request a creation is surely to take a unique liberty. As ever, the God of liberty rewards initiative. Milton's Doctrine likewise stresses human power and status: e.g., "God made no absolute decrees about anything which he left in the power of men" (155). Accordingly, his interpretation of "created man in his own image" verges on the literal. But (*pace* Hill 297) his cautious qualifiers shy away from it: "We do not imply . . . that God, *in all his parts* . . . , is of human form, but that, *so far as it concerns us to know*, he has that form" (136; my italics). Raphael, too, thinks highly of God's "youngest": "for God on [humankind]/ Abundantly his gifts hath also pour'd/ Inward and outward both, his image faire: . . . . Nor less think wee in Heav'n of thee on Earth/ Then of our fellow servant" (8.219-25). And the envious Enemy will concede in soliloquy that he "could love [them], so lively shines/ In them Divine resemblance" (4.364-5).

While Adam's trials, like those of any creature, will constitute "a cumulative and increasingly judgmental process" (MacCallum 122), the Father is "tender and intimate" with his newborn son (Christopher 114). "[C]alled by thee I [God] come" (8.298): Adam's first lesson is "the efficacy of prayer" (MacCallum 133). And yet no sooner has God introduced himself so "mildely" (8.317) than he is warning "Sternly" of "The Pledge of thy Obedience and thy Faith" (8.333, 325). God thus allows for Adam's immaturity as he does for the angels' in Book V (cf. p. 49), warning him in similar terms of the consequences of disobedience or faithlessness rather than of misinterpretation:

> Remember what I warne thee, shun to taste,
> And shun the bitter consequence: . . .
> From that day mortal, and this happie State
> Shalt loose, expell'd from hence into a World
> Of woe and sorrow.
> (8.327-33)

The tone of "Dye hee or justice must" 'returns.' Indeed, the reporting phrase that follows, "pronounc'd/ The rigid interdiction" (8.333-4), recalls the demand to "pay the rigid satisfaction" (3.211-12). By this seeming severity, God's humble irony suggests that "Garden of bliss" (8.299) contains a "World/ Of woe" unrealized within it. Although God eases the *interpretive* challenge by making this explicit, Adam's trials are well and truly underway. From day one, his Eden is defined both "mildely" and "sternly," both by what it now is and by the horror that could be. In his ironic way, God multiplies perspectives, nurturing freedom by providing the stuff of moral choices. Eden, like England, will be not so much what God made it as what people choose to make it.[58]

As seen in Chapter One (pp. 24-5), the trial develops variations on this theme of "harmonie" with the world. Inducting him into the order of 'Adamic' language before the animals ("I nam'd them . . . and understood/ Thir nature" [8.352-3]), God drops a hint that something important is missing:

> [']Not onely these fair bounds, but all the Earth
> To thee *and to thy Race* I give; as Lords
> Possess it[.']
> ....
> As thus he spake, each Bird and Beast behold
> Approaching two and two[.]
> ....
> [B]ut in these
> I found not what me thought I wanted still;
> And to the Heav'nly vision thus *presum'd.*
> (8.338-56; my emphases)

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[58] Milton's concept of moral choice requires that Adam and Eve learn at least a certain sense of good and evil (e.g., from Eve's dream; from Raphael) before they sin. Pre- and postlapsarian worlds are not then so divided, and Areopagitica is relevant to Eden: "the knowledge . . . of vice is . . . necessary to the constituting of human vertue" (1006). For Burke, "humble irony" recognizes that very necessity – "Folly and villainy are integral motives, necessary to wisdom or virtue" – and thus "provides us with a kind of 'technical equivalent for the doctrine of original sin'" (515). By 'owning up' to "what is contrary" (cf. p. 16), or what Burke calls "the enemy" *contained within* (in Eden, as a potential), such irony makes choices more conscious and hence more free.

This "thought" derives partly from innate need yet mainly from Adam's ability as a Miltonic gatherer to put 'two and two' together in a way familiar to the reader from Books III (the Son) and V (Abdiel). That is to say, he "establishes his identity . . . by engagement with the world around him" (MacCallum 135), and especially with the words around him. To the sight of the animals "Approaching two and two" (reminding the reader ironically of the flood to which sin will lead [Gen. 7:9]), Adam adds God's hints of human plurality to arrive at a model or law of mutuality.

That Adam "presumes" to raise the issue – "with mee/ I see not who partakes. In solitude what happiness[?]" (8.363-4) – has more to do with republican chutzpah, however, than with "right reason." And in God's obvious delight at his daring we see Milton's vision of a leader quite unlike the Stuarts, or even the Cromwells, who "could not endure the beings [they] had created to dispute with [them]" (Norbrook 486). For it is "with a smile more brightened" (8.368) that God counterattacks, reminding Adam that the animals are no "puppets" either: "knowst thou not/ Thir language and thir wayes, they also know/ And reason not contemptibly" (8.372-4). As already mentioned (pp. 8, 24), Adam fails this part of the test by dismissing relationships with "unequals" as "Tedious" (8.383, 389). The directive to "Find pastime" with them, he decides, is not both an ironic (partial) truth and a teasing goad but only the latter: "Among unequals what societie/ Can sort, what harmonie or true delight?" (8.384-5). Thus, God's subsequent reaction need not be read as "leaden" irony "on the subject of women" (Christopher 117) so much as a wry comment on the subject of the disparaged "societie" of "unequals":

> A nice and suttle happiness I see
> Thou to thy self proposest, in the choice
> Of thy associates, *Adam*, and wilt taste

> No pleasure, though in pleasure, solitarie.
> (8.399-402)

Adam will not (rather than cannot) take pleasure in other company, so that his "solitarie" state is partly his own fault. But in the first lines one also senses God's approval of this Miltonic creature who seems to want heaven on earth and is not afraid to "propose" so.

And yet surely the most astonishing aspect of this trial is God's hinting at his own need for mutuality, possibly his very motive for creating in the first place:

> What thinkst thou then of mee, and this my State,
> Seem I to thee sufficiently possest
> Of happiness, or not? who am *alone*
> *From all Eternitie*, for none I know
> Second to me or like, equal much less.
> How have I then *with whom to hold converse*
> Save with the Creatures which I made, and those
> To me inferiour[?]
> (8.403-10; emphases added)

These questions certainly succeed in prompting Adam to elaborate on his desire, as a "defective" and quite different being, for the solace of "Collateral love" (8.425-6). And the Father, as noted in Chapter One, goes on not only to praise Adam but to explain the pedagogical approach: "Thus farr to try thee, *Adam*, I was pleas'd"; "for trial onely brought,/ To see how thou could'st judge" (8.437, 447-8). But the reader is left to wonder whether what is supposedly just a strategic argument ("for trial onely") does not in fact speak to God's *own* "defective" condition. For why did God create? And why abdicate, humbly risking open dialogue to "raise" his creatures (as Adam puts it) "to what highth [he will]/ Of Union or Communion, deifi'd" (8.430-1)?

The next chapter, then, will aim to show how the broader ways of God's humble irony further this ultimate goal of universal "deification," the *telos* of "All in All" that is the theological image of Milton's political be-all and end-all – the republicanization of

England, the "raising" of subjects to the "highth" of citizens. Yet already we begin to see that in the Father's pointed discourse lies the 'rub' that invites his creatures to co-author the drama of history.[59] Trial-by-irony turns out to be not a form of torture but the pedagogical method of a loving parent. That God's irony is indeed the aggregative "irony of love" (cf. p. 19) is made manifest in numerous ways: from his readiness to guide rather than to control his kin to his careful grading of trial to experience by balancing demands on faith and reason; from his willingness to make himself dependent on his fallible creatures' decisions and missions to his rewarding and celebrating mutual successes; and from his attentiveness to his creatures' dignity – and especially to human dignity – to his 'unSatanic' embracing of revolution in the "cycle of humiliation and exaltation." And in the poet we have found not just a master dramatist but another pedagogue, who nevertheless guides his readers through debate (as in Satan vs. Abdiel) without resorting to coercion. Finally, primarily in those exemplary contenders, the Son, Abdiel, and Adam, we have rediscovered the "laborious gatherer" born of Milton's pamphlets, the revolutionary reader who will not bow to any words as monological commands but confronts them as calls to drama and becoming.

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[59] Loewenstein uses the phrase "drama of history" somewhat differently: "to underscore the literary dimensions of Milton's historical vision, while also drawing attention to the performative side of Milton as a revolutionary writer" (1). I employ it mainly to emphasize the agonistic nature of history and of education-by-history in the poem – our inherently dramatic relationship with God-the-ironist at the heart of both (cf. my n. 37) – as well as history's being for Milton a collective 'performance,' collectively authored, which nonetheless depends on the political roles of individuals such as Abdiel and Noah.

CHAPTER THREE

God's Ways of Irony: For the Sake of "Rational Libertie."

While antifeminists like to trumpet the fallibility of Eve, even the "sharpest sighted Spirit of all in Heav'n" (3.692) is momentarily blinded by the shape-shifting Adversary (cf. my n. 43). That Satan in cherub's clothing gets directions to Paradise from the very "Regent of the Sun" (3.691), the archangel Uriel, elicits the final lesson of Book III:

> For neither Man nor Angel can discern
> Hypocrisie, the onely evil that walks
> Invisible, except to God alone,
> By his permissive will, through Heav'n and Earth[.]
> (3.682-5)[60]

As we have seen, this is the book in which the colloquy in heaven establishes God's republicanizing irony by modelling the drama that enables communion "through Heav'n and Earth." But the poem, of course, must also tell of "foul distrust, and breach/ Disloyal" (9.6-7), of loss and disunion. And so Milton concludes his paradigmatic Book III with a reminder that, barring the fulfillment of the "All in All," God stands omnisciently "alone" (cf. p. 20). To be free "by his permissive will" *must* mean to be "free to fall" (3.99); and, although benevolent creatures such as Uriel may not fall, they will sometimes fail. In attempting to develop God's ways, they run the risk of paving the road to hell with good intentions because, unlike the Father, they cannot always divine or "discern" the intentions of others (including God's).[61] Nevertheless, creatures undergoing trial-by-irony can always learn to *read* – to contextualize and to respond – taking their cue from the Son's response and responsibility (cf. pp. 31-42). If the English people have missed their cue and restored "domestic slaverie" (1148), the poet will take comfort, however cold, in the fact that this very 'misreading' proves our reading power. God made us *imago dei*, of creative as much as "created mind" (3.705), to co-author the drama of history as we in our ignorance may see fit.

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[60] The same book's invocation, the poet's prayer that he "may see and tell/ Of things invisible to mortal sight" (3.54-5), can be understood in light of this passage as in one sense a prayer for insight into malice.

[61] Milton's Doctrine confirms that "neither Man nor Angel" is exempt from limitations: "there are many things of which [the angels] are ignorant. For we find an angel full of curiosity and asking questions: Dan. 8:13" (348). And yet, Reimer could write as late as 1984 that "doubt of [Raphael's] reliability [as an

Thus, the co-operative ways of Milton's ironic God are necessarily flawed in their dialogical dependence on fallible missionary-interpreters. But one creature's failure may be another's epiphany. If in his own words the Father rations truth, or departs from the most telling truth, for the sake of trial, then the 'departures' of malicious and/or mistaken creatures such as Satan and Uriel may serve ironically, if more crudely, as another source of trial. And even in Eden the potential for departure lurks within free agents so as to make their choices meaningful. In Burkean terms, this is to say that the Father's "indebtedness" to "the enemy" extends to what Michael warns are "[Satan's] works/ In thee and in thy Seed" (12.394-5), as well as to the Satanic voice within us all. For the Adversary not only functions as the 'other' voice to conscience but thereby acts as one of God's Associate Professors. In addition to our innocent departures, the potential and actual sins of Satan's 'assistants' can help us to arrive at virtue through the "interaction of perspectives" (p. 24), just as tyranny points Milton on the way to his republic (cf. my n. 58). As our wayward choices thrust our fellows into trial's way, might not the Father then be tempted to cloister his progeny rather than to guide them, to use force instead of

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educator of Adam and Eve] has only been hinted at" (1). As we shall see, Raphael himself admits his creaturely limitations – "to recount Almightie works/ What words or tongue of Seraph can suffice[?]" (7.112-13) – just as Uriel does when guiding Satan: "what created mind can comprehend/ [The] number [of God's works]" (3.705-6). For Milton, even the Son's is a "created mind" (cf. my n. 30).

irony? Yet God will let perversity have its day because bound up with our freedom, as we have seen, there lies a universal goal. Milton's God makes himself dependent on the choices of us all for the sake of "Rational Libertie" for all (12.82).[62]

Given, however, the poem's assumption that the inevitability of misinterpretation is compounded by the possibility of hidden "Hypocrisie," God's dice of freedom might seem weighted towards the snake-eyes of the Satanic gamble. In other words, for all of Satan's ironic service to the cause of moral growth, what if we skirt the irony and learn the Devil's ways instead of God's? And what if 'good' creatures become good for nothing (cf. p. 38)? A republican poet writing in the shadow of the dreaded Tower could be forgiven for succumbing to such pessimism.[63] That Paradise Lost proclaims the ultimate *triumph* of "Libertie," albeit "with wandring steps and slow" (12.648), bespeaks Milton's faith in political progress through dialogical contention, particularly in the projected rise of the reader-citizen. Above all else, the beleaguered poet draws upon the same faith in God-gifted "right reason" that led the eager pamphleteer to insist on freedom of the press. In sum, to explore the reconciling ways of Milton's God – 'his' ways made ours in our imperfect hands – is to witness with Adam the agony of creaturely evil and error, all the while discovering "good/ Still overcoming evil" (12.565-6).[64]

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[62] This paragraph tells against the notion that "God was determined to make man fall" with the help of Satan and others (Empson 112). The reason why Raphael "never once says the practical thing which would be really likely to prevent the Fall" (151) is the same reason why Satan is not confined to hell: to "prevent" our falling would be to prevent our choosing not to fall. No longer free or 'fit to be tried,' we would then be unable to attain to godhead except by arbitrary decree (as in Calvinism), and agency would be God's alone. (See p. 27 on God's self-transcendence.) The focus on evil and error turned to good does not mean that good will not also serve; e.g., the Son as he matures becomes another Associate Professor, teaching/testing by example (cf. pp. 88-91 below). But, for Milton, to err is angelic as well as human.

[63] See Parker (557-76) on the persecution of republicans at the Interregnum's end (in 1660), 'trials' which in Milton's case ranged from imprisonment to formal book-burning by the public hangman. Even in later years, "[a]ccording to the Richardsons, Milton's early biographers and annotators, Milton 'was in Perpetual Terror of being Assassinated'" (Flannagan 320).

[64] To argue that the Fall was "fortunate," however, would be to miss the nearness to God that might have been. (What is fortunate, indeed necessary to freedom, is our *potential* to fall.) Thus, although Milton is in

The epitome of this vexed 'co-operative' process is the drama of the War in Heaven. For what could be more agonizing and, especially in the case of deathless angels, what more erroneous than civil war? Moreover, what trial could be more relevant to Milton's England? His idiosyncratic design of a celestial conflagration sparked by the Father's ironic "begetting" of the Son illustrates unflinchingly the costs and benefits of trial-by-irony, of "God speaking and the creature responding, for better or for worse" (Christopher 89).[65] If two thirds of the heavenly hosts respond for better and one third for worse, then Milton places the War at the epic's centre not just to laud the works of the Son[66] but to carry the burden of a realist's optimism, wrested from revolution and counterrevolution: two tentative steps forward, one terrible step back; a measure of goodness and truth out of so much evil and error. But, while the titanic battle is seriously spiritual – a hermeneutical contest of cosmic consequence (cf. pp. 48-54) – surely it is also comically material. And this apparent disjunction may explain why Milton's critics are as divided as God's creatures.

Finding the War to be "Milton's most problematic episode," Norbrook seeks a compromise: "To see it wholly as comic is to miss the crucial weight it bears in the poem's action, yet to play down the comedy is to exaggerate this epic's orthodoxy" (447-

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several ways "indebted" to the Restoration, he would have preferred a "republic of love." See Danielson (202-27) on the *felix culpa* controversy (cf. 11.86-9). Hill and other historians have shown that Milton's well-tempered optimism (cf. p. 45) turns out to be historically justified, as the Restoration was helpless to erase the "great revolution in human thought," and "[a]bsolute monarchy on the French model was never again possible" (Century 187-90). Milton certainly believed that it was theologically (or philosophically) justified: "it is intolerable and incredible that evil should be stronger than good" (Doctrine 131; cf. "Of Renovation" and "Of Regeneration"). See Achinstein on the later poems as representing not political "withdrawal" but "ongoing commitment" (Literature 115), a commitment further demonstrated by Of True Religion (1673). Cf. also my n. 41 on "right reason."

[65] As many commentators note, there is no scriptural authority (in Revelation 12) for Milton's linking the War dramatically to the Son's begetting and its resolution to his intervention.

[66] J. H. Summers points out that, in reshaping the epic from ten to twelve books for the second edition (1674), Milton shifted the poem's centre from Abdiel's "angelic exemplum of man's ways at their most

8). Yet even this balanced view assumes that what is comic cannot carry "crucial weight," cannot bear a burden as important as Milton's philosophy of history – an assumption that is quite unwarranted. By contrast, Roy Flannagan assumes that, like a visual pattern, the comedy once clearly perceived cannot be 'unperceived': "the War . . . is a sardonic comedy of gigantic proportions, as Arnold Stein first showed" (302). Indeed, Stein's analysis of the War as "a kind of great diabolical scherzo" (from the Italian for 'jest' or 'joke') both demonstrates the power of the comic and dissolves "Dr. Johnson's verdict that 'the confusion of spirit and matter' fills the whole narrative with 'incongruity'" (267, 264). However, the tendency to privilege the relationship between the poet and his audience (for whom it may *read* as a scherzo) over that of God and his own interpreters leaves Stein's stimulating canvas incomplete.[67]

For in more ironic ways than one, and for everyone, God will turn to pedagogical advantage the War that Satan seeks for personal gain (cf. 4.50-1). First of all, the political campaign launched by the Adversary and answered by Abdiel serves to draw every angel into a trial of reason and faith. Secondly, God allows and conditions the fighting itself so as to intensify the trial, inviting all to recognize that right is might. Thirdly, the War as dramatized by the well-meaning but near-sighted Raphael – from the rub of the ironic begetting to the rooting out of self-serving 'readers' – provides God's "youngest," still innocent of Satanic self-aggrandizement, with an example of freedom in action, a trial of others' trials. In addition, the poet serves his own purposes beyond the dramatic frame by building a 'tour de farce' upon all three of these 'advantages' to try the

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heroic" to "the divine image of God's ways at their most providential," i.e., to the Son's role in the War and in the Creation (113).

[67] This common tendency, much more marked in Christopher and Silver (cf. pp. 33-4), finds its natural corrective or supplement in dramatic readings of the kind pursued below.

fallen survivors of the English Civil War. His last-ditch arguments against the "inconveniences and dangers" of monarchy had failed (Readie and Easie Way 1134). Not just the inhabitants of Eden, then, but the people of England "must be made to comprehend the process by which a wrong choice may be made by the conscious mind" (MacCallum 141; cf. Hill 386).

While the war of words has natural priority (see Chapter Two), the fight as farce will lead us to the other internal ways of ironic education. Indeed, it is only by distinguishing the poet's/reader's scherzo from the human couple's drama and Raphael's glorious war that we may advance our understanding of Milton's God. For us, as we have seen, the conflict begins at the beginning, with Satan's post-War image of God-as-tyrant in tension with the epic voice and the republican revelations of Book III. And obviously readers alone can generate commentary on the English Civil War, not to mention the intertextual play (vis-à-vis the literary tradition). Thus, the War that seems to the innocent pair a cautionary tale of a good God and a disobedient Devil, or the height of heroism to warriors such as Raphael, already appears murkier and more comical to the poem's 'guilty' readers. In sum, whereas our view is complicated by *Milton's* ironic ways, it is the War for Adam and Eve and for heaven itself that best illustrates the ironic ways of God. Even so, the "begetting" should remind us that each view sheds light on its companions. Moreover, just as Raphael is led to wonder whether "Earth/ Be but the shaddow of Heav'n, and things therein/ Each to other like" (5.574-5), so Milton and his God, so readers' and creatures' wars, turn out to have much in common.[68] While God's creatures lack some of the clues and magnifying lenses, they too are challenged to detect the risible wrongheadedness of "a materialistic concept of *might*" (Stein 271; italics his), and to discover reason's "right" with the ironic help of wrong.

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[68] See also p. 54: the poet imitates his God by turning evil to good.

Stein approaches the ways of the war poet chiefly by retracing the way thus far of the reader. Book I presents the "authorized" verdict (1.36-49) – "the war was ambitious, impious, . . . and resulting in ruin" (265) – and then gives rein to the loser's view: "Glorious Enterprize" (1.89). Finding the latter dubious (are the rebels "innumerable," and has God "Doubted his Empire"? [1.101-14]), Stein notes that for readers Satan is further undermined by Gabriel in Book IV, whose mockery turns out to be a "true anticipation of what happens in the battles" (266): "Satan, I know thy strength, and thou knowst mine,/ Neither our own but giv'n [by God]; what follie then/ To boast what Arms can doe" (4.1006-8). And folly (as "scherzo") indeed lies just around the reader's corner. But Stein's remark that Gabriel speaks here "the truth of innocent inexperience" (267) is misleading. Although Gabriel "has not . . . tried evil," evil has tried Gabriel; his proto-Christian insight into the pagan warrior's "follie" shows that he has learned directly from the War. Even Adam and Eve will gain experience vicariously from this cosmic cataclysm in order to raise their consciousness of freedom. Evidently, God has allowed his kinsman Satan to bring self-serving hermeneutics and its self-defeating consequences to all of heaven's attention.

And yet, if trial-by-irony makes education available to each and every creature, still it cannot force them all to learn. The adoring angels' pæan in Book III to the Son and his chariot of fire (overlooked by Stein en route to Book V and God's "great laugh" [267]) underscores the divine ironist's helplessness to guarantee a 'Godward' learning curve. In light of the momentous promises of self-sacrifice and abdication just made before the angels in the colloquy, their summary of the Son's role in the War lacks spiritual maturity, especially when juxtaposed with Raphael's account in Books V and VI. Even at this juncture in Book III, such bloodthirsty words from those who have just failed to volunteer their deeds (cf. p. 38) should raise the reader's eyebrows:

> [God] by thee *threw down*
> Th' aspiring Dominations: thou that day
> Thy Fathers dreadful *Thunder didst not spare*,
> Nor stop thy flaming Chariot wheels, that shook
> Heav'ns everlasting Frame, while o're the necks
> Thou drov'st of warring Angels disarraid.
> Back from pursuit thy Powers with loud acclaime
> Thee only extoll'd, Son of thy Fathers might,
> To execute fierce vengeance on his foes[.]
> (3.391-9; italics added)

We noted above that, while the Son may fail half of his test by forgetting kinship and revelling in hatred, he does "spare" half of his Father's "Thunder" (cf. pp. 55-6). Moreover, "threw down" suggests direct force, whereas Raphael notes of the rebels that "headlong *themselves they* threw/ Down from the verge" (6.839, 864-5; my emphases). But, before such instructive discrepancies emerge, the hymn to the Saviour-King sounds out of tune with both the colloquy and with Milton's immediate distancing of his "Heav'nly Muse" (1.6) from pagan epic values. Old-style valour is openly identified with the blustering devils (as in Satan's "great event/ In Arms," or Moloch's "sentence . . . for open Warr" [1.118-19, 2.51]). Thus, Milton eschews Manichæan polarity to suggest that, while a loyalist "sub-perspective" is "neither precisely right [n]or precisely wrong" (Burke; cf. my n. 23), even 'good' angels need to try and be tried again. So we may surmise as early as Book III that all creatures are in this sense "each to other like," as one "divorced" creation in need of irony's wedding in the godhead (cf. my n. 25). Just as the Puritans preached that "one good [person] was as good as another, and better than a bad peer or bishop or king" (Hill [Century] 81-2), so in Milton's levelling universe "one just Man" (11.890) might well be better than a bloodthirsty or apathetic angel.

To sense in these ways the undermining of the old heroic *ethos*, however, is not to go to battle fully prepared for comedy. On the contrary, Milton adheres to his usual practice of deferring the strongest signals lest his readers go untried. It is not until the invocation of Book IX that the War's epic 'unorthodoxy' is unmistakably confirmed:

> Sad task [to sing our Fall], yet argument
> Not less but more Heroic then the wrauth
> Of stern *Achilles* on his Foe pursu'd
> Thrice Fugitive about Troy Wall; or rage
> Of *Turnus* for *Lavinia* disespous'd,
> Or Neptun's ire or Juno's[;]
> ....
> Not sedulous by Nature to indite
> Warrs, hitherto the onely Argument
> Heroic deem'd, chief maistrie to dissect
> With long and tedious havoc fabl'd Knights
> In Battels feign'd; the better fortitude
> Of Patience and Heroic Martyrdom
> Unsung[.]
> (9.13-33; cf. 11.689-99)

Milton not only dismisses traditional epic wars as "tedious havoc," but also associates "wrauth," "rage," and "ire" with pagan ways eclipsed by "Patience and Heroic Martyrdom." The invocation of the later book thus upholds the moral strength of the Son as martyr-to-be over that of the wrathful charioteer, and certifies the moral weakness of those who celebrate "fierce vengeance" (the 'good' angels), much less advocate "open Warr" (the 'bad' Moloch). And almost equally plain is Michael's admonition in Book XII that the real struggle is spiritual: "Dream not of thir fight,/ As of a Duel"; "Not by destroying Satan, but his works in thee," etc. (12.386-7, 394). But, hindsight aside, God's ironic ways can now be revealed more subtly through the gap between the reader's and the storyteller's Wars.

Steering us into the War's intrinsic comedy, Stein notes that "we are told that it will be metaphorical": Raphael will "lik[en] spiritual to corporal forms,/ As may express them best" (5.573-4). To "regard it as a realistic war to be taken quite seriously" is therefore to mistake from the outset its character (264). The point is well taken; but Stein sees Raphael in full command of a wholly appropriate metaphor, i.e., as no more than a stand-in for the poet. The dramatic ramifications of the archangel's biases thus pass unnoticed. If the "winged Hierarch's" teachings are both wittingly restricted to what he judges "lawful to reveal" (5.468, 570) *and* unwittingly distorted by his own restricted view, then his medicine will contain homeopathic elements unbeknownst to him – i.e., ironic 'departures' that will further test the couple's resistance to error. For example, as Martin Kuester observes, his two terminological "forms" and their supposedly distinct "realms prove to be hardly different after all"; Raphael is "trying to keep men and angels . . . in separate categories," despite his "quot[ing] the Father to the effect that the different categories will come together in the end" (268, 272).[69] His musing on the likeness of heaven and earth ("*what if* Earth/ Be but the shaddow," etc.) works both to "qualify" the metaphor (Stein 265) and to qualify the authority of the extraterrestrial messenger, who for all his intuition (cf. 5.486-9) has yet to plumb the likeness for himself. As we know (cf. p. 56), the commission to tell of the "enemie/ Late falln" does not appoint him the Father's mouthpiece but demands that he fashion a medium of his own.

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[69] We have seen that the real divide in Milton's monism – not a substantial divide but a temporary gap for freedom's sake – lies between creator and creatures. Kuester lists overwhelming evidence for Raphael's "indicat[ing] against his will a relationship of degree" (not a difference in kind) between earth and heaven, such as his numerical comparisons and his revelations of labour, food, sex, and tragedy on high (268-70).

Most convincing, however, is Stein's perception of "the dominant mood of the war" and its "more than human laughter" (267). As he points out, "God sets the mood [of scherzo] when he comments to the Son on the budding rebellion":

> Neerly it now concernes us to be sure
> Of our Omnipotence, and with what Arms
> We mean to hold what anciently we claim
> Of Deitie or Empire[.]
> ....
> Let us advise, and to this hazard draw
> With speed what force is left, and all imploy
> In our defence, lest unawares we lose
> This our high place, our Sanctuarie, our Hill.
> (5.721-32)

Raphael has the Father "smiling" here (5.718); and readers tend to fall in with the Son's response: "thou thy foes/ Justly hast in derision, and secure/ Laugh'st at thir vain designes" (5.735-7). "The great laugh," Stein concludes, "cannot fail to be heard" (267; cf. 12.59). In fact, as early as 1728, this was read as "very *majestic Irony*" whereby, as Norman Knox explains, the ironist conveys "the very opposite of innocent ignorance" by "depreciat[ing] himself in relation to the object of his irony, as though Lucifer were a respectable foe" (101-2; italics in original). Indeed, an omniscient God is not about to lose any place "unawares." But, while Stein's sense of the mood will be amply confirmed, there is no reason to take the Son's response at face value, granted what he has yet to learn about the Father's "kinship" with the enemy or his approaching abdication. Nor then is there good reason, especially in light of God's humble irony, to limit "the object of his irony" to Satan's crew, or the irony itself to the Socratic.

Evidently, the Son has much to learn before reaching the "climax of his development, when he proves willing to be impaired by an act of love" (MacCallum 78). Here, in the half-light of his sub-perspective, he goes on to boast of his power and to indulge in a pun on his "high place" at God's right hand: "when they see all Regal Power/ Giv'n me to quell thir pride, and in event/ Know whether I be dextrous to subdue/ Thy Rebels" (5.739-42). Such puns as "dextrous" are most often associated with Satan (e.g., 1.642, 5.869, 6.558-68); and the tone of "Regal" seems self-important next to his later self-admonition regarding the resignation of power (6.731; cf. p. 55). Considering that God's irony partly eludes him even at the point of assuming the Father's armaments, this immaturity makes dramatic sense. And it appears to have gone unnoticed that his "wrauth" and "ire" in battle (6.824-66) serve to deride Turnus and Neptune in the invocation quoted above. In sum, to take the Son's subordination and education seriously is to realize that his rudimentary grasp of the Father's joke can be no more than our starting point.[70]

What is lacking in the Son's response (as in most critics' responses) is a sense of the same dimension of irony sounded in the Father's 'blessing' his own sons as "Sons of Darkness" (cf. pp. 55-6). As we have seen, this crucial dimension is plumbed first in Book III in terms of the "cycle of humiliation and exaltation": all power is to wither away as kinship comes to fruition; time is to tell that "God shall be All in All." The joke is indeed based on omniscience: the 'gunpowder plot' downstairs cannot possibly catch God "unawares." But in a deeper sense the Father sends up his own full awareness of the chosen course of his omnipotence, as 'omni' is to take on a genuinely universal character. God's "Sanctuarie" will have been lost for good, and lost *awares*, when all attain the "highth/ Of Union or Communion, deifi'd" (cf. p. 61), when "All things . . . up to him return" (5.470) and his own "Darkness" sees the light. If on its face the jest features an ironist and an "object," the poet suggests a more profound level – a level that the Son and

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[70] Even MacCallum (cf. 89), otherwise so enlightening on the Son's education, neglects to consider this.

Eden's raconteur have yet to fathom – at which the irony is typically inclusive, i.e., characteristically humble.[71]

Heard in this (self-)inclusive sense, how much heartier then is God's "great laugh." As Stein's "epic farce" breaks out, this laugh locates the 'side-splitting' War within the Father; and once again two sides of his family appear, despite the looming moral difference, "each to other like" as creatures under trial. Not just Satan's but both sides are subjected to ridicule ranging from the psychological ("scorn, scoffing, laughter") to the physical (Stein 269-70) – as in Satan's armour-staining encounter with Michael, or when the latter's forces fall down like bowling pins "By thousands" *because* of their armour (6.594). Instead of asking what the storyteller makes of all this, however, Stein conflates Raphael with Milton, whose "devastating irony" Himy also spies "hovering over the battlefield" (124). When the "scene reaches its height," for instance, Stein debates whether "Milton [is] straining for grandeur in this passage" (271):

> So Hills amid the Air encounterd Hills
> Hurl'd to and fro with jaculation dire,
> That under ground they fought in dismal shade;
> Infernal noise; Warr seem'd a civil Game
> To this uproar[.]
> (6.664-8)

Stein is surely right that it would be "naïve" to think that Milton intended epic grandeur. And yet, if the "controlled excess" is that of Milton for the reader, how controlled is that of Raphael? Could he be "straining for grandeur" before his impressionable audience of two, as when he offers this eulogizing lament: "for who, though with the tongue/ Of Angels, can relate, or to what things/ Liken on Earth conspicuous, that may lift/ Human imagination to such highth/ Of Godlike Power" (6.298-301)? And what does it mean for God's pedagogy if the moral that 'right is might' is partly lost on the moralizer – a professor of freedom whose understanding of freedom ("the process by which a wrong choice may be made" [p. 68]) is likewise only partial?

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[71] To my knowledge, only Reimer takes a similar view: "The Father's 'cruel' mirth . . . need no longer offend, so long as we understand this as a test of His creatures' Godlike humility. . . . [He] was in fact

Raphael seems still to be absorbing the lesson that "[u]ltimate moral law and ultimate force *are* external [to the self], but to be confused with material force only by the morally perverted" (Stein 283; italics his). Nor is it clear how far his grasp of freedom extends beyond its definition: "to stand or fall/ Free in thine own Arbitrement it lies" (8.640-1). Like any angel, Raphael will have to try and be tried again – i.e., as in The Readie and Easie Way Milton had feared of England, be "forc'd perhaps to fight over again all that [he has] fought, and spend over again all that [he has] spent" (1138). Besides the indications of bias already mentioned, several features of his discourse strongly suggest that the "sociable Spirit" (5.221) unwittingly leads the couple down the Garden path. We must be careful not to see the Fall itself as evidence of his failings, since his task is not to prevent their choosing wrongly but to enable their choosing freely. Yet by attending to the archangel's weaknesses we might see the poet in a newly humble light – not by conflating the two inadvertently, but by realizing that in lending Eden such a naïve teacher Milton may be acknowledging the republicans' failure to transcend their own reliance on military might, to bring the benefits of citizenship to a people long accustomed to subjection. Milton may even be mocking those ironic occasions when, in effect, his 'mighty' republican pen had put republican aims to the sword.[72]

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confessing the limitations of His omnipotence" (62-3). These "limitations" must be understood, however, as self-imposed for his purpose of abdication (cf. pp. 42-4 above).

[72] Parker, perhaps thinking of the epic's "long choosing, and beginning late" (9.26), notes that Milton "was late in maturing, as he himself realized and confessed" (590). In his early twenties (Sonnet VII; c. 1632),

With regard to the visitor's grasp of freedom, Kuester has shown that Raphael's "knowledge of coming human disobedience makes him insist even more firmly on automatic obedience" (271). Indeed, often assuming the imperative or 'military' mood, he tends (without a hint of conscious irony) to educate by command: "be lowlie wise:/ Think onely what concerns thee"; "love . . . / Him whom to love is to obey" (8.173-4, 633-4). Furthermore, Milton shows us that the same, warrior's mentality, one 'akin' to the Devil's own, underlies his incapacity to laugh at military might in heaven. For example, Satan incites his followers to war by insisting that "Our puissance is our own, our own right hand/ Shall teach us highest deeds" (5.863-4). Yet Raphael will echo him by describing Abdiel and other officers as "the mightiest, bent on highest deeds" (6.112). He celebrates an ethic of self-reliance in more explicit terms still: "each on himself reli'd,/ As onely in his arm the moment lay/ Of victorie; deeds of eternal fame/ Were don, but infinite" (6.238-41). And numerous other passages associate the storyteller with an *ethos* from which the poet works hard to distance his Christian epic. Whereas the Father will address the angels as "ye Gods" just once (3.341), and there in the context of exaltation through humility, Raphael (ab)uses the ultimate term repeatedly to suggest the perverted contrary – exaltation by force of arms: "adventrous deeds/ Under thir God-like leaders"; "such highth/ Of Godlike Power: for likest Gods they seemd" (6.66-7, 300-1).[73]

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the poet already worries at the issue: "I to manhood am arriv'd so near,/ And inward ripenes doth much less appear" (l. 6-7; cf. "Lycidas" l. 1-7). Although Milton is not known for acknowledging political naïvete or error, notice the 'should/might have' in the following passage, where on the very eve of the Restoration he regrets the impractical idealism that has failed to save the Revolution from a fractious exclusivity: "Tis true indeed, when monarchie was dissolvd, the form of a Commonwealth should have forthwith bin fram'd; and the practice thereof immediatly begun; that the people might have soon bin satisfi'd . . .: we had been by this time firmly rooted, . . .:this care of timely setling a new government . . . hath bin our mischief" (Readie and Easie Way 1140).

[73] Quite in keeping with this *ethos* is Raphael's first naming himself (6.363), then claiming that angels "Seek not the praise of men" (6.376). But Milton implies that, compared to Satanic solipsism, this taste for personal glory is more callow than damnable.

Nor does God neglect to provide a moral primer in his praise for Abdiel: "single hast maintaind/ Against revolted multitudes the Cause/ Of Truth, in word mightier than they in Armes" (6.30-2). Truth's "might" is reinforced as God unleashes the so-called "highest deeds" by contrasting "force" with the force of reason: "subdue/ By force, who reason for their Law refuse,/ Right reason for thir Law" (6.40-2). And so the Father's pointed irony is once again at work as the very call to engage in war suggests its inadequacy. Yet this is not to say that the rebel legions are abandoned. Their Prince's rhetorical joust with Abdiel (not to mention the battle itself) grants them, too, ample opportunity to regain "the path of truth" (6.173).[74] Republican 'angels' such as the younger Milton were perhaps understandably slow to realize that "Cromwell's Army had as little respect for the sovereignty of Parliament as Charles I, and far more strength" (Hill [Century] 189) – especially given the New Model Army's repeated routs of the royalists in the 1640s. But the poet makes it clear that heaven's angels should have known better than "to raise/ Dreadful combustion warring, and disturb/ . . . thir happie Native seat" (6.224-6).

That Eden's instructor is partially deaf to his own instruction when God has broadcast this message; when God's measured guidance has amplified the futility of fighting (e.g., by balancing the forces); when the rebels have thrown themselves down, defeated "in thir Soules" more than in arms (6.837) – that even emerging from such trial Raphael still imports so much of the Homeric *ethos* into Paradise shows how hard it is to see to the bottom of God's ironies. In the Father's terms, the archangel's hierarchical sub-perspective is less 'wrong' than it is 'primitive'; it smacks of the early stages of the republicanizing process when, following creation's "divorcing commands," the devolution of authority and the dissolution of division is just beginning to be earned. Yet if God the caretaker-king must rely on the inherently unreliable in his words of irony, then in the equally "self-denying ordinance" of his ways he must be willing to entrust the truly "highest deeds" to the 'perspectivally challenged.'[75] Otherwise, how could such (d)evolution ever be earned? The Father depends on flawed ambassadors who must themselves depend on others, learning by trial and error, by reason and faith, how to make sense of their fellows' waywardness. What Milton remarks of malice therefore holds in theory for inadvertent departures such as Raphael's: "a will which is already evil [or in error] . . . may produce out of its own wickedness [or misreading] either *good for others* or punishment for itself, though it does so *unknowingly*" (Doctrine 332; italics added). As for practice, however, that the Son himself could be a god-in-progress, often falling short of "true responses" (cf. p. 31), bespeaks the unavoidable cost of the Father's laissez-faire mode of spiritual 'production.'[76]

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[74] Raphael does well in this respect, stressing that they could always have changed or "reclaimed" their minds. Instead, they "stood obdur'd" in pride, "hard'nd more by what might most reclame" (6.785-99).

On the point of Restoration, the older Milton says as much of the English people-in-progress: "Shall we never grow old anough to be wise to make seasonable use of gravest autorities, experiences, examples?" (Readie and Easie Way 1144). If this question has long since haunted the poet, Raphael, God's flawed but trusted authority, has yet to make full and "seasonable use" of his own wartime experience. And in his consequently limited capacity to "produce . . . good for others" lies his resemblance to

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[75] As noted in my "Introduction," it was by means of Parliament's Self-Denying Ordinance (1645) that the New Model Army was made meritocratic or "open to the talents" instead of being led by men of the ruling classes such as the Members themselves (Hill [Century] 127-8). Analogously, God "opens" creation *and himself* to the talents of his creatures by urging them to earn their shares in freedom.

[76] 'Laissez-faire' suggests the Father's letting others 'take over,' as well as his letting evil be. But his guiding presence within us in the form of conscience/reason (not to mention the Bible's guidance) means that, although he refuses to control us, Milton's God never leaves us entirely to our own (de)vices.

Milton before his "seasonable" authoring of revolutionary experience into exemplary song. What the archangel calls his "Sad task" has by the end of Book VI turned into a swashbuckling drama whose ironies are even less apparent to his wide-eyed listeners than to himself: "[*Adam*] with his consorted *Eve*/ The storie heard attentive, and was fill'd/ With admiration" (7.50-2). More monologically than dialogically, Raphael's "highest deeds" form the couple's conception of "Great things" (7.70; compare 12.567); moreover, the "winged Hierarch's" concluding on a note of "automatic" obedience ("fear to transgress") discourages discussion of the War, as does his apparent rank as an "autoritie." In fact, Milton lets us know that any "doubts" the pair may have had regarding this response – or rather, this reaction – to the problem of evil are "soon repeal'd" by their unspoken conclusion that evil has been "Driv'n back" (7.59-60). This will be of little use, of course, when next the Satanic voice pipes up within. Still, Adam and Eve now know as well as Raphael that any creature, even the illustrious Lucifer, can choose to cross the bar from potential to actual evil; they can "themselves thr[o]w/ Down from the verge of Heav'n" (6.864-5). Adam's first, astonished question, "can we want obedience then/ To [God], or possibly his love desert" (5.514-15), has been answered.

However, the overconfidence instilled by this supposed "driving back" of evil combines with Raphael's mistrust of Edenic liberty and reciprocity to leave Adam and Eve more vulnerable than ever to the temptation to follow Lucifer across that potential-actual divide. Indeed, no sooner have the couple "repeal'd" their "doubts" than we are reminded that they are "yet sinless" (7.61) – a reminder usually taken to exonerate Adam's "scientific inquiry" (Flannagan 539), but one that may also hint that repealing doubts and dialogue in favour of automatic obedience is no way to remain sinless.

Raphael's putting the man in charge of Eden's innocence (commanding him, to Eve's face, to "warne/ Thy weaker" [6.908-9]) makes this point particularly challenging for Adam. As Eve's husband makes clear to the archangel in Book VIII with characteristic chutzpah (e.g., 8.595), his intimate dialogue with the Father and his blissful experience of the mutuality and "rational delight" for which he petitioned his maker sit uneasily with such hierarchical imperatives. Further discord may be heard in Raphael's warnings about Eve's fair "outside" (8.568), since the warrior's attempt to impose a moral chain of command from himself to Adam and on 'down' to Eve clashes with the moral individualism of "how/ Can hearts, not free, be tri'd whether they serve/ Willing or no, who will but what they must" (5.531-3). Because of this incoherent paternalism, it will be up to Eve, who answers snub with snub and retreats to a "shadie nook" (cf. 8.53-4, 9.277), to reclaim "Rational Libertie" for herself and for her muddled husband in the wake of the archangel's visit.

Thus, if Raphael's error produces any "good for others," it is ultimately to ensure that their hearts and minds are well and truly tried. Good will not pop out of the hat of evil and error at God's ironic behest, the poet suggests; as ever, it demands co-operative effort. "For better or for worse" (cf. p. 66), Adam and Eve will have to fulfill their parts in the trial that God's messenger unwittingly compounds. And yet many critics insist that the open trial of virtue, which Milton first theorized in Areopagitica (cf. pp. 15-16), is a blessing out of place in Eden.[77] In other words, Eve brings about the Fall by pursuing a form of liberty fitted only for the fallen, the 'impure.' But this is to mistake both the pamphlet's conception of trial and the poem's portrait of Paradise. Areopagitica does not define trial in terms of purification, but rather *vice versa* ("that which purifies us is triall"). As we saw in the trial of the unfallen angels, the logic of trial, which permeates Milton's oeuvre, involves the whole gamut of creaturely development; the purification of the fallen is just one of its applications. Furthermore, we have noted (p. 59) that God defines Eden both by what it is and by what it could be. Evil is always already a potential in Eden's inhabitants, as Adam explains after Eve's bad dream: "Fansie . . . / Wilde work produces oft . . . . yet be not sad./ Evil into the mind of God or Man may come and go" (5.110-18). Hill contends that "[o]ne of Milton's problems, which he did not solve, was to differentiate between unfallen innocence and ignorance" (378-9). What Adam and Eve are engaged in from the outset, however, is doubtless such a differentiation, as they emerge out of ignorance without necessarily falling out of innocence. In generic terms, as Barbara Lewalski has shown, Adam and Eve actually develop by "integrat[ing] the georgic and even heroic challenges that arise from their work, their complex love relationship, . . . and their duty to resist and conquer evil into the pastoral mode that defines their lives" (174). In sum, "there is nothing static about life in Eden"; and, no less than in the fallen world, the "catalyst in the process is trial" (MacCallum 111-12).[78]

Even granted trial in Eden, it is still possible to argue that Eve is not – and therefore, in the so-called 'separation scene,' ought not to have tried to be – the fully-fledged individual that Adam is. But critics such as Marilyn Farwell make it increasingly difficult to deny Eve her inheritance of "the freedom for which Milton adamantly argues in Areopagitica" (4). Eve's first test, to recall an earlier point (p. 47), is that of

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[77] In refuting this view, Marilyn R. Farwell quotes J. H. Hanford's contention that "the logic of Areopagitica 'does not apply to the immature and weak'," noting that J. S. Diekhoff and D. H. Burden share Hanford's opinion (5).

[78] See MacCallum's detailed demonstration of "The Analogy of Fallen and Unfallen Experience" (203-9).

narcissism; her "individual growth and choice" shares in the "dynamic ontology" of all creaturely becoming (cf. 5.493-500). Furthermore, in keeping with the companionate marriage of minds envisioned in Milton's tracts, "Eve's reason undercuts a simple identification of woman with nature or emotion" (13). She grows through trial "from inexperienced thought [cf. 4.457] to independent decisions," so that her reasoned decision to divide their labours in Book IX is "not a surprise, but a logical step" (14). In sum, given God's repeated confirmations that Eden's grown-ups are not exempt from the personal duties of freedom (e.g., 10.43-7), there can be nothing illogical in the physical separation of the already spiritually separate.

That separation appears, even so, to 'lead to' the Fall has been enough to convince most readers that it must be a mistake. Flannagan speaks for many when he concludes that "Adam abrogated his responsibility when he obeyed her, rather than acting as her guide and commanding her not to go" (595). What Flannagan fails to consider is that a "guide" cannot be a "commander," as the Father's ways so eloquently argue. Nor does Adam "obey" her, since, like the Father, she does not command but only persuades. The poet is surely tempting his readers (cf. my n. 31) to throw out, as Flannagan does here, the baby of freedom with the bathwater of evil and error. According to Milton, this is precisely the weakness to which England succumbs in 1660 – the temptation to find in renewed subjection the solution to confusion, in the bondage of monarchy the answer to "the frequent disturbances, interruptions and dissolutions which the Parlament hath had" (1140), and which must afflict any dialogical process.

Labouring under Raphael's prescriptions (and often reduced to parrotting his language), Adam is simply bested by Eve in the debate over moral freedom. Milton thus points us to the irony that doing the *right* thing can 'lead to' disaster nevertheless, since wrong is always there for the choosing. And reason too can go before a fall. As Book III has emphasized, "neither Man nor Angel can discern/ Hypocrisie" (cf. p. 63) – which is why Eve is wrong to disregard Adam's warning that "Reason not impossibly may . . . fall into deception unaware" (9.360-2), and also why reason depends on its more intuitive partner, faith. It is certainly reasonable to see in the serpent the counterexample that 'disproves' the rule of death, and the example that 'proves' the rule of knowledge: "How dies the serpent? Hee hath eat'n [of the forbidden fruit] and lives,/ And knows, and speaks, and reasons, and discerns,/ Irrational till then" (9.764-6). However, for all of Eve's overconfidence in the power of reason over fiendish "fraud" (9.287), and for all of her "injured love" (Reimer 119), the crucial confusion nonetheless belongs to Adam, whose mistaking of the personal duties of freedom and the individual ethic of trial causes the injury in the first place. This becomes clear when we realize that, in his well-meaning effort to be the manly "guard" (9.269) that Raphael has ordered, he contradicts himself left and right and departs from the dialogical model of his colloquy with the Father. Freedom may be costly, but Milton insists that, until that model is restored, humankind will sustain the far greater cost of spiritual infancy, of remaining the morally stunted 'children of a lesser god' – of being, like the English people, not citizens but subjects.

When Eve proposes, "Let us divide our labours" (9.214), the "wanton growth" that "require[s]/ More hands than ours" (4.628-9) suddenly seems to Adam manageable "with ease" by "our joynt hands" (9.244-5). The operative word is clearly "joynt," as the insecure husband insists that Satan will be "hopeless to circumvent us joynd" (9.259). Now "Th' attempt itself" must be avoided (9.295); the evil that in Book V may come and go and "leave/ No spot or blame behind" (5.118-19) will "asperse[]/ The tempted with dishonour foul" (9.296-7). Raphael's command to "warne/ Thy weaker" takes command of Adam's language, which itself becomes commanding – "leave not the faithful side/ That gave thee being, still shades thee and protects" (9.265-6) – in keeping with the archangel's doctrine, "Oft times nothing profits more/ Then self esteem" (8.571-2). What is more, Adam's final, exasperated admonition, "For God towards thee hath done his part, do thine" (9.375), directly echoes Raphael at *his* most exasperated ("with contracted brow"): "Accuse not Nature, she hath don her part;/ Do thou but thine" (8.561-2).

And yet, just as the young pamphleteer "cannot praise a fugitive and cloister'd virtue . . . that never sallies out and sees her adversary" (cf. p. 15), so Eve rises to Adam's illogical challenge to her moral freedom by asserting her own individuality and responsibility: "And what is Faith, Love, Vertue unassaid/ Alone, without exterior help sustaind?" (9.335-6). At the same time, she makes it clear that she knows the source of his novel proscriptions: "That such an Enemie we have . . . both by thee informed I learne,/ And from the parting Angel over-heard" (9.274-6). As Diana Benet observes, Eve "sees into the meaning of trial" as an occasion for "the affirmation of the relationship between the individual creature and his creator," whereas for Adam "it is an occasion not to affirm his love of God, but to sustain Eve's admiration" (135-7; cf. 9.265-9). Raphael's approval, however, seems to matter even more to Adam, who contradicts himself once again with the claim that God's "creating hand/ Nothing imperfet or deficient left" (9.344-5; compare 8.415-27). He clearly falls back upon the archangel's injunction, "The more she will acknowledge thee her Head" (8.574), as he switches from the subjunctive to the imperative: "but tender love enjoynes,/ That I should mind thee oft, and mind thou me" (9.357-8). Finally, he is prepared to rest such a weak case on Raphael's automatic obedience ("approve/ First thy obedience"), before abruptly reversing himself to concede Eve's point exactly: "[constancie] who can know,/ Not seeing thee attempted, who attest?" (9.367-70). As he will later remark, rightly if ruefully, "beyond this had bin force,/ And force upon free will hath here no place" (9.1173-5). But here, Milton underscores the change in the couple's relationship by concluding, "So spake the Patriarch of Mankinde" (9.376), thus framing their debate in terms of 'fallen' authority, not the mutuality originally granted them by God.

By way of defending Adam's poor defense of moral 'cloistering,' some critics defend his source – Raphael's paternalism, which they then attribute to Milton.[79] But David Aers and Bob Hodge point out what should perhaps be the obvious: "The crucial debate between Adam and Raphael [8.521-643]. . . has a context that undercuts the authority of the angelic case," i.e., "Adam's reported debate with God." As we saw in Chapter Two (pp. 57-61), this debate over the human need for "collateral love" not only "gives divine sanction for Adam's ['pre-Raphaelite'] view of marriage as a mutual relationship between equals," but also "gives a precedent for God's . . . giving out an inadequate ethic in order to 'try' Adam" (23-4). Again, reading dramatically reveals the multiplicity of perspectives; and there is no reason to take Raphael's as anything but a testingly "inadequate ethic" without first contextualizing like a good "gatherer." Even Eve, of course, the champion of freedom, is muddled by the sorry 'outcome' of her championship, clutching desperately at everything from Miltonic liberty ("Was I to have never parted from thy side?") to Raphaelite authoritarianism ("why didst not thou the Head/ Command me absolutely not to go" [9.1154-7]). But at least the couple's "accusation" is already "mutual" (9.1187). And it is when, and only when, Adam and Eve resume their customary mutuality in dialogue, in penitence and remorse ("in proportion due/ Giv'n and receiv'd," as Adam asked of God [8.385-6]), that they are able to gather new purpose together with new hope of "favor, grace, and mercie" (10.1096).

What holds the centre of Paradise Lost as Christian verse, then, is less the fact of loss than the transformative 'fiction,' the creative 'gathering,' of our readerly responses in words and deeds.[80] Loewenstein's comment that in the final books "fallen history, with its terrible conflicts, becomes the subject proper" is therefore somewhat misleading (97). More important than facing the "nightmare" (121) of history, or wallowing in the guilt of original sin, is the process of awakening through it to the knowledge of things truly "Great" (cf. p. 80), and to our duty to "add/ Deeds to [that] knowledge answerable" (12.567-82). Indeed, the spiritual and the historical, the internal ("knowledge") and the external ("deeds"), are bound up with one another inextricably in the human couple's successful awakening to their *raison d'être*. As the poem's exemplary 'readers' have taught us, learning is doing in Paradise Lost – and the "highest deeds" of learning are dialogical. "We teach that only Doers shall be saved, and by their doing," Thomas Taylor sums up the Puritan creed (qtd. in Hill [Century] 82). At the core of Milton's "great Argument" (1.24) burns his conviction that spiritual becoming will change the world because it demands "engagement with the world" (cf. p. 60).[81]

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[79] See the fine critique by Aers and Hodge of these ("neo-Christian") critics, among them Lewis and Fish.

[80] I thus broadly concur with Achinstein (Milton), who argues that Milton in his epic "aimed to promote readerly skills as a means for English citizens to regain . . . [their] freedoms" (202). Politically speaking, words and deeds considered as (speech-)acts may of course be equally 'active.' To rephrase Sonnet 19: they also serve who only read and write.

[81] See Parker for an influential argument that, to the contrary, the poem represents an inward, individualistic retreat from history: "[t]he poet holds out no hope for the freeing of nations . . . . [b]ut man, alone with his Maker, can create a paradise in his own heart" (592-3).

Such engagement means that "we may be forc'd perhaps to fight over again all that we have fought" (p. 76), yet Milton persuades us to try and be tried again. God "tempt[s] even righteous men . . . so that they may become wiser, and others may be instructed" (Doctrine 338). If the more realistic or mundane focus of this collective enterprise is Eve's and Adam's uneven growth, the truly exemplary learning curve is that of the Son. "Mans Friend" (10.60) demonstrates in judgment over his wayward kin that he has learned from the colloquy with the Father how humility coupled with irony can enable "Mercy collegue with Justice" (cf. pp. 56-7). In trusting him completely, God also proves his own willingness – or possibly his own need – to go on trying and retrying his creatures, so "dear" to him in both senses of the word (cf. 3.276). God helps even his "righteous" Son to grow ever "wiser" under trial so that "others may be instructed."[82]

"Vicegerent Son, to thee I have transferr'd/ All Judgement, whether in Heav'n, or Earth, or Hell" (10.56-7). Over his own, better judgment, the abdicating Father promotes that of his subordinate, though the task to make room for mercy where "Justice shall not return as bounty scorn'd" (10.54) will test to the utmost the Son's 'contextualizing' mettle. Commentators have shown that the Son rises to this high responsibility, his balanced judgment acting as a catalyst to "the internal process of renovation" (MacCallum 175). This "inward work" in those who "deserv'd to fall" (10.16) begins not so much with his stern words as with his tender deeds:

> [He] disdain'd not to begin
> The form of servant to assume,
> As when he wash'd his servants feet so now
> As Father of his Familie he clad

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[82] In logical terms, the overall optimism of Miltonic trial-by-irony should by now be clear: the 'bad' consequences of 'failure' are limited by their being appropriated as ironies both to *re*trials and to others' trials, while the 'good' consequences of 'success' are multiplied in their ripple effect on others' morals. (Again, this is to polarize for theory's sake the poet's shades of grey [cf. p. 25].)

> Thir nakedness with Skins of Beasts, or slain,
> Or as the snake with youthful Coate repaid;
> And thought not much to cloath his Enemies:
> Nor hee thir outward onely with the Skins
> Of Beasts, but inward nakedness, much more
> Opprobrious, with his Robe of righteousness,
> Arraying cover'd from his Fathers sight.
> (10.213-23)

The Son "begins his work of mediation" as a servant (MacCallum 175) in the humble fashion of the Father's irony. Although Adam and Eve are still reeling from their sentence, the reader will realize that "already something restorative has begun to take place, and that the law's [death's] delay is really mercy in disguise" (176). While Reimer has preceded me in linking the couple's need for this example of humility to Raphael's divisive 'counter-example' of "the old familiar terms of authority" (100), the dramatic context of the (chronologically) recent colloquy in heaven (Book III; cf. pp. 31-44) has still more to tell us about God's ways of irony.

To the Son as a spiritual contender, the celestial dialogue represents a great leap forward as he attains to the seat of godhead by embracing "the loathsom grave." His reading effects God's 'first communion,' heralding the "All in All." From this climactic moment, his identity is well-nigh dual; Milton's subordinationism (cf. my n. 30) allows for him to grow to the "highth" of his Father's ways. Thus, in the colloquy and in the judgment scene the same three players take the stage: the Father, the Son, and the Adversaries. The Father's first words in Book III refer to "our adversarie"; and human beings are 'present' chiefly as associate adversaries ("man will hark'n to his glozing lyes"), their final (ransomed) state in doubt. This state remains at issue in the judgment scene, where Adam and Eve again take the Satanic role ("his Enemies"), while the Son speaks for himself and for the Father. In fact, the role of Father links the two in the passage quoted above ("As Father of his Familie"; "his Fathers sight"). And so the Son is able to design a merciful justice by drawing upon the colloquy with the Father as a whole. By this progressive paralleling, Milton suggests how in dialogue we learn to sing the other's part. That the "Enemies" are so markedly unresponsive (Eve sullen, her husband merely accusing) confirms conversely that Satan inhabits the dead end that is monologue. Just as in Book III renewal issues from self-sacrifice, so here the "Enemies" will be mired in self-pity and self-defeat until the lovingly ironic mediation of the Son begins to set them free. Since "Love was not in thir looks, either to God/ Or to each other" (10.111-12), genuinely dialogical responses to the Son and to each other will come only later, together with a renewed sense of humility.

The Son attempts to provoke the pair to dialogue: "what chance detains?"; "hast thou eaten of the Tree" (10.108, 122). Like the Father ("Which of ye will be mortal" [3.214]), he already knows the answers to his questions but seeks to open spaces for response. Failing this, he takes on the Father's sternest tone (as in "Ingrate"; cf. p. 33) to spell out sin as distance from God, distance from each other, distance from their home ground: "Was shee thy God"; "hee over thee shall rule"; "Curs'd is the ground for thy sake" (10.145, 196, 201). Again like the Father, he also defers disclosure, hiding meanings to try his 'hunter-gatherers,' who will have to struggle to find Satan in the serpent ("unless/ Be meant, whom I conjecture, our grand Foe/ *Satan*" [10.1032-4; cf. 10.181]). But as their father he soon reasserts his "fundamental kinship" with "his Enemies" by clothing them body ("outward") and soul ("inward"). Thus, in spite of their unresponsiveness, several sub-perspectives come into play, suggesting in ironic "interaction," though not in themselves, the Father's republicanizing model. Distance or division is necessary; but it is reversible, as the reversal from high court judge to lowly servant hints dramatically. Eve "shall submit" to "[her] Husbands will" during their punishing time of trial (10.195-6), but humankind will have to work out the final answer to the problem posed to Adam: "was shee made thy guide,/ Superior, or but equal" (10.146-7).[83] At this point, only the reader is ready to interpret the irony; anger, shame, and worse, must remain for a time the couple's lot. But they, too, will eventually gather that love can overcome division: "[H]is hands/ Cloath'd us unworthie" (10.1059). The "something restorative" that the Son administers will bear in time a fruit less bitter.

And yet the fallen pioneers have much to learn, even after deciphering in dialogue some of the Son's meaning and winning from recrimination a tentative peace. Like republicans after the Restoration, they must brace themselves to try and be tried again. Many of Raphael's ironic teachings, for instance, still have not taken effect – hence Michael's urging, "Dream not of thir fight/ As of a Duel" (12.386-7). Because Milton in his own reversal of fortune has confronted personally his country's problem of reading history (cf. my n. 72), he would seem to progress through the epic first as Raphael admonishing a 'nation,' and then as Michael's student, Adam, straining to see the 'end' of history. For in the sobering sights of Books XI and XII Adam gains through Michael "the experience which Milton had already undergone" (Hill 385).[84] In a chain of maturation hinging on the acknowledgment of failings past, the naïve would-be educator naturally becomes once more the Bible's/history's student, emerging finally to take the poet's "solitarie way," "hand in hand" with Urania his muse.

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[83] No one could claim that Milton's 'final answer' is that of a modern feminist. But he consistently stresses full mutuality – as borne out in his friendships with cultured women (Flannagan 324) – even as he adheres to the Pauline creed that the husband has greater authority. "[A]ll human society must proceed from the mind rather then the body" (Divorce 948). "Marriage . . . consisted in the mutual love, delight, help and society of husband and wife, though with the husband having greater authority . . .,[which] became still greater after the Fall" (Doctrine 355). If education serves "to repair the ruin of our first parents" (980; cf. p. 95 below), then Milton would clearly have his readers seek a more equitable (i.e., a more 'original') balance of authority. Moreover, to move towards the "All in All," as we have seen, is to move beyond authority altogether ("For regal Scepter then no more shall need" [3.340]).

[84] It should be noted that Eve gains the same experience directly from God: "For God is also in sleep, and Dreams advise" (12.611). Perhaps this is simply because three voices would be less dramatically effective,

There is much modesty in remaining, as Milton certainly did, forever the student. To place the poet in the instructor's position only (e.g., Loewenstein 95) would be to set him far above his nation and to miss the significance of Michael's stringent guidelines from the Father (cf. p. 57). In a certain rhetorical sense, C. S. Lewis was not so far off the mark when he labelled the archangel's lesson "an untransmuted lump of futurity" (129). Yet it need not be "inartistic," provided we read in terms of pedagogical irony and perceive the parallel with Milton's divorce tracts. For personal crisis once again directs him to the supposedly metapersonal source of wisdom and self-knowledge – ideally, the "untransmuted" Bible – this time in order best (and most discreetly) to comprehend the new English version of Israel's odyssey. In practice, as we have seen, Milton is a 'conscientious,' and to a large extent a conscious, *rewriter* of the Bible, daring to check and balance and further to dramatize his sacred text (cf. p. 11). Protestants of "Conscience" claiming to be "appealing to the authority of Scripture . . . were appealing to their own interpretation of Scripture" (Hill [Century] 93); and Milton might be said to *republicanize* the word, however sincerely, in all manner of contextualizing ways (e.g., by harping on the tyranny of Nimrod), not to mention by his daring to contextualize at all. In rhetorical effect, however, Michael's history in its relative lack of "figurative and mythopoetic invention" (Loewenstein 97) contrasts sharply with the War in Heaven, where the poet's winged words far outsoar his pithy source. Our final impression as the

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or less pedagogically exemplary, than the model dialectic in which Adam can represent humankind as well as the maturing Milton. But it may be another sign of God's loving ways that the first to be "deceiv'd/ By archangel discourses strictly from *his* source ("As I," God says, "shall thee enlighten" [cf. p. 57]) is then one of Milton's falling back into step with the Bible, its "transmutation" subtly muted. And so we close the book on a powerful note of 'counter-Restoration,' as Michael gradually 'restores' Adam/Milton to the biblical/republican model from which Charles II would exile him. Such a counter-Restoration, the poet hopes, will one day restore England to its (or at least to humankind's) originally republican senses and let "Rational Libertie" begin again at home (cf. p. 58).

As noted above, critics such as Loewenstein (92-125) have brought out the "tragic conflicts" of history in Books XI and XII. Hill, too, notices an "emphasis on the tragedy of history," going on to illuminate Michael's selective survey with reference to the disheartening collapse of Protectorate politics (380-90). But "tragedy can galvanize" (Norbrook 467); and the focus on God's ironic "galvanizing" of his creatures to response draws our attention to the lesson's telling frames. Following the couple's reconciliation, the Son prefaces the survey by reiterating the great goal of "All in All": the "hearts contrite" of Adam and Eve together with the (com)passion of the Redeemer presage eternal "joy and bliss" (11.43). This prophecy is then seconded by the Father: "after Life/ Tri'd in sharp tribulation, and refin'd/ By Faith and faithful works, to Second Life" (11.62-4). "So God with Man unites," Adam will soon exult (12.382). What critics tend to miss is that we are meant to bear in mind this "happie end" (12.605) even as we are warned of further trial and of the need for this-worldly "works." Although Michael reveals a history foreknown, his commission opens the future nonetheless to the human potential for learning from evil and error: "*If* patiently thy bidding they obey,/ Dismiss them *not disconsolate* . . . yet *in peace*" (11.112-17; my emphasis). One creature's

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the other" (3.130-1) appears thereby to have 'earned' unmediated healing from the Father.

failure may be another's epiphany. In Adam's ability to find peace and joy in history, even and especially in its ironic 'counterexamples,' we are urged to see our own capacity both to learn from history and (guided by right reason and God's word) to shape its course by "faithful works." After all, it is only for Adam that the future is laid out as a *fait accompli.* If Adam-Milton emerges "not disconsolate," England/the reader is surely encouraged not to linger in the tragedies of history but to take on his realist's optimism. Moreover, God has already come to the same informed conclusion as Adam (cf. p. 23) – to go ahead and father the Devil he knows for the sake of liberty and its "happie end."

The closing frame bolsters this optimism (qualified by the 'realistic' double negative, "not dis-"), as Adam departs "Greatly instructed . . .,/ Greatly in peace of thought" (12.557-8). The verbal echo of the Father's "yet in peace" (from 11.117) only strengthens our sense that his republicanizing *telos* will be fulfilled,

> with good
> Still overcoming evil, and by small
> Accomplishing great things, by things deemd weak
> Subverting worldly strong, and worldly wise
> By simply meek[.]
> (12.565-9)

This Christian conclusion – that "suffering for Truths sake/ Is fortitude to highest victorie" (12.569-70) – means that in a sense the human errors and evils of Michael's vision are beside the point. Focussing on these may lead us to conclude with Loewenstein that "Milton never quite resolves the conflict between envisioning history degeneratively . . . and progressively" (120). But this conflict is resolved when the pedagogical process proves to be dramatically progressive. For Adam's attaining the very "summe/ Of wisdom" (12.575-6) shows that we can not only learn wisdom from history but also learn to *make good of* and *in* history by accomplishing "great things" –

not like those of Raphael, but deeds "Of Patience and Heroic Martyrdom" (9.33). Indeed, Adam's and Michael's conclusion that good overcomes evil depends on the irony that "all this good of evil shall produce,/ And evil turn to good" (12.470-1). And it is this co-operative turning or converting that manifests the irony at the centre of God's ways.

The final books reaffirm that the purpose of God's irony is to republicanize the cosmos for the sake of "Rational Libertie." Even if "fire" is to "purge all things new" when time's task is complete (11.900), our "great things" and good deeds must build the ark of an earthly republic to prepare "long wanderd man" for "eternal Paradise of rest" in the universal republic of love (12.313-14). For Milton's Bible, like his history in the pamphlets, teaches republicanism, as critics such as Lejosne and Himy have made clear. The "just man" is no "Man over men" (12.69) but instead a man under God, a builder of arks. Moreover, as noted above (p. 58), Milton's humankind is "naturally, instinctually republican." Adam's anti-monarchist reaction to Nimrod's "aspir[ing]/ Above his brethren" (12.64-5) shows that Milton's pedagogical project "to repair the ruins of our first parents" (980) amounts to a call for the counter-Restoration of a republican Paradise.

If Adam is to "dwell on even ground now with [his] sons" (11.348), the ultimate challenge to God's creatures is to make this true also of the Father, to fulfill the "All in All" by "Deeds" of conversion and reconciliation. That Milton's God appears to have staked his "All" on human history – that his "Rational Libertie" depends on ours, and that he looks to our active co-authorship to transcend the either/or of schism and solipsism – is often overlooked in debating the poem's verdict on our fate. As we have seen (cf. p. 26), a monistic God who creates *ex deo* is "immediately involved" in the history of his human kin. And so the poet never abandons England or history to what seem to be its tragic 'Restorations.' By the ironic ways of the world as well as the word, the earthly reader is called to dialogue with heaven's Ironist, where neither party need build the republic alone. The Father will let Satan do his worst, but he continues to have his ironic say in human affairs, provoking without coercing us to turn the Serpent and his works into servants of our spiritual becoming.

For the Serpent is God's servant too, and the Devil's "Darkness" is the Father's own (cf. p. 55). What Adam and Eve glean from the War is not only the possibility of turning their backs on God, but also "strange things to thir thought/ So unimaginable as hate in Heav'n,/ And Warr so neer the Peace of God" (7.53-5). God's own 'War and Peace' contains the long story of our history's *agon*; in overcoming evil we may even "solace *his* defects" as he will solace ours (8.419; my emphasis). The Adam born yesterday would seem to have been wrong about God's perfection (8.415; cf. p. 61 and Reimer 71). If God is to transcend his 'One-to-One' relationship with himself, creation's "[self-] divorcing command" and the Ironist's invitation must be answered by the bold 'I do' of free-willed creatures. And Satan has his envious part to play in the love triangle of moral freedom. Milton's God knows all of "[Satan's] works/ In [us] and in [our] Seed" (12.394-5), and yet he lets us into the world of his foreknowledge nevertheless. Adam, too, looks on human fallings and failings, but he also learns to see the ironic conversions, the greater purpose of becoming. Like God the caretaker-king, Adam seeks "conversation with his like," not with himself (8.418). Questing beyond the monarch's solo voice, Milton sings with the readers of English history the polyphonic chorus of the Christian republic to come.

EPILOGUE

The "Sociable Spirit" of Milton's Republican God.

If others did not exist, a "sociable Spirit" would have to invent them. And so in the beginning Milton's God created other minds "with whom to hold converse" (8.408).[85] "[C]entral to the poem's deity is the need to diffuse himself, to communicate his energies as far as possible" (Norbrook 476). Genuine communication, of course, is always beyond his own reach; God extends the hand of irony, but must rely upon co-authors to write back. Only communal history, it seems, can "solace" the divine solitude that God implies to Adam, and suture the wound in the 'bedevilled' Father. Thus, Reimer can with some justice conclude that "God creates in order to refine himself; creation is . . . his 'Cure of all'" (131). Yet such reflexivity (to diffuse, or even to refine, himself) tempts us to forget that in these ways God shuffles off the immortal coil of oneness. God becomes the Father not to colonize others as extensions of himself (though substantially they must be such), but to empower them as gods in their own right (cf. my n. 45). As Hill points out, "What God prohibited was not knowledge of good and evil (knowledge of gods) but the attempt to attain it by magic, by short cuts" (379). Creation in Paradise Lost is a divine "retiring" (7.170), a giving (a)way to others – a bountiful, if conditional, gifting of being and becoming in the drama of diversity; and ultimately the promise of an abdication earned, as in the "happie end" the tried and true "come forth as gold" to "Communion, deifi'd."

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[85] Milton describes the archangel Raphael as "the sociable Spirit" (5.221; cf. p. 76), an apt phrase for a mediator. Since the name Raphael means 'health of God' in Hebrew (Flannagan 482), it seems no less fitting to extend the phrase to the Creator. The quotation from Book VIII recalls p. 61 above.

And yet the trials of English history, not to mention the demands of Christian doctrine, so temper the poet's optimism that through the republican chorus we hear still the sour notes of hell. Christ may have redeemed us all (Doctrine 444-9), but few good things come to "those who . . . accept not grace" (3.302). Satan will win some even as he loses all: "Bad men and Angels . . . arraignd shall sink/ Beneath thy Sentence; Hell her numbers full,/ Thenceforth shall be for ever shut" (3.331-3). Nevertheless, Catherine Belsey's complaint that the Last Judgment "seal[s] off all that is other in hell" (76) misconstrues what Milton's hell and Satan represent. As we have seen, it is not the Father but the Devil who fears change and mistrusts "all that is other." Whereas God sets free all that is other, Satan sets himself up as "Monarch" over all by "prevent[ing] all reply" (2.467). To be a Satan is thus to overrule the otherness within (here, the othered voice of conscience) so as to rule over others without. It is to doom *oneself* to the insatiability of the solipsist: "my self am Hell" (4.75). In any case, far from harping on retribution, what Milton's epic emphasizes instead is our collective potential to 'contain' the evil that we harbour as free agents. Inspired by his pedagogical Ironist, the poet makes common cause with his readers to restore the republic through the labour of 'right reading.'

This potential, however, is often seen by critics not as collective but as radically individual, as in Parker's focus on the promised "paradise within" (12.587; cf. my n. 81). In keeping with the Marxist critique of Protestantism, 'making good' in Paradise Lost is said to be either the work of God or "the business of a merely personal and private salvation" (Jameson 50). In this critical reading, the poem takes – astonishingly, given Milton's record of unyielding republicanism – an "anti-political turn" (50) that deepens the "division of politics from religion" (Kendrick 2). But, as I have shown, Milton never separates personal enlightenment from social engagement, never divorces "wisdome" from "Deeds" (12.575-87; cf. p. 87). Nor does he ever suggest that inward and outward, or private and public, works are anything but complementary, part and parcel of the same political process. What we have discovered from the outset is a vision of spiritual interdependence that is sociopolitical through and through. "I in thy persevering shall rejoyce,/ And all the blest" (8.639-40), Raphael assures humankind, whose trials will galvanize the 'family' of Heaven into action. "For should Man finally be lost, . . . thy youngest Son[?]" (3.150-1), God's eldest Son pleads on our behalf, before offering himself in sacrifice. And Abdiel's heroics, while certainly individual, prove to be quite the opposite of "private" or "anti-political." For he "Stood up" and "oppos'd" the Adversary in public debate (5.807-8) to provide his fellow angels with the "interaction of perspectives" that is the very lifeblood of politics. Moreover, when Adam and Eve are cast out of Eden, the "World" that lies "all before them" (12.646) is not so much their own future – by the Son's judgment, a dutiful time of "sorrow" and "sweat" (10.201-5) – as it is the brighter future of their "Seed" (cf. 10.1031-40, 12.374-85, 469-78). Their "great expectation" (12.378), like that of God the Father, has everything to do with others.

Paradise Lost, then, is evidently and eminently both "sociable" in spirit and wrought in the tradition of theology as grand narrative, encompassing politics, religion, and more. Even sin is social in Milton's epic: "sometimes Nations will decline so low/ From vertue, which is reason, that no wrong,/ But Justice . . ./ Deprives them of thir outward libertie,/ Thir inward lost" (12.97-101; cf. Hill 349). After all, did Adam and

Eve not fall *dialogically*, sin together as a 'nation' by "hark'n[ing] to [the] glozing lyes" of another (3.93)? And if sin is social, then so is salvation – as the readerly examples of the Son, of Abdiel, and of the primordial couple illustrate most clearly. Indeed, to discover the Father as pedagogical ironist, education as dialogical trial, and history as teleological drama – all of these roads lead us to the "sociable spirit" of becoming in Paradise Lost.

As we learn from Milton, as much as from Hutcheon and Burke, "interpreters 'mean' as much as ironists do." Irony "happens as a part of a communicative process; it is not a static rhetorical tool" (cf. p. 22). The poet's sociable Ironist cuts through the static to produce the cosmic drama. But authorship, direction, and action belong to all free creatures. The poem's self-d(en)ying deity falls upon his sword of irony to bless the godhead-in-progress of others. The One calls upon the many to create in "Rational Libertie" a republican oneness "happier farr."

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