Possible Worlds

in Milton's Paradise Lost

86

A Thesis

Submitted to the Faculty of Graduate Studies

University of Manitoba

in Partial Fulfilment of the Requirements for the Degree of

Master of Arts

by

Lynn Kerr

(c) March 1995

National Library of Canada

Bibliothèque nationale du Canada

Acquisitions and Bibliographic Services Branch

Direction des acquisitions et des services bibliographiques

395 Wellington Street
Ottawa, Ontario
K1A 0N4

395, rue Wellington
Ottawa (Ontario)
K1A 0N4

Your file Votre référence

Our file Notre référence

The author has granted an irrevocable non-exclusive licence allowing the National Library of Canada to reproduce, loan, distribute or sell copies of his/her thesis by any means and in any form or format, making this thesis available to interested persons.

L'auteur a accordé une licence irrévocable et non exclusive permettant à la Bibliothèque nationale du Canada de reproduire, prêter, distribuer ou vendre des copies de sa thèse de quelque manière et sous quelque forme que ce soit pour mettre des exemplaires de cette thèse à la disposition des personnes intéressées.

The author retains ownership of the copyright in his/her thesis. Neither the thesis nor substantial extracts from it may be printed or otherwise reproduced without his/her permission.

L'auteur conserve la propriété du droit d'auteur qui protège sa thèse. Ni la thèse ni des extraits substantiels de celle-ci ne doivent être imprimés ou autrement reproduits sans son autorisation.

ISBN 0-612-13242-0

Canada

Name "Possible Worlds in Milton's Paradise Lost" By

Dissertation Abstracts International is arranged by broad, general subject categories. Please select the one subject which most nearly describes the content of your dissertation. Enter the corresponding four-digit code in the spaces provided.

LITERATURE - ENGLISH | 0 5 9 3 | U·M·I

SUBJECT TERM | SUBJECT CODE

Subject Categories

THE HUMANITIES AND SOCIAL SCIENCES

COMMUNICATIONS AND THE ARTS
Architecture 0729
Art History 0377
Cinema 0900
Dance 0378
Fine Arts 0357
Information Science 0723
Journalism 0391
Library Science 0399
Mass Communications 0708
Music 0413
Speech Communication 0459
Theater 0465

EDUCATION
General 0515
Administration 0514
Adult and Continuing 0516
Agricultural 0517
Art 0273
Bilingual and Multicultural 0282
Business 0688
Community College 0275
Curriculum and Instruction 0727
Early Childhood 0518
Elementary 0524
Finance 0277
Guidance and Counseling 0519
Health 0680
Higher 0745
History of 0520
Home Economics 0278
Industrial 0521
Language and Literature 0279
Mathematics 0280
Music 0522
Philosophy of 0998
Physical 0523
Psychology 0525
Reading 0535
Religious 0527
Sciences 0714
Secondary 0533
Social Sciences 0534
Sociology of 0340
Special 0529
Teacher Training 0530
Technology 0710
Tests and Measurements 0288
Vocational 0747

LANGUAGE, LITERATURE AND LINGUISTICS
Language
- General 0679
- Ancient 0289
- Linguistics 0290
- Modern 0291

Literature
- General 0401
- Classical 0294
- Comparative 0295
- Medieval 0297
- Modern 0298
- African 0316
- American 0591
- Asian 0305
- Canadian (English) 0352
- Canadian (French) 0355
- English 0593
- Germanic 0311
- Latin American 0312
- Middle Eastern 0315
- Romance 0313
- Slavic and East European 0314

PHILOSOPHY, RELIGION AND THEOLOGY
Philosophy 0422
Religion
- General 0318
- Biblical Studies 0321
- Clergy 0319
- History of 0320
- Philosophy of 0322

Theology 0469

SOCIAL SCIENCES
American Studies 0323
Anthropology
- Archaeology 0324
- Cultural 0326
- Physical 0327

Business Administration
- General 0310
- Accounting 0272
- Banking 0770
- Management 0454
- Marketing 0338

Canadian Studies 0385
Economics
- General 0501
- Agricultural 0503
- Commerce-Business 0505
- Finance 0508
- History 0509
- Labor 0510
- Theory 0511

Folklore 0358
Geography 0366
Gerontology 0351
History
- General 0578
- Ancient 0579
- Medieval 0581
- Modern 0582
- Black 0328
- African 0331
- Asia, Australia and Oceania 0332
- Canadian 0334
- European 0335
- Latin American 0336
- Middle Eastern 0333
- United States 0337

History of Science 0585
Law 0398
Political Science
- General 0615
- International Law and Relations 0616
- Public Administration 0617

Recreation 0814
Social Work 0452
Sociology
- General 0626
- Criminology and Penology 0627
- Demography 0938
- Ethnic and Racial Studies 0631
- Individual and Family Studies 0628
- Industrial and Labor Relations 0629
- Public and Social Welfare 0630
- Social Structure and Development 0700
- Theory and Methods 0344

Transportation 0709
Urban and Regional Planning 0999
Women's Studies 0453

THE SCIENCES AND ENGINEERING

BIOLOGICAL SCIENCES
Agriculture
- General 0473
- Agronomy 0285
- Animal Culture and Nutrition 0475
- Animal Pathology 0476
- Food Science and Technology 0359
- Forestry and Wildlife 0478
- Plant Culture 0479
- Plant Pathology 0480
- Plant Physiology 0817
- Range Management 0777
- Wood Technology 0746

Biology
- General 0306
- Anatomy 0287
- Biostatistics 0308
- Botany 0309
- Cell 0379
- Ecology 0329
- Entomology 0353
- Genetics 0369
- Limnology 0793
- Microbiology 0410
- Molecular 0307
- Neuroscience 0317
- Oceanography 0416
- Physiology 0433
- Radiation 0821
- Veterinary Science 0778
- Zoology 0472

Biophysics
- General 0786
- Medical 0760

EARTH SCIENCES
Biogeochemistry 0425
Geochemistry 0996
Geodesy 0370
Geology 0372
Geophysics 0373
Hydrology 0388
Mineralogy 0411
Paleobotany 0345
Paleoecology 0426
Paleontology 0418
Paleozoology 0985
Palynology 0427
Physical Geography 0368
Physical Oceanography 0415

HEALTH AND ENVIRONMENTAL SCIENCES
Environmental Sciences 0768
Health Sciences
- General 0566
- Audiology 0300
- Chemotherapy 0992
- Dentistry 0567
- Education 0350
- Hospital Management 0769
- Human Development 0758
- Immunology 0982
- Medicine and Surgery 0564
- Mental Health 0347
- Nursing 0569
- Nutrition 0570
- Obstetrics and Gynecology 0380
- Occupational Health and Therapy 0354
- Ophthalmology 0381
- Pathology 0571
- Pharmacology 0419
- Pharmacy 0572
- Physical Therapy 0382
- Public Health 0573
- Radiology 0574
- Recreation 0575
- Speech Pathology 0460
- Toxicology 0383

Home Economics 0386

PHYSICAL SCIENCES
Pure Sciences

Chemistry
- General 0485
- Agricultural 0749
- Analytical 0486
- Biochemistry 0487
- Inorganic 0488
- Nuclear 0738
- Organic 0490
- Pharmaceutical 0491
- Physical 0494
- Polymer 0495
- Radiation 0754

Mathematics 0405
Physics
- General 0605
- Acoustics 0986
- Astronomy and Astrophysics 0606
- Atmospheric Science 0608
- Atomic 0748
- Electronics and Electricity 0607
- Elementary Particles and High Energy 0798
- Fluid and Plasma 0759
- Molecular 0609
- Nuclear 0610
- Optics 0752
- Radiation 0756
- Solid State 0611

Statistics 0463

Applied Sciences

Applied Mechanics 0346
Computer Science 0984
Engineering
- General 0537
- Aerospace 0538
- Agricultural 0539
- Automotive 0540
- Biomedical 0541
- Chemical 0542
- Civil 0543
- Electronics and Electrical 0544
- Heat and Thermodynamics 0348
- Hydraulic 0545
- Industrial 0546
- Marine 0547
- Materials Science 0794
- Mechanical 0548
- Metallurgy 0743
- Mining 0551
- Nuclear 0552
- Packaging 0549
- Petroleum 0765
- Sanitary and Municipal 0554
- System Science 0790

Geotechnology 0428
Operations Research 0796
Plastics Technology 0795
Textile Technology 0994

PSYCHOLOGY
General 0621
Behavioral 0384
Clinical 0622
Developmental 0620
Experimental 0623
Industrial 0624
Personality 0625
Physiological 0989
Psychobiology 0349
Psychometrics 0632
Social 0451

POSSIBLE WORLDS IN

MILTON'S PARADISE LOST

BY

LYNN KERR

A Thesis submitted to the Faculty of Graduate Studies of the University of Manitoba in partial fulfillment of the requirements of the degree of

MASTER OF ARTS

© 1995

Permission has been granted to the LIBRARY OF THE UNIVERSITY OF MANITOBA to lend or sell copies of this thesis, to the NATIONAL LIBRARY OF CANADA to microfilm this thesis and to lend or sell copies of the film, and LIBRARY MICROFILMS to publish an abstract of this thesis.

The author reserves other publication rights, and neither the thesis nor extensive extracts from it may be printed or other-wise reproduced without the author's written permission.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to thank Dr. John Teunissen for his support and patience throughout the writing of this thesis.

I also wish to thank Dr. Evelyn Hinz and Dr. John Wortley for serving as members of my examining committee.

I would also like to thank The University of Manitoba for the financial support of the Dr. Vernon B. Rhodenizer Graduate Scholarship, 1991-92, and the Duff Roblin Graduate Fellowship, 1992-93.

This thesis is dedicated to Anthony Kaduck --

"...thou to mee

Art all things under heaven"

ABSTRACT

In Paradise Lost, Milton sets himself the challenging assignment of presenting a predetermined story as something other than a predestined series of events. In this thesis I argue that Paradise Lost not only presents the Fall as the product of Adam and Eve's choices, but also repeatedly evokes the real possibility that they could have made other choices which would have actualized other worlds. Unlike Leibniz, who argued that God's omnipotent benevolence must inevitably produce "the best of all possible worlds," Milton depicts a God who can accommodate an infinite variety of possible worlds, any one of which will serve equally well to manifest his infinite power, glory and goodness.

For Milton, human freedom -- the freedom to actualize one of God's many possible worlds -- is both essential for the dignity of humankind and necessary for the vindication of his God. In Paradise Lost, creaturely freedom is affirmed through the textual presence of diverse possible worlds and is enacted by characters endowed with the God-given (and Godlike) capacity to apprehend, select and actualize possibilities through the exercise of right reason. For Milton and for Paradise Lost, the actualization of any particular world (whether fallen or unfallen) is ultimately less important than a recognition of the enduring necessity for faith and hope in the God for whom all things are possible and who turns all possibilities to good.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Introduction..1

Chapter One:

"The Unfallen Possibility: Paradisal Life"...6

Chapter Two:

"Multiplying Possibilities: The Separation Dialogue"........................33

Chapter Three:

"The Possibility of Sin: The Temptations of Eve and Adam".............53

Conclusion..84

Notes..94

Works Cited 101

Introduction

Milton's unequivocal belief in the individual's ability to choose freely between good and evil lies at the heart of the "great argument" by which he would "justify the ways of God to man." For Milton, the concept of free will is both straightforward and imperative. It is straightforward in that he conceives of free will as the ability of a rational creature to choose freely between equally available moral alternatives. It is imperative because unless the freedom of the individual will is acknowledged, it is logically impossible to avoid blaming God for the presence of sin in the world.[1]

That the freedom of the will is inextricably linked to the capacity to choose freely between moral alternatives may seem to be self-evident: in terms of Christian theology, of course, it is not. Christian theologians have argued that free will should be understood only as the freedom to follow the will's own inclination to sin; or even that God himself may act upon the individual will in order to incline it towards sin without in any way abrogating the individual's moral responsibility for the sin that he or she commits.[2] In either case, it is argued, since one follows the inclination of one's own will in sinning, one is justly damned to eternal punishment for persisting in sin.

In The Christian Doctrine, Milton condemns the sort of theological hair-splitting which purports to explain how the individual's will can be simultaneously free and not free; or how God can incline the will toward sin without himself becoming the cause of sin. Milton does not see his faith as requiring him to assent to logical impossibilities.

> [I]t is sufficiently evident, that free causes are not impeded by any law of necessity arising from the decrees or prescience of God. There are some who in their zeal to oppose this doctrine, do not hesitate even to assert that God is himself the cause and origin of sin. Such men, if they are not to be looked upon as misguided rather than mischievous, should be ranked among the most abandoned of all blasphemers. An attempt to refute them, would be nothing more than an argument to prove that God was not the evil spirit. (Milton 915-16)

Milton refuses to invent such an argument -- though in Paradise Lost, he does depict a comparable one as taking place among the fallen angels in hell.

> Others apart sat on a Hill retir'd,
> In thoughts more elevate and reason'd high
> Of Providence, Foreknowledge, Will, and Fate,
> Fixt Fate, Free will, Foreknowledge absolute,
> And found no end, in wandr'ing mazes lost. (2.557-61)

A refusal to engage in blasphemous debate, however, should not be equated with indifference to the subject under discussion, for Paradise Lost certainly lacks neither opinions nor conviction in matters of theology.

In her discussion of "Free Will and Predestination in Paradise Lost," Julia Walker argues that, despite the Father's unambiguous declaration of human free will in Book 3, a "rival reality of predestination" permeates the language of the poem (16). Walker accounts for this apparent contradiction by explaining that Milton was committed, on theological grounds, to a logically untenable position: i.e. to the absolute truth of the story he was telling and to the absolute free will of his human protagonists. With the air of one pronouncing reductio ad absurdum, she observes: "To accept absolute truth and absolute free will is, after all, to grant a realistic half-chance that we might never have existed in our present human state" (13). Precisely so, I would reply; and I find that I can hardly improve upon Stephen Fallon's response to Walker's objection: "The meaning of free will is precisely that from every significant juncture in life, two possible worlds diverge, with only one actualized by the choice of the creature" ("Uses" 100).

This thesis will explore some of the divergent possible worlds of Paradise Lost: the "alternate universes" which, Milton suggests, might have been had the free will decisions of God's rational creatures been different. In place of Walker's "rival reality of predestination," I propose to examine some of the "rival possibilities of free will" which may be found in Milton's poem. I believe that throughout Paradise Lost, Milton is engaged in the task of defining the limits of the necessary, the contingent, the possible and the impossible. To say this is to say that Milton engages in the discourse of modal logic: a discipline which, in recent decades, has revived the Leibnizian concept of possible worlds as part of its search for a viable semantics. In Labyrinths of Reason, William Poundstone explains the concept of a "possible world" as follows:

> It is not another planet out there in space. A possible world is a complete universe unto itself with a past, present, and future. You can talk about the possible world in which Germany won World War II and even about the year 10,000 A.D. in that possible world. People often use the singular to denote what is actually a class of possible worlds. There must be trillions upon trillions of possible worlds in which Germany won World War II, each differing from one another in some detail. There are, or seem to be, an infinite number. The one possible world that we live in is called the "actual" world. (132)

While Leibniz believed that God had necessarily actualized the best of all the possible worlds that were pre-existent in his mind, modern proponents of possible worlds proffer a variety of opinions regarding the reality (as opposed to the actuality) of possible worlds, ranging from the "extreme realism" of David Lewis, to the more moderate position of Nicholas Rescher, who distinguishes between the actuality of the existential universe and the existence of possible worlds as products of human minds and/or discourse.

Although I tend to accept the value of retaining an ontological distinction between the actual and the possible, I am prepared to acknowledge that such distinctions become problematic when the realities under discussion are literary rather than historical -- and certainly few modern (or post-modern) readers of Milton are inclined to accept Paradise Lost as a history of the actual world. For such readers, I would suggest, the actual and possible worlds of Paradise Lost effectively enjoy the same ontological status: the "actual

world" (in which Milton's Adam and Eve fall) and the "possible worlds" (in which they do not or in which they fall under other circumstances) are equally fictional.

I believe that the God of Milton is a God of few necessities and infinite possibilities; and that for Milton, human freedom -- that is, the freedom to actualize one of God's many possible worlds -- is both essential to the dignity of humankind and necessary for the vindication of his God. In this context, I will begin my exploration of the "Possible Worlds of Paradise Lost" by examining Milton's unconventional depiction of paradisal life as a superior, yet recognizably human manner of existence -- and hence as a powerful argument for the real possibility of unfallenness. In my second chapter, I will consider the separation dialogue between Adam and Eve as a textual site for the multiplication of possibilities. My third chapter will seek to uncover the possibilities which continue to exist for Eve and Adam until each, in turn, actually disobeys the "one easy prohibition" -- possibilities which Eve and Adam choose variously to accept, reject and deny. In conclusion, I will argue that for Milton and for Paradise Lost, the actualization of any particular world (whether fallen or unfallen) is ultimately less important than the enduring necessity for faith and hope in the God for whom all things are possible and who turns all possibilities to good.

Chapter One

The Possibility of Unfallenness:

Paradisal Life

In Paradise Lost the case for human free will depends largely on Milton's ability to convince his readers that Adam and Eve did have an alternative course of action available to them: that they could, in fact, have chosen not to eat the forbidden fruit, in which case the Fall (at least as we know it) would not have taken place, and Adam and Eve (not to mention their similarly sinless, faithful and immortal progeny) might still very well be enjoying life in Paradise. For the reader to accept this premise, the text would have to depict unfallen life not merely as luxuriant or desirable, but as possible: i.e. as a real (albeit non-actual) alternative to fallen existence. In this chapter I will argue that Milton enhances the reality of the unfallen possibility by depicting paradisal life a recognizably human but nonetheless superior manner of existence; by insisting on the evolving rather than static nature of unfallen perfection; and by implicitly extending the duration of the prelapsarian world backward and forward in time.

Roy Daniells calls Milton's garden "an image of permanent happiness" and notes, perhaps ruefully, that "it is customary to sneer a little at the concept" (15). Milton criticism has periodically addressed what is seen as the inherently unsatisfactory nature of paradisal life, usually by way of what Diane McColley has neatly summarized as "the nostalgic reading, which makes prelapsarian life charming but irrelevant, and the rebel reading, in which the Fall is an escape from a tiresome bucolic repose" (Milton's Eve 123). Thus, in the 1930s for example, Basil Willey claimed to see in Milton's Eden "the blank innocence

and effortlessness of a golden age" (229); while E. M. W. Tillyard wrote that Milton "fails to convince us that Adam and Eve are happy because he can find no adequate scope for their active natures" and described Adam and Eve's life in Eden as "utter stagnation" (Milton 239). Tillyard ultimately recanted, conceding that raising children might have provided even an unfallen Adam and Eve with some small degree of challenge (Studies 68); but the modern equivalent of this view persists (curiously enough) in the work of feminist critic Stevie Davies, for whom Milton's Eden is "the closed world of eternal childhood and spring" which Eve fortunately "liberate[s] into culture" (246-47).

Other critical approaches to Milton's garden have included the discussion of archetypal imagery (Stein 52-74; MacCaffrey 144-58), classical allusion (Giamatti 299-313), and Christian commentary and tradition (Patrides 97-108,165-68; Lewis 65-71; Duncan 38-124). Each of these approaches has yielded thoughtful analyses of Milton's artistry and of his debt to earlier depictions (classical, Jewish and Christian) of the hortus conclusus. Nevertheless, as Barbara Lewalski warns, "the reader who expects to find the paradisiacal garden of archetypal myth or traditional theology in Paradise Lost will encounter several surprises which are not minor and are not played down" ("Innocence" 86).

A distinguishing feature of Milton's Eden is its eminently civilized quality: indeed, Northrop Frye observes that "Few can have read Paradise Lost without being struck by the curiously domesticated nature of the life of Adam and Eve before the fall" (66). Contrary to what the reader might expect, Adam and Eve do not simply sleep out under

the stars. Rather, at the end of each day, they retire to "thir blissful Bower":

....it was a place

Chos'n by the sovran Planter, when he fram'd

All things to man's delightful use; the roof

Of thickest covert was inwoven shade

Laurel and Myrtle, and what higher grew

Of firm and fragrant leaf; on either side

Acanthus, and each odorous bushy shrub

Fenc'd up the verdant wall; each beauteous flow'r,

Iris all hues, Roses, and Jessamin

Rear'd high thir flourisht heads between, and wrought

Mosaic; underfoot the Violet,

Crocus, and Hyacinth with rich inlay

Broider'd the ground, more color'd than with stone

Of costliest Emblem: other Creature here

Beast, Bird, Insect, or Worm durst enter none;

Such was thir awe of Man. (4.690-705)

The reader is advised that Eve "deckt first her Nuptial bed" with sweet smelling herbs and flowers (4.710); and is even allowed a glimpse of Eve working in her "kitchen":

> ....fruit of all kind, in coat,
>
> Rough, or smooth rin'd, or bearded husk, or shell
>
> She gathers, Tribute large, and on the board,
>
> Heaps with unsparing hand; for drink the Grape
>
> She crushes, inoffensive must, and meaths
>
> From many a berry, and from sweet kernels prest
>
> She tempers dulcet creams, nor these to hold
>
> Wants her fit vessels pure .... (5.341-48)

This dinner is served and enjoyed at a square table "rais'd of grassy turf" which "mossy seats had round" (5.391-92) -- "a nice tactile differentiation," Daniells observes, "in view of what is not being worn" (6). This bower, while undeniably idyllic, is nonetheless recognizable as a human dwelling place: in Milton's Eden, Adam and Eve have a house! And clearly, Adam and Eve do not deal with physical hunger merely by reaching out and plucking whatever fruit happens to be nearby (although of course they can do this too, whenever they wish). Rather, meals are prepared with loving care and are served at appropriate hours of the day in pleasant and dignified surroundings.

Jewish and Christian commentators alike accepted that Adam and Eve were truly husband and wife, joined together in marriage by no less an authority than God himself: "And the rib, which the Lord God had taken from man, made he a woman, and brought her unto the man" -- Genesis 2:22 (Fresch 21). But while the prelapsarian marriage of Adam and Eve was all but universally acknowledged, the Christian exegetical tradition

also taught that Adam and Eve had fallen within hours of their creation -- and certainly prior to the consummation of their sexual relationship.[3] Milton arguably departs most fully from orthodox Christian teaching with his uncompromising insistence that "sex at its most beautiful and meaningful did flourish in Eden" (Danielson, Milton's Good God 188).

> ...into thir inmost bower
> Handed they went; and eas'd the putting off
> These troublesome disguises which wee wear,
> Straight side by side were laid, nor turn'd I ween
> Adam from his fair Spouse, nor Eve the Rites
> Mysterious of connubial Love refus'd.... (4.738-43)

Milton's depiction of Adam and Eve's unfallen sexuality enhances both the reality and the attractiveness of the unfallen possibility.

> ... half her swelling Breast
> Naked met his under the flowing
> Gold of her loose tresses hid: hee in delight
> Both of her Beauty and submissive Charms
> Smil'd with superior Love...and press'd her Matron lip
> With kisses pure.... (4.495-98;501-02)

If sexual love did not exist in Milton's Paradise, the reader would be left to assume "that this profound dimension of human love was somehow occasioned by the fall" (Danielson, Milton's Good God 188). Milton does not permit his readers this interpretation: in Paradise Lost, the Fall triggers lust, not love:

> But come, so well refresh't, now let us play,
> As meet is, after such delicious Fare;
> For never did thy Beauty since the day
> I saw thee first and wedded thee, adorn'd
> With all perfections, so inflame my sense
> With ardour to enjoy thee....
> So said he, and forbore not glance or toy
> Of amourous intent, well understood
> Of Eve, whose Eye darted contagious Fire
> Her hand he seiz'd, and to a shady bank...
> He led her nothing loath. (9.1027-32,34-7,38)

One basis for the traditional denial of a prelapsarian sexual relationship between Adam and Eve was the assumption that unfallen sexual intercourse would necessarily have resulted in conception, and hence in the birth of a child free from the taint of Original Sin (which Cain, the first child born to Adam and Eve, evidently was not). This assumption, however, owes more to the conventions of classical mythology than to those of scripture;

and in Paradise Lost, Milton does not allow his depiction of paradisal life to be constrained by such pagan considerations. McColley elaborates:

> Every sacrosanct rape by a pagan god begets a hero or a hapless girl or a troublemaker, but the mothers of biblical heroes -- Sarah, Rachel, Manoah's wife, Hannah, Elizabeth -- often had to wait through years of married barrenness. If Adam and Eve had not fallen, Eve might have been bloomingly pregnant much of the time, and each child a burgeoning microcosm of beauty, wit, talent, affection, and new ideas. But Milton imagines a time of sheer amorous delight before the first conception in aid of the other purposes of marriage he lists first in Tetrachordon -- "a mutual help to piety" and "to civil fellowship of love and amity; then to generation" -- and in preparation for the arrival of new lives. (Gust 201-02)

Milton's God is the God of Abraham: a God who tested the faith of his chosen servant for many years before finally fulfilling his promise to make Abraham's descendants as numerous "as the stars of the heaven, and as the sand which is upon the sea shore" (Genesis 23:17). The prayers of the unfallen Adam and Eve affirm their faith in God's promise to provide "from us two a Race / To fill the Earth" (4.732-33); but in their unfallen world (no less than in the fallen one) the conception of a race (or even of a child) is evidently to be experienced as a divine gift rather than as the inevitable consequence of physical coupling.[4]

In Paradise Lost, marriage and family are "translapsarian categories" (Danielson, Milton's Good God 188) which affirm the real possibility of unfallenness and which enable the reader to make meaningful comparisons between pre- and postlapsarian life. For example, moments after her creation, Eve is gently directed towards Adam by a heavenly voice which tells her:

> Whose image thou art, him thou shalt enjoy
> Inseparably thine, to him shalt bear
> Multitudes like thyself, and thence be call'd
> Mother of the human Race. (4.472-75)

After the Fall, woman's role is still that of child-bearer, but the description of this role is tragically altered:

> ...Children thou shalt bring
> In sorrow forth, and to thy Husband's will
> Thine shall submit, hee over thee shall rule. (10.194-96)

The depiction of the unfallen Adam and Eve in Paradise Lost suggests that paradisal life would include marriage, sexual love, and children, but without the rancor or "vain contest" which so invariably characterize personal relationships in the fallen world. Milton's text

thus evokes a way of life which is at once superior to our own, and yet resonantly and undeniably human.

In an unfallen world, personal relationships would extend beyond those within the human family. Raphael tells Adam that angelic visits to earth, for social as well as educative purposes, should be seen as a commonplace feature of the unfallen life.

> Adam, I therefore came, nor art thou such
> Created, or such place hast here to dwell
> As may not oft invite, though Spirits of Heav'n
> To visit thee. (5.372-75)

The notion of such interspecies friendships appears to be an idea very close to Milton's heart. There is no mistaking the note of genuine regret in the poet's tone at the beginning of Book 9:

> No more of talk where God or Angel Guest
> With Man, as with his Friend, familiar us'd
> To sit indulgent, and with him partake
> Rural repast, permitting him the while
> Venial discourse unblam'd: I now must change
> Those Notes to Tragic. (9.1-6)

The poet's regret increases the reader's perception that humanity could and should have enjoyed the friendship of angels as part of everyday experience.

Milton's Adam and Eve are not vacationers in Milton's paradise: they are gardeners, whose efforts make a significant contribution to the quality of life in Eden. Before going to bed, Adam enumerates the tasks that await them the following day:

> With first approach of light, we must be ris'n,
> And at our pleasant labor, to reform
> Yon flow'ry Arbors, yonder Alleys green,
> Our walk at noon, with branches overgrown,
> That mock our scant manuring, and require
> More hands than ours to lop thir wanton growth,
> Those Blossoms also, and those dropping gums,
> That lie bestrown unsightly and unsmooth,
> Ask riddance, if we mean to tread with ease. (4.624-32)

The "wanton growth" of Milton's paradise has been interpreted as foreshadowing the Fall (Hamilton 45), and as evidence of the Garden's inherently transitory nature (Stein 67-74). But Milton's garden -- a garden capable of reverting to wilderness without faithful cultivation, but which can also be made even more delightful through human effort -- may be understood at least as readily as an expression of Milton's resounding belief in the

human capacity to choose freely whether or not to co-operate with the divine plan expressed in creation. Lewalski observes:

> ...the world that was made for them by the 'Sovran Planter'...must be preserved, cultivated, sustained and raised to higher states of perfection by their own proper labor....this fundamental responsibility of man for his world is not a postlapsarian condition but has obtained from the beginning.
>
> ("Innocence" 91)

This responsibility, moreover, is not Adam's alone: McColley draws particular attention to Milton's unprecedented depiction of Eve as "a gardener even more committed and original that Adam" who is "engaged in acts of creative stewardship and design as a regular part of her life" (Gust 126).

> Veil'd in a Cloud of Fragrance, where she stood,
> ....so thick the Roses bushing round
> About her glow'd, oft stooping to support
> Each Flow'r of slender stalk, whose head though gay
> Carnation, Purple, Azure, or speckt with Gold,
> Hung drooping unsustain'd, them she upstays
> Gently with Myrtle band.... (9.425-31)

Eve's horticultural artistry is also evident in "thick-wov'n Arborets and Flow'rs / Imborder'd on each Bank, the hand of Eve" (9.437-38). Milton also extends to his Eve the traditionally male prerogative of naming: his Eve gives the flowers their names, just as Adam gives theirs to the beasts (McColley, Gust 126-27).[5]

Their work necessitates a life of moderate discipline: they must retire early and rise at first light in order to work in the coolness of the early morning hours. The "heat of noon," we are told, is "more warmth than Adam needs" (5.302); and so he must retire to "bower or shade...to respite his day-labour with repast, or with repose" (5.231-32). Milton thus explicitly challenges Augustine's notion of the Garden of Eden as a place where there was "never a day too hot or too cold" (City of God 14.26, quoted in Danielson, Milton's Good God 181).

Milton's depiction of the prelapsarian life of Adam and Eve seems to strike at the heart of any popular notion of paradisal life. Work? Rising at dawn? In paradise?! Yes, says Adam, calmly,

> Man hath his daily work of body or mind
> Appointed, which declares his Dignity,
> And the regard of Heav'n on all his ways. (4.618-20)

Milton suggests that a paradise without physical labour would effectively deprive humankind of the joys of leisure.

> They set them down...after no more toil
> Of thir sweet Gard'ning labor than suffic'd
> To recommend cool Zephyr, and made ease
> More easy, wholesome thirst and appetite
> More grateful....(4.327-31)

In Milton's paradise, this healthful alternation of work and leisure both reflects and contributes to the "grateful vicissitude" (6.08) which characterizes all of God's creation, whether on earth or in heaven. The fact that the garden seems somewhat unmanageable to Adam and Eve reinforces the divine command to procreate and at the same time promises security and plenty for themselves and their offspring. The need for still "more hands" in order to "dress and keep" the garden thus heightens the reader's perception of Milton's Garden of Eden as a place designed to sustain and delight many generations of immortal beings.

In Milton's Paradise, unfallen human beings -- like their fallen counterparts -- must strive faithfully if they would actualize their physical, mental and spiritual possibilities. Although Satan calls the unfallen world "a Fabric wonderful / of absolute perfection" (10.484), Milton's God describes it only as "yonder world... which I created so fair and good" (10.617-18). Over the past twenty-five years, a growing number of Milton critics have recognized that Paradise Lost depicts the unfallen world as possessing an evolving rather than an absolute perfection. J. M. Evans, for example, notes that Milton depicts prelapsarian innocence as a "kind of spiritual apprenticeship" (246), adding that "the idea

of spontaneous self-discipline, so common in previous treatments of Milton's theme is totally foreign to Paradise Lost and indeed to all of Milton's thinking" (266). Stanley Fish comments that "Innocence, far from being static, includes large possibilities for growth as well as the possibility of declining to grow" (226). Lewalski likewise argues that Milton defines the state of innocence not as "stable serene completeness" but as "radical growth and process, a mode of life steadily increasing in complexity and challenge and difficulty but at the same time and by that very fact, in perfection" ("Innocence" 88).

Adam and Eve's joint efforts to bring order to the garden -- to bring order out of chaos -- enhance their understanding of themselves as beings made in the image and likeness of God. Their experience as gardeners also teaches them that restrictive activities (such as plucking, pruning and cutting) paradoxically serve to promote greater fertility (Lewalski, "Innocence" 91-92):

> On to thir morning's rural work they haste
> Among sweet dews and flow'rs; where any row
> Of Fruit-trees overwoody reach'd too far
> Thir pamper'd boughs, and needed hands to check
> Fruitless imbraces; or they led the Vine
> To wed her Elm.... (5.211-16)

Adam and Eve must learn to apply the lessons of the garden to their own natures. As Eve's feelings must be guided (like the vine about the elm), so too Adam's desire for knowledge must be "checked" lest it "reach too far" (Evans 253-57).

Beyond their responsibilities to care for the garden and to raise their children, Adam and Eve are also called upon to engage in that daily labor of the mind which Milton, in "Of Education" calls "laborious indeed at first ascent but else so smooth, so green, so full of goodly prospect and melodious sounds on every side that the harp of Orpheus was not more charming" (632). Since Milton sees learning as such a delightful part of fallen existence, it is hardly surprising that his Paradise includes opportunities for Adam and Eve to expand their knowledge of the world and of themselves and to exercise their capacities for intellectual and moral reasoning. John Peter notes that the unfallen Adam and Eve spend much of their time "in discovery, in learning what to think and how to behave.... Time and time again they are seen questioning, probing, extending the comprehension they already have" (98).

Adam's first conversation with his creator serves as a good example of the paradisal model for education. Based on Adam's description in Book 8, this exchange may be understood as a Socratic dialogue in which the teacher (God) draws forth knowledge from the student (Adam) by posing a series of questions and by examining the implications of the student's answers. Thus, in response to Adam's request for a companion with whom to share Paradise, God asks questions which are designed to encourage Adam to consider his conceptions of solitude and companionship more carefully, and to articulate his conclusions in a logical and coherent fashion:

> What call'st thou solitude? is not the Earth
> With various living creatures, and the Air
> Replenisht, and all these at thy command
> To come and play before thee; know'st thou not
> Thir language and thir ways? (8.369-73)

Adam's reply indicates that he recognizes that his need for a companion is related to his need for rational discourse: a need which distances man from the beasts. Adam also refers to the eminently suitable pairing of the lion and lioness, but he does not specifically mention his own need for a mate for procreation.

Adam's reply is good, but incomplete. God's next series of questions ask Adam to consider the difference between God and man in the same manner that he has considered the difference between man and beast.

> What thinks thou then of mee and this my State,
> Seem I to thee sufficiently possest
> Of happiness, or not? who am alone
> From all Eternity, for none I know
> Second to mee or like, equal much less. (8.403-6)

The question leads Adam to contemplate God's perfect self-sufficiency which in turn leads him to a fuller understanding of the kind of companion that he requires: not merely a fellow man, but someone with whom to share "collateral love and dearest amity," to "help or solace his defects," and, of course, to provide for the propagation of the human race (8.426; 418-19; 420). Adam's answer thus reflects his improved understanding of the nature and purpose of human relationships.

Arthur Lovejoy observes that "Milton's Adam is quoting Aristotle when he contrasts God's self-sufficiency with his own need for a companion" ("Historiography" 5). While this episode reveals the newly created Adam's intellectual powers (he effortlessly equals the insights of classical philosophy regarding the nature of the supreme good), it also seems designed to illustrate the inherent limitations of human reasoning. Adam may intuit the existence of a "great Maker" and he may deductively reason that this Maker must be self-sufficient, but he cannot reason his way to a knowledge of the Son or to an understanding of the Son's special role as intermediary between the transcendent unknowable God and his creatures. God asks Adam to consider:

> How have I then with whom to hold converse
>
> Save with the Creatures which I made, and those
>
> To me inferior infinite descents
>
> Beneath what other Creatures are to thee? (8.408-11, emphasis mine).

To the fallen reader, with the benefit of Christian revelation, the answer is obvious: how indeed but through his Word, the divine Logos, the Son of God?

Milton's God apparently poses this question in a tone of kindly amusement, recognizing that the revelation of the Son awaits a later stage in Adam's education (though he may also be gently prodding Adam to further inquiry). When Adam replies that God "canst raise thy Creature to what highth thou wilt / Of Union or Communion, deifi'd" (8.430-31), he shows that he recognizes the theoretical possibility of a being like the Son. But Adam does not attempt to pursue this matter, nor does he recognize that even now he is (necessarily, from Milton's point of view) conversing with God through the agency of the Son. Instead, Adam dutifully acknowledges God's infinite superiority, and promptly turns the discussion away from the nature of God and back to his own desire for a companion.

Milton's God does not comment on Adam's conclusions regarding divine self-sufficiency nor does he answer Adam's question of how he is to be addressed. Milton's God may be amused by Adam's evident single-mindedness in this conversation, but he is also, for the moment, clearly satisfied with Adam's reasoning and his faith. Adam has passed his first test (if not brilliantly, at least adequately) and has demonstrated both to God and to himself that he is ready to embark on the next stage of his education as a human being. Consequently, God gives him Eve, who is not only the companion Adam desires and requires, but who will also serve as yet another test of his ability to exercise that "right reason" which is the basis of free will. The creation of Eve ("Mother of all Living") from the rib of Adam is also (potentially) educative, in that the process may be

seen as analogous to God's generation of the Son, who is "of all creation first" and by whom all things are made. Through his dream-vision, Adam observes the creation of Eve, and is thus permitted to experience the creative process in a way that emphasizes the "God in him."

In the unfallen world, God is humankind's best and most perfect teacher; but he is not the only one. For example, Adam calls Raphael "Divine instructor" and recognizes the educational aspect of his visit.

> What thanks sufficient, or what recompense
> Equal have I to render thee, Divine
> Historian, who thus largely hast allay'd
> The thirst I had of knowledge. (8.05-08)

In fact, Raphael instructs Adam not only in history (the war in heaven and the creation) but also in metaphysics and astronomy. Raphael teaches Adam that creation is monistic -- "one first matter all" (5.473) -- but indued by God with "various forms, various degrees" (5.472). The difference between human and angel, Raphael insists, is comparable to the difference between the root and flower of the same plant: "Differing but in degree, of kind the same" (5.490). Adam learns from Raphael that "the scale of Nature [is] set / From centre to circumference, whereon / In contemplation of created things / By steps we may ascend to God" (5.509-12); and that "Heav'n / Is as the Book of God before thee set / Wherein to read his wondrous Works and learn" (8.65-67). Raphael's words suggest that

Nature itself serves as the unfallen counterpart of scripture: a divine revelation to be studied, pondered, and interpreted.[6] Thus, the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil and the Tree of Life grow side-by-side in the middle of the garden: a symbolic juxtaposition of Adam and Eve's pledge of obedience and of God's promise of eternal life (Grossman, Authors 77-82). Likewise, the animals within Eden are "friendly," reminding Adam and Eve of their dominion over the beasts; while the Sea and its creatures (which cannot harm Adam and Eve) function as visible manifestations of God's power (Burden 51). Raphael's refusal to give Adam a definitive model of planetary motion reflects Milton's firm belief (especially in the context of Galileo's persecution by the Catholic Church) that "scientific fact is not the concern of God's revelation to man" (Lewalski, "Innocence" 111).[7] Far from discouraging Adam's astronomical speculations, however, Raphael supplies additional possibilities for Adam to ponder regarding planetary motion, and even raises the possibility of life on other planets.

As Adam is the student of God and of Raphael, so Eve is the student of Adam.

> Her Husband the Relater she preferr'd
> Before the Angel, and of him to ask
> Chose rather: hee, she knew, would intermix
> Grateful digressions, and solve high dispute
> With conjugal caresses.... (8.51-5)

To quote Joan Hartman, "It is a repellent model for women's education, though one I am sure Milton thought charming" (132). Presumably more important, however, is its basis in scripture: Milton's unfallen Eve apparently inclines by nature to that which Paul later prescribes for all women -- "And if they will learn anything let them ask their husbands at home" (1 Corinthians 14:35). Milton's Paradise is designed as a community in which learning and education are to grow and flourish.

Ultimately, the unfallen Adam and Eve are to raise themselves "by degrees of merit," that they may (in the Father's words) "open to themselves at length the way / Up hither, under long obedience tri'd" (7.158-9). In Milton's Eden, obedience is not passive, but dynamic and transformative (Grossman, Authors 93). By persevering in obedience to God's "sole command," Adam and Eve and their descendants can actualize a universe in which "Earth [is] chang'd to Heav'n, and Heav'n to Earth, / One Kingdom, Joy and Union without end" (7.160-61). Even for unfallen beings, however, obedience is not automatic -- as Raphael explains:

> Myself and all th'Angelic Host that stand
> In sight of God enthron'd, our happy state
> Hold, as you yours, while our obedience holds;
> On other surety none; freely we serve,
> Because we freely love, as in our will
> To love or not; in this we stand or fall....(5.535-40)

The Father's instructions indicate that the possibility of disobedience is precisely what Raphael is to communicate to humankind:

> ...warn him to beware
> He swerve not too secure: tell him withal
> His danger, and from whom, what enemy
> Late fall'n himself from Heaven, is plotting now
> The fall of others from like state of bliss.... (5.237-41)

The knowledge that disobedience is possible increases the moral complexity of the reality which Adam and Eve inhabit; and hence offers them the possibility for spiritual growth. An understanding of moral possibilities, however, should not be confused with experiential knowledge. In the aftermath of the war in heaven, the Son and the faithful angels are well acquainted with the concepts of disobedience and rebellion; and their desire and their ability to stand is enhanced rather than destroyed by the experience. Similarly, while Milton's Adam and Eve are sinless prior to the Fall, "Their innocence consists not of no acquaintance with evil but of no taint by it" (Blackburn 124) Adam and Eve's sinless condition is thus in no way lessened either by the theoretical understanding of disobedience furnished by Raphael's parable[8] or by Eve's totally involuntary experience of evil in her dream; rather, both Raphael's mission and Eve's dream may be understood as examples of the kind of moral experience which would allow unfallen human beings to

grow in spiritual and moral wisdom while preserving both their innocence and their freedom to know and to choose the good.

Eve's dream may, in fact, be seen primarily as a vindication of the Father's statement that an attempt by Satan to subvert humankind by force will not be permitted: "By violence, no, for that shall be withstood / But by deceit and lies" (5.242-43). Satan may force the sleeping Eve to disobey the injunction against the tree (though Eve's account certainly suggests his inability even to force her to dream of eating the forbidden fruit) but in any case he cannot force her to sin. Sin results only when a rational being allows his or her reason to be persuaded "by deceit and lies" so that the will freely chooses to sin rather than to obey the commands of God. Until and unless Eve eats the fruit as a free act of will, she is sinless and the world around her remains unfallen. For Milton, the world in which Satan is able to compel an unwilling Eve (or Adam) to eat the forbidden fruit is a world in which God's "goodness and...greatness both [should] / Be question'd and blasphemed without defense" (3.165-66) -- and hence, I would argue, an impossible world.

Eve and Adam admittedly experience some distress as a result of this dream and of course we do not conventionally associate distress (any more than work) with paradisal life. This prelapsarian distress, however, is qualitatively different from the post-lapsarian variety. (The reader may consider, by way of contrast, the "abyss of fears and horrors" experienced by the fallen Adam, and the desperate anguish of the fallen Eve, who willingly endures Adam's harshest reproaches rather than risk being left to face Death alone.) Moreover, the distress which Eve experiences in the aftermath of her dream immediately

proves to be a source of positive spiritual development for the unfallen couple. First of all, they comfort one another, thus discrediting any notion that "mutual help and solace" between men and women is unnecessary in the unfallen world and thus, presumably, a product of the Fall.

> So cheer'd he his fair Spouse, and she was cheer'd,
> But silently a gentle tear let fall
> From either eye, and wip'd them with her hair;
> Two other precious drops that ready stood,
> Each in thir crystal sluice, hee ere they fell
> Kiss'd as the gracious signs of sweet remorse
> And pious awe, that fear'd to have offended. (5.129-36)

The essential humanity of this scene cannot be denied. If Milton includes tears in his Paradise, it is not because he sees its inhabitants as inevitability or already fallen, but because he understands that a world in which women cried no tears would be a world in which men could never kiss women's tears away. Such a world would be infinitely poorer than any fallen one: it would certainly be no Paradise.

The second consequence of Eve's dream is that Adam and Eve learn that vexations of the spirit may be soothed through prayer. Adam and Eve's prayers usually take the form of spontaneous hymns of praise: "The church of Adam and Eve is never far from heaven, meets twice daily, and improvises a new liturgy each time" (McColley, Gust 136).

In this prayer, however, the reader perceives Adam and Eve's enhanced awareness of their own vulnerability.

> Hail universal Lord, be bounteous still
> To give us only good; and if the night
> Have gather'd aught of evil or conceal'd
> Disperse it, as now light dispels the dark
> So pray'd they innocent, and to thir thoughts
> Firm peace recover'd soon and wonted calm. (5.205-10)

Their consciousness of this possibility rightly prompts them to entrust themselves to God's care, and as a result they are calmed and strengthened. In fact, the lesson of Eve's dream (both for Adam and Eve and for the reader) is that the proper response to anything new or troubling is always to turn to God.

Finally, Milton's epic apparently rejects the traditionally ephemeral nature of the Christian paradise, and implies instead that Adam and Eve have been living in Eden for some time prior to Satan's arrival in Eden. When Satan first encounters the happy couple, Eve is telling Adam how she "oft remembers" (4.449) the day of her creation. Later that evening, when she asks her husband for whom the stars shine, Adam reminds her "how often from the steep / Of echoing Hill or thick have we heard / Celestial voice" (4.680-09). The following morning, Eve's speech reveals that she is sufficiently familiar with dreams to recognize her satanically induced one as an aberration -- indeed, she doubts whether it

should be called a dream at all: "for I this Night...have dream'd, / If dream'd, not as I oft am wont, of thee, / Works of day past, or morrow's next design" (5.30-33). A full week then passes before Satan reappears to tempt Eve in the form of a serpent. After the Fall, the Son arrives to judge the human pair and asks: "Where art thou Adam wont with joy to meet / My coming seen far off?" (10.103-04) and "My voice thou oft hast heard....how is it now become / So dreadful to thee?" (10.119-121). Adam is subsequently grief-stricken to learn that he must leave the Garden where he has "so oft beheld" the face of God and Angel (11.1082). Adam's and Eve's (and especially the Son's) use of words such as "wont" , "oft" and "so often" to describe the details of Adam and Eve's unfallen existence suggests that they have been enjoying life in Eden for some significant period of time (Babb 129); and this, in turn, implicitly validates and substantiates the possibility of unfallen existence.

Likewise, the unfallen Adam and Eve possess a strong sense of the future possibilities of unfallen life. Their prayers, as we have seen, anticipate "a Race / To fill the Earth, who shall with us extol / Thy goodness, infinite" (4.732-34). Adam's explanation to Eve of the movement of heavenly bodies refers to the needs of nations "yet unborn." Finally, after the Fall, Michael supplies a bittersweet glimpse into an alternate unfallen history of humanity:

> ...this [Eden] had been
> Perhaps thy Capital Seat, from whence had spread
> All generations, and had hither come
> From all the ends of th'Earth, to celebrate

And reverence thee thir great Progenitor.

But this preeminence thou hast lost.... (11.342-47)

The tangibility of this discarded possibility is underlined by the word "loss": although Adam cannot, in terms of actuality, be said to have lost a pre-eminence among descendants who have yet to be conceived, the reader senses that the loss is no less real for being non-actual. Furthermore, Michael's reference to this alternative future gains solidity from the nature of his commission from the Father: i.e. to "reveal / To Adam what shall come in future days, / As I shall thee enlighten" (11.113-15). If Michael has come to Adam expressly for the purpose of revealing what is to happen, is it really so improbable that he should speak with divine authority about what could have happened?

Milton's paradise is not a place of static and unchanging perfection but a dynamic stimulating environment expressly designed to allow unfallen men and women to explore and expand their physical, mental and spiritual capacities. Paradise Lost presents unfallen life as a valid alternative mode of human existence complete with love, marriage, sex, children, friendship, healthful labour, intellectual education, moral development and prayer. In the relationship between the unfallen Adam and Eve, we perceive the beginnings of such familiar institutions as the family, the school, the church and the government. In this way, Milton enhances the reader's impression that there is indeed a choice to be made in the Garden of Eden: a choice that will determine the context within which the rest of human history will unfold.

Chapter Two

Multiplying Possibilities:

The Separation Dialogue

I have suggested that if free will is the ability of a rational being to choose between equally available moral alternatives, then the case for human free will in Paradise Lost depends not only on Milton's depiction of the choices that Adam and Eve make, but also on his evocation of the alternative possibilities that they reject. Like their biblical counterparts, Milton's Adam and Eve actually eat the forbidden fruit. As we have seen, however, the possibility that they will not and the attendant possibility of an unfallen existence are also present in Milton's narrative. In the following chapters, I shall consider the multiple possibilities which permeate Milton's account of the Fall of humankind. Specifically, I will argue that the separation dialogue and the temptations of Eve and Adam, all constitute "significant junctures" (Fallon, "Uses" 101) from which various possible worlds diverge. Throughout his elaboration and expansion of the story recorded in Genesis, Milton draws the reader's attention to the multiplicity of choices which define Adam and Eve's existence as rational beings, and which bear witness to their freedom to actualize one of God's many possible worlds.

The separation dialogue in Book 9 of Paradise Lost has been the subject of intense critical scrutiny and debate. There are those critics for whom the separation manifests the inherent fallenness of Milton's human protagonists (Tillyard, Studies in Milton 10-11; Bell 873) or at any rate the corruption of Eve in the wake of her satanically inspired dream (Waldock 33-34; Patrides 105-06). Others argue that the separation itself marks the

beginning of the Fall: that it constitutes a moral failure which makes the Fall inevitable or all but inevitable (Stein 102; Burden 89-91). Still others maintain that although the separation is a mistake which increases the likelihood of the Fall, it in no way necessitates the Fall: Marshall Grossman, for example, observes that the separation is an error of judgement but not sinful because Adam and Eve have not been ordered never to separate nor has Eve been told to obey every command given by Adam ("Dramatic" 210); likewise, Joan Bennett claims that Eve's staying or going is by itself a "thing indifferent" and that Adam's failure to persuade her to stay is tactical but not moral (116-17).

Frye, however, declares that Adam is right to let Eve go, and that the decision to separate appears wrong only in retrospect (63). John Reichert likewise defends the couple's decision to work separately, noting that when Eve asks "what is Faith, Love, Virtue unassay'd / Alone, without exterior help sustain'd?" she echoes not merely Milton's sentiments in Areopagitica, but also the Father's argument in Book 3: "Not free, what proof could they have giv'n sincere / Of true allegiance, constant Faith or Love...?" (91-92). Diane McColley, Stella Revard and Diana Benet[9] all present compelling cases for Eve's sufficiency to stand whether she is alone or with Adam; and McColley contends that the couple's decision to separate represents the better (if riskier) option, because for Adam and Eve to allow the possibility of evil to constrain their God-given freedom and to restrict their potential for good would be for them to allow evil, in some sense, to triumph (Milton's Eve 154).

The critical consensus, one is tempted to conclude, is that Eve's desire to work alone is either praiseworthy, sinful, or misguided; that Adam's decision to let Eve go is

either right, wrong, or indifferent; and that the separation itself is either a necessary and sufficient cause of the Fall, a necessary but not sufficient cause of the Fall, or neither a necessary nor sufficient cause of the Fall. It may be, as a recent contributor to Milton Quarterly observes, that "No intelligent reading is wrong" (Swan 64); but surely the separation scene's capacity to sustain such diverse and even flatly contradictory readings signals something other than the undeniable ingenuity of literary critics. I would like to suggest that the separation scene in Paradise Lost is remarkable for its proliferation of possibilities; that the substance and format of the separation dialogue are designed to elicit speculation regarding the ways in which "things could have been otherwise"; and that ultimately the separation scene aims less at convincing the reader that the choice to separate is right or wrong, than at persuading the reader that the choice to separate or not exists.

The isolation of Eve during her temptation by the serpent is not strictly required by the Genesis account[10]; it is, rather, a tradition of considerable lineage which is based on the assumption that had Adam been present, he would not have stood by passively while the serpent successfully tempted his wife. Jewish and Christian commentaries and earlier literary and dramatic interpretations of the Fall offered Milton a range of possible explanations for the separation of Adam and Eve: that God had assigned Adam and Eve to work in separate portions of the garden; that God had taken Adam for an extended tour of Eden; or even that Adam and Eve had separated by chance in the course of exploring the garden by themselves.[11] Alternatively, many writers and commentators suggested that woman's inherent curiosity (or vanity or idleness or love of secrecy)[12] was in some way

responsible for Eve's isolation: that Adam had gone apart to pray or to work and that Eve had promptly taken advantage of his absence to satisfy her desire for the forbidden.

In "Paradise Lost" and the Genesis Tradition, J. M. Evans argues convincingly that Milton rejects these earlier explanations for the separation because he recognizes the theological perils inherent in them. To implicate God in the separation of Adam and Eve would indict God's goodness; to implicate chance would call into question God's providence; and to suggest that Eve was somehow naturally inclined towards sin would "cast the gravest doubts on her original integrity, and, by implication, on the benevolence and justice of her Creator" (97).[13] Evans concludes:

> If they were to part, they had to be shown doing so fully aware of the risks they were taking, of the dangers to which they were thereby exposing themselves. Consequently Milton made these risks and dangers the whole crux of the long argument between the two protagonists.... (272-73)

In the separation dialogue, Milton's Adam and Eve are expressly concerned with the kind of world that their working together or separately may actualize: they imagine possible worlds in which they work separately and possible worlds in which they work together, and try to decide which possible world they would prefer to live in.[14] Their speculations in this regard draw the reader's attention to the possibilities which remain accessible to Adam and Eve at this juncture in their history.

Eve begins the discussion of "how that day they best may ply / Thir growing work" (9.201-02) by observing that the Garden is growing "luxurious by restraint": that is, that the Garden has responded to their diligent pruning, lopping and binding with luxuriant "wanton growth" (9.209-11). Eve suggests that they respond to this "growing work" by dividing it: she envisions the possible world in which she and Adam separate as a world in which she spends the morning giving her undivided attention to "yonder Spring of Roses intermixt / With myrtle", while Adam proceeds to "wind / The Woodbine round this Arbor" or perhaps to "direct / The clasping Ivy where to climb" (218-19; 215-17). Eve contrasts this possible and, from her perspective, desirable world with the more familiar one in which the frequent exchange of smiles and small-talk allows "th' hour of Supper [to come] unearn'd" (225).

Adam responds to Eve's proposal by approving her dedication to "household good" and her promotion of "good works" in him; he also acknowledges the intrinsic value of solitude. Adam counters Eve's possible worlds, however, with two of his own. He pictures first, a world in which their "malicious Foe .... Watches, no doubt, with greedy hope to find / His wish <u>and best advantage</u>, us asunder" (253,257-58; emphasis mine); and then, by way of contrast, one in which Satan is unsuccessful -- "Hopeless to circumvent us join'd, where each / To other speedy aid might lend at need" (259-60). This stanza-ending line seems conclusive; and indeed, the reader senses that Adam might have stopped at this point, his argument won (Lewalski, <u>Rhetoric</u> 233). If, as Mary Nyquist claims, the separation dialogue is presented "as a conversation which simply goes out of control" ("Reading" 209), then surely it begins to do so here, as Adam characteristically allows his

mind "to rove uncheck't" (8.188-89), and to speculate regarding Satan's likely motives and tactics. As Adam considers Satan's probable envy of their conjugal love, he modifies his description of the world in which he and Eve remain together:

> The Wife, where danger or dishonor lurks,
> Safest and seemliest by her Husband stays,
> Who guards her, or with her the worst endures. (9.268-70)

In place of his earlier image of mutual support and aid, Adam envisages himself the protector of his wife's virtue, effectively reducing Eve from "help meet" to the "passive object of her mate's protection" (Benet 132).

Benet argues that the ensuing debate between Adam and Eve regarding the merits of working together or apart is the product of their disparate interpretations of Raphael's story of the War in Heaven: that Adam imagines himself in the role of the Son, telling the good angels to "stand only and behold" (6.810); while Eve imagines herself in the role of the faithful Abdiel who stands alone against many. McColley suggests that Eve may be trying to help Adam temper his feelings for her, and that her reference to the "parting angel" is intended as a tactful reminder of Raphael's parting warning to "take heed lest Passion sway / thy judgement" (8.635-36). As Reichert warns, however, "What goes on in Eve's mind here we cannot know, and cannot guess at <u>without imposing greater certainty on the dialogue than Milton wishes us to possess</u>" (89; emphasis mine). We are told only that Eve responds "as one who loves and some unkindness meets": an

ambiguous phrase, which supplies "a comparison, not a direct description" of Eve's reaction to Adam's words (McColley, Milton's Eve 167). Eve acknowledges the existence of their Enemy, but observes that neither she nor Adam requires protection from Satan's violence: a possibility which the Father likewise disallows -- "By violence, no, for that shall be withstood" (5.241). Eve concludes -- perhaps incorrectly but not unreasonably -- that Adam is assuming that the possible world in which they work separately is one in which she is "seduc't" by Satan's fraud; and that, contrariwise, the possible world in which they work together is one in which Satan's attempts are unsuccessful, either because Adam protects her from Satan or because he helps her to "endure" Satan's "worst."

Adam, apparently flustered, protests that Eve has misunderstood his formulation of possibilities; and he introduces further variants of the possible worlds in which they work together and separately. He suggests that if they work together, Satan may decide not to attack them at all; whereas if they separate, Eve could still be troubled by Satan's attempt on her faith, even though she successfully repelled his attack. Adam reiterates that if they work together, Satan will be forced either to attack them both simultaneously (and hence unsuccessfully) or else to attack Adam first, in which case Adam anticipates gaining strength from Eve's presence -- just as, he trusts, Eve would gain strength from his.

Despite the obvious deficiencies in Adam's argument (as Eve observes, "harm precedes not sin") Adam's wish to "avoid th'attempt itself" may be sincere enough. He is remembering, perhaps, the tears of "pious awe, that fear'd to have offended" (5.135) and he lovingly wishes to shield Eve from any similar distress. Eve, however, sensing Adam's unwillingness to expose her to even the possibility of temptation, asks him to consider the

broader implications of his assumption that each of them is more likely to fall if working alone.

> ... what is faith, love, virtue unassayed
> Alone, without exterior help sustained?
> Let us not then suspect our happy State
> Left so imperfet by the Maker wise,
> As not secure to single or combin'd,
> Frail is our happiness, if this be so,
> And Eden were no Eden thus expos'd. (9.335-41)

Dennis Burden accuses Eve of "indict[ing] God's providence" (88) in this speech; Reichert argues more convincingly that she is affirming her faith in it (91-92). Eve rejects the possibility that she and Adam require physical proximity in order to be proof against their enemy precisely because she believes that such a world would imperfectly manifest God's infinite goodness and must therefore be an impossible world. Eve may be incorrect -- she may fail to comprehend the full range of possibilities that Divine Providence will allow -- but we need not assume that she is impious. Dennis Danielson, on the other hand, rejects what he sees as the "two incompatible premises" underlying Eve's argument:

> It is true that faith, love, and virtue are nothing unassayed. But given this and given that genuine assay presupposes some real possibility of failure

> and loss, man's "happy state" in some sense must be left "imperfet by the maker wise"; man's happiness must be frail; and, given the requirements for "the constituting of human vertue," Eden were no Eden unless "thus exposed"....Eve (and Milton critics) cannot have it both ways.
>
> (Milton's Good God 199)

As I read Eve's argument, however, she is not rejecting the idea that Eden is exposed to the possibility of evil: only that she and Adam are "not endu'd / Single with like defense" against that possibility. Here again, Eve may be incorrect: it may be, for example, that "The liberty which Eve claims is not that liberty which her female nature was created to have" (Burden 88). But Eve's argument is inherently neither illogical nor blasphemous; and her concern for the possible world that could result from a failure to trust in God's goodness and wisdom is well-founded, especially if, as I have argued, the possibility of unfallenness is to be taken seriously by the reader of Paradise Lost. McColley observes:

> What Adam and Eve decide to do about Satan has long-term implications. The immortal evil spirit is not likely to give up because he finds them together on the first try. Supposing they stave off temptation for now, what will happen when their eldest sons conceive their natural but separate interests in plants and animals, or agriculture and husbandry? Will the first parents deny their children all independent exploration, meditation, and mystical, ecological and artistic leadings

> of the Spirit into the wilderness, albeit of sweets, lest the Temptor lurk?
>
> (Gust 170)

Even in an unfallen world, Adam, as head of the human family, community, and church, needs to learn to balance his protective impulses against his flock's need for the freedom which makes virtue possible.[15]

Adam's "higher intellect" understands intuitively that humanity does better to avoid temptation than to seek it out; and Eve's compelling questions encourage him to articulate this knowledge more clearly. For the first time, Adam acknowledges that the primary danger lies within the individual will rather than in the presence of an external tempter:

> Firm we subsist, yet possible to swerve,
> Since Reason not impossibly may meet
> Some specious object by the Foe suborn'd
> And fall into deception unaware....(9.359-62; emphasis mine)

The unfallen reason is "right" but it is not all-knowing; it remains vulnerable to deception and hypocrisy, and must keep "strictest watch":

> Seek not temptation then, which to avoid
> Were better, and most likely if from me
> Thou sever not: Trial will come unsought,

> Wouldst thou approve thy constancy, approve
> First thy obedience; th'other who can know,
> Not seeing thee attempted, who attest? (9.364-69)

Adam's argument is strongly buttressed with what the fallen reader recognizes as a reference to the Lord's prayer; and again, Eve's acquiescence to Adam's just reasoning appears imminent (Lewalski, Rhetoric 235). Instead, as Adam considers the implications of a "trial unsought," he recognizes and raises yet another possibility:

> ... if thou think, trial unsought may find
> Us both securer than thus warn'd thou seem'st,
> Go; for thy stay, not free, absents thee more;
> Go in thy native innocence, rely
> On what thou hast of virtue, summon all,
> For God towards thee hath done his part, do thine. (9.370-75)

If Adam is persuaded to let Eve go, it is at least partly because he is able to imagine a world in which he and Eve "swerve too secure" and are taken by surprise by their enemy. As Eve accepts Adam's permission, she lightly dismisses the possibility that their proud Foe could choose to attack her first; and this, of course, will prove unwise -- as indeed will most human and angelic assumptions that seek to limit the range of possibilities inherent in God's creation. The separation dialogue concludes with the poet's sorrowful

reference to a world which both he and the reader know will never be actualized: a world in which Eve returns safely to the Bower, her morning's work done, "all things in best order to invite / Noontide repast or Afternoon's repose" (9.402-03). The narrator's lament for the lost possibility of unfallenness affirms the reality of its loss; but the location of the lament at this point in the narrative may also encourage the perception that its loss may be traced back to this earlier decision by Adam and Eve to separate.

Burden has accused Milton of engaging in "some sleight of hand" in the separation scene (91), and I am inclined to agree: a sense of narrative misdirection pervades the episode. Eve's isolation, though sanctioned by tradition, is not actually part of the Genesis account; hence, the possibility that Adam and Eve could choose to stay together remains real until the moment when Eve gently disengages her hand from Adam's and moves towards the grove. By dangling this possibility before his readers, Milton implicitly raises the question of "what might have been" had Adam and Eve chosen to remain together on this particular morning. Moreover, by presenting the temptations of Eve and Adam by way of this prior decision to work separately, Milton effectively raises the possibility that the entire sequence of events which, in Paradise Lost, culminates in the Fall need never have happened at all. Milton thus seeks to liberate his narrative from the constraints imposed by the "necessary and revealed facts of Scripture" (DiBenedetto 1): constraints which might otherwise cause readers of Paradise Lost to experience the Fall of Adam and Eve as scripturally or divinely pre-ordained.

In her commentary on the separation dialogue, Nyquist observes:

> The sense that this dialogue might have developed differently is kept alive not only by moments such as the first of Adam's concluding exhortations ["Wouldst thou approve thy constancy, approve / First thy obedience"] but also by the way in which both characters are themselves preoccupied with hypothetical alternatives. Together with the thematic emphasis on individual volition which concludes the scene, this suggests that the illusion of tragic inevitability is an illusion that Eve and Adam themselves could at any moment apocalyptically shatter. (213; emphasis mine)

The hypothetical alternatives (possible worlds) envisaged and articulated by Adam and Eve in the separation dialogue are part of the textual and imaginative reality of Paradise Lost. As the separation dialogue clarifies, Adam and Eve's decision to work together or separately is not the only factor capable of influencing the actualization of events on this particular morning. Should Adam and Eve choose to separate, Satan may attack the isolated Eve (perhaps successfully, perhaps unsuccessfully) or he may choose not to attack Eve because she is too "unworthy" an opponent. On the other hand, should Adam and Eve choose to work together, Satan may decide to attack them both, or he may be forced to attack Adam first, or he may decide not to attack them at all, or he may simply decide to wait for another day when they are less ready for him. Milton raises these possibilities only to withdraw them -- much as a trial lawyer might raise inadmissible evidence, knowing that it will be ruled out of order, but knowing also that it will never be entirely erased from the minds of the judge and jury (Mollenkott 103).[16] The textual presence of

non-actual possibilities thus serves to undermine a rigidly predestinarian approach to Milton's narrative.

The centrality of hypothetical alternatives to Milton's separation scene is reflected in the critical literature which not infrequently purports to explain "what Adam should have done" given Eve's persistence in wanting to work alone. Burden, for example, claims bluntly: "...Adam would not have fallen if he had met and been tempted by Satan on his own....And if Adam had been with Eve when she was tempted he would likewise not have allowed her to be deceived" (81). Burden maintains that Adam should have ordered Eve to stay with him: and Danielson agrees, observing that such a command would not violate Eve's freedom (anymore than the injunction against the Tree of Knowledge does) because she would still be free to choose whether to obey or not (Milton's Good God 127). Bennett, however, argues that Adam should neither have ordered Eve to stay nor abandoned her to a course of action which he believed to be ill-advised; rather, he should have continued the process of open debate which (as Milton argued in Areopagitica) would ultimately have allowed the truth to emerge for all of the community (i.e. Eve) to see (114). Even McColley, who staunchly defends both Eve's desire to work alone and Adam's decision to allow her to do so, acknowledges that "Perhaps Adam erred in not setting up a contingency plan for consultation in case of need" (Gust 168). Underlying all such critical commentary is the assumption of a possible world in which Adam and Eve decide to work together: an assumption, I would argue, which is implicitly endorsed by the language of the separation dialogue and by Adam and Eve's "preoccupation with hypothetical alternatives."

Whether we believe that the separation debate constitutes a "domestic spat" (Samuel, "Mimesis" 25) or merely an "unfallen difference of opinion" (Burden 92), its format may tempt us to "choose sides"; that is, to assume that one character (and hence one course of action) must be right, that the other must be wrong, and that we as readers should be able to tell which is which. Since we know that Milton's Adam and Eve actually fall, it <u>seems</u> logical to conclude that what they actually choose to do (i.e. work separately) must be wrong and that whatever they do not chose to do (i.e. work together) must be right. Certainly Adam, no less than many critics and commentators, is convinced that if he and Eve remain together, Satan will find them "hopeless to circumvent." Yet Raphael's story of the War in Heaven should serve as a warning (both to Adam and to readers) that Satan has already "circumvented troops of angels who found no moral safety in their number and who failed to profit from the speedy aid of Abdiel's loyal retort" (Benet 131). Moreover, the fact that Eve has previously elected to work alone in the garden, without eliciting objections or warnings from Adam (or from Raphael, for that matter) suggests that the human couple's physical separation is not intrinsically dangerous (Benet 132; Revard 72). Should readers of <u>Paradise Lost</u> assume that had Adam and Eve remained together, they would have resisted the serpent more successfully than Eve alone actually does? Revard cautions:

> Nothing in our knowledge of Satan leads us to think that he would not have been ingenious enough to have used another ploy (adapting the

> temptation to the tempted) had he encountered a circumstance different from the one that he found. (77)

Nor need we assume that Satan's efforts to subvert humanity would have ceased had Eve (or for that matter Adam and Eve) withstood the serpent's lies. Grossman notes:

> Satan had limitless time to effect the temptation. Adam and Eve, though tempted on the particular day depicted in Book 9, were subject, as we are, to continual temptation.... As the war in heaven of Book 6 shows, even had they ascended the scale of nature to become angels, they would still have remained subject to temptation. ("Dramatic" 209)

Indeed, Revard (77) and Reichert (94) argue that critics who focus their attention on the separation scene are as fundamentally misguided as the fallen Adam and Eve: Adam (like Burden) claims that he would not have fallen if only Eve had not insisted on "wandering"; and Eve (like Danielson) retorts that if Adam is so smart, he should have ordered her to stay. In contrast with the fallen couple, however, neither the Father nor the Son ever mentions Adam and Eve's separation: even when the Son rebukes Adam for having "resign[ed] his manhood" to his wife, it is explicitly in the context of responding to Adam's excuse for having accepted the forbidden fruit from Eve's hand (Revard 71). Furthermore, if Adam's failure to assert his masculine authority at the time of the separation were the critical factor in Eve's fall, one would expect it to serve as a mitigating factor in her

defence. Instead -- and in accordance with the Genesis account, of course -- Eve is singled out for the special punishment of pain in childbirth, suggesting that she is as fully accountable as Adam for her decision to disobey the injunction against the fruit.

In point of fact, the question of whether Adam and Eve should work together or separately is a considerably more complicated one than the question of whether or not they should eat the forbidden fruit (the answer to which is a straightforward "no"). Except as regards the interdicted Tree of Knowledge, Adam and Eve are free to live their lives as their reason dictates; and, as the work of numerous critics attests, reason alone is quite capable of making a cogent case for either side in the separation debate. More significant, perhaps, is the fact that we can hardly read this dialogue without simultaneously attempting to assess the merits of Adam's and Eve's arguments; and in attempting this, we are likely to follow Adam and Eve's example by imagining and evaluating alternative possibilities. What if Adam had persuaded Eve to stay? What if Adam had commanded Eve to stay? Would she have stayed? And would this, by itself, have made all the difference? Should we assume that Adam's masculine qualities of "contemplation" and "valor" are inherently greater proof against evil than are Eve's feminine qualities of "softness" and "sweet attractive grace"?

Satan, admittedly, assumes that they are. When he spots Eve by herself, it is "to his wish / Beyond his hope" (9.423-24): a formulation which acknowledges Eve as Satan's preferred target even as it suggests that Satan was also prepared to attack the human couple had he found them together. But Satan -- like Adam, who imagines that he and Eve together could not possibly fall, and like Eve, who imagines that a proud foe could

not possibly choose to attack the weak -- does not anticipate the full range of possibilities that God's Providence will permit. Satan, who has felt the piercing "wounds of deadly hate," who has vowed that Evil shall be his Good, and who has steeled himself against pitying Adam and Eve in their "harmless innocence," is astounded to find himself abruptly immobilized -- not by Adam's physical strength or mental acuity -- but by the staggering and unexpected power of Eve's unfallen beauty.

> .... her Heav'nly form
> Angelic, but more soft, and Feminine
> Her <u>graceful Innocence, her every Air</u>
> <u>Of gesture or least action</u> overaw'd
> His malice, and with rapine sweet bereav'd
> His fierceness of the fierce intent it brought:
> That space the Evil one abstracted stood
> From his own evil, and for the time remain'd
> Stupidly good, of enmity disarm'd,
> Of guile, of hate, of envy, of revenge;... (9.457-66; emphasis mine)

Unfallen beauty disarms hatred and evokes love; above all, it bears undeniable witness to the essential goodness of its Creator and hence represents a real threat to Satan's destructive purposes (Tanner 165). Satan knows that "terror" lurks "in love / And beauty, not approacht by stronger hate," and he finds that he must "hate stronger" in order to

persist in his desire to corrupt Eve's beauty and goodness (9.490-91,492). McColley wonders whether Satan's susceptibility to Eve's "graceful Innocence" might not suggest that there is still another possibility embedded in Milton's account of the Fall: that Eve, had she persisted in loving obedience, might have served "as a conduit of grace...perhaps even to Satan himself" (Milton's Eve 189). Although such a possibility is arguably contradicted by the Father's assertion in Book 3 that humanity "shall find grace, / The other none" (3.131-32), McColley suggests that the Father's pronouncement may be understood as contingent rather than absolute: that Satan will find no grace precisely because "Man falls deceiv'd / By th'other first" (3.130-31). Even assuming that Satan's contrition and redemption remain possible at this relatively late juncture, however, McColley concedes that there is "considerable evidence" that Satan would continue to reject such a possibility (189).

> If Eve had prevented [Satan's] putting his plan into action, he might have tried again and again, against beings better and better prepared to resist through grace and virtue following the precedents of their parents; that is, he might have continued to choose damnation. But his success with Eve ensures it. It cuts off his opportunity not to sin by corrupting innocence. When one gives in to temptation one sins against the temptor -- as Adam, too, is about to do. (Milton's Eve 191)

By allowing herself to be corrupted, Eve co-operates with Satan's efforts to damn himself more thoroughly, and thus permanently relegates the possibility of Satan's contrition and repentance to non-actuality.

Carefully differentiated readings of the separation debate have offered scrupulous assessments of Adam's and Eve's spoken and unspoken motives, careful examinations of the logical (and theological) imports of Adam's and Eve's arguments, and (of course) definition after definition of Eve's supposed status in Eden. Such critical perspectives, however insightful, may risk imposing on the separation dialogue as a whole a "greater certainty than Milton wishes us to possess." Adam and Eve must choose whether to work together or separately, and the decision they make will determine the context within which the day's temptation will unfold. Either decision, however, leaves open to them a multitude of possible worlds, fallen and unfallen alike. As rational beings, each choice that Adam and Eve make will contribute to the construction of a context within which successive choices will have to be made: by Satan, by themselves, and ultimately, by their children. Adam and Eve's decision to separate actualizes one possible world among many, but whether it will prove to be a fallen or an unfallen one awaits the subsequent decisions of God's rational creatures.

Chapter Three

The Possibility of Sin:

The Temptations of Eve and Adam

As I have shown, the separation scene serves as a textual site for the multiplication of possibilities: it implicitly raises the question of whether the Fall might be avoided if Adam and Eve choose to remain together on this particular morning; and it explicitly posits a variety of possible scenarios (possible worlds) which could proceed from Adam and Eve's decision to separate or remain together. Its articulation of alternative possibilities serves to define and delimit the nature of the freedom enjoyed by Milton's human protagonists: namely, the freedom to actualize (and conversely, to render non-actual) pre-existent possibilities. Unless the possibility of separating exists, Adam and Eve will not be able to separate; but unless the possibility of their remaining together also exists in some sense, their separation cannot be the product of free choice. In Paradise Lost, creaturely freedom is affirmed by the existence of diverse possible worlds and is enacted by characters with the God-given (and God-like) capacity to apprehend, select and actualize possibilities through the exercise of right reason.

In this chapter I shall consider Milton's depiction of the actualization of the fallen world: a process, I will argue, which is initiated by Eve's contravention of the divine prohibition against the fruit of the Tree of Knowledge ("she pluck't, she eat" -- 9.781) and which is subsequently confirmed and perpetuated by Adam's "completing of the mortal Sin / Original" (9.1003-04). When Eve and Adam disobey the "one easy prohibition" they effect a permanent change in their reality. Unlike the change which accompanies their

separation, however, this is a change of tragic and cataclysmic proportions -- a radical transformation which will be forever remembered by Adam and Eve and their descendants simply as "the Fall."

Just as theologians have reached diverse conclusions regarding the precise nature of the first human sin -- Augustine thought it was pride, Luther and Calvin agreed that it must have been the loss of faith (Evans 274; 278-79) -- so too, critics of Paradise Lost have offered a range of opinions with regard to the nature and timing of Adam and Eve's passage from innocence to sinfulness. Critics have pronounced Eve fallen (or at least as fallen for all practical purposes) once Satan is able to disturb her sleep (Tillyard, Studies 158; Waldock 33-34; Patrides 105-06); when she insists on having her own way in the separation debate (Stein 102; Burden 89-91); and as she begins her final soliloquy before eating the fruit (Lewalski, Rhetoric 238; Nyquist, "Reading" 218). Adam, for his part, has been seen as effectively fallen when he permits Eve to work alone despite his best judgement (Waldock 34), and when he declares his intention of dying with Eve (Shumaker 1187).

As early as 1953, Millicent Bell defined a new extreme in the critical debate with her article "The Fallacy of the Fall in Paradise Lost." In Bell's view, Milton's Adam and Eve are never really unfallen: the new-born Eve's preoccupation with her own reflection bespeaks an innate "dainty vanity" (871); while Adam's conversation with Raphael reveals an already present "lust of forbidden knowledge, uxoriousness, [and] ...subordination of Reason to passion" (873). Bell bases her reading on the premise that an unfallen human being could not be subject to temptation: "all possible temptations... appeal to impulses

characteristic of fallen mankind" (863). Bell concludes that Milton, faced with the impossible task of depicting perfect beings who were nevertheless capable of corruption, chose instead to devise "an account of the Fall which subtly obscured any sharp division in the drama, any 'before' and 'after' " (864). For Bell, Adam and Eve's transgression is unquestionably a felix culpa: a happy fault which allows them (and their descendants) to become aware of their innate imperfections and inherent need for redemption (880-81).

In addition to her problematic conflation of the concepts of sin and temptation,[17] Bell's analysis is flawed by what I take to be the implausible (indeed offensive) notion that since Milton was committed by faith to the truth of the Genesis account, he was not concerned by its apparent absurdity: "The logical flaw in the fable -- as it appears to a different order of mind -- never presented itself to him" (864). Surely the logical inconsistencies stemming from the Christian understanding of the story of Adam and Eve would have been no less evident -- indeed far more troubling -- to an intelligent believer of the seventeenth-century than to a skeptical academic of the twentieth. Danielson notes that "Among Milton's contemporaries... the intelligibility of the Fall was a live issue, not something uncritically accepted" (Milton's Good God 196); and Evans's "Paradise Lost" and the Genesis Tradition testifies to the long history of theological and literary attempts to fill in the all too evident "silences and discontinuities" (24) of the Genesis account of the Fall.

For my part, I prefer to read Paradise Lost as the culmination of Milton's best efforts, based on a lifetime of faith and study, to make sense of a story which churchmen and theologians had long recognized as a patently problematic explanation for the origin

of evil in human society. In Paradise Lost, the Father unequivocally attributes the Fall to Man's transgression of "the sole Command, Sole pledge of his obedience" (3.94-95). In this context, and drawing upon the model that I have employed throughout this thesis, I would like to suggest that Milton's Adam and Eve remain unfallen until the possibility that they will not disobey has been rendered permanently and irrevocably non-actual; and that for both Eve and Adam this occurs more or less coincidentally with the actual eating of the forbidden fruit. Throughout the temptations of Eve and Adam until the "last moment of possible return" (McColley, Milton's Eve 205) Milton's text alerts the reader to the alternative possibilities that remain accessible to Eve and Adam, thus emphasizing the continuing reality of their freedom to actualize worlds other than the fallen one that they actually do.

The reader of Paradise Lost cannot avoid knowing that Milton's Eve is going to fall, but as McColley observes, she does not fall easily or immediately and "her resistance deserves attention as well as her failure" (Milton's Eve 191). In contrast with earlier Eves who were depicted as taking advantage of Adam's absence to examine the forbidden tree more closely, Milton's Eve is not in the vicinity of the Tree of Knowledge when the serpent first approaches her; moreover, she is so absorbed in her work that the serpent has a difficult time attracting her attention (McColley, Milton's Eve 154):

> ...Oft he bow'd
> His turret Crest, and sleek enamell'd Neck,
> Fawning, and lick'd the ground whereon she trod.

> His gentle dumb expression turn'd at length
>
> The Eye of Eve to mark his play.... (9.524-28)

The serpent begins his "fraudulent temptation" by heaping lavish praise upon Eve's "Celestial Beauty" (9.540): Eve, the disguised Satan assures her, should be "A Goddess among Gods, ador'd and serv'd / By Angels numberless" (546-48). But while Milton's narrator tells us that the serpent's words "made their way" into Eve's heart, her response suggests that she is primarily intrigued by the words themselves: that is, by the fact that the serpent, in contrast to what she has been told, apparently is capable of speech and reason. Indeed, as Nyquist has noted ("Reading" 219), the serpent's persistence in flattery elicits only a wry rejoinder from the unfallen Eve -- "Serpent, thy overpraising leaves in doubt / The vertue of that Fruit, in thee first prov'd" (9.615-16).

Evans notes that Milton's account of the Fall is "wholly original" (277) in depicting the serpent as initially withholding the identity of the tree which has supposedly given him the power of human speech. With no reason to suspect that the tree in question is the forbidden one, Eve comments, innocently enough, that God has bestowed his goodness in such abundance that she and Adam have hardly begun to sample it; and motivated by her sense of responsibility for the Garden and its creatures, Eve instructs the serpent to lead her to this unknown tree. According to Evans: "The temptation proper thus begins with Eve already in a mood of frustrated anticipation. By building up her hopes only to demolish them, Satan creates in her the very state of mind in which she might be disposed to listen to his arguments with some eagerness" (277).

Frustrated or not, however, once Eve recognizes which tree the serpent has in mind, she unhesitatingly declares: "Serpent, we might have spar'd our coming hither, / Fruitless to mee, though Fruit be here to excess"(9.647-48). Her prompt and categorical rejection of the forbidden fruit serves to remind the reader that Eve need only persevere in her first response in order to defeat Satan. Eve may not be Adam's intellectual equal,[18] but she knows everything that she needs to know in order to avoid falling. She knows that she is not to touch or taste the fruit of the Tree of Knowledge; she knows that the penalty for doing so is death ("some dreadful thing"); and most importantly, she knows that the commandment regarding the Tree of Knowledge is not properly subject to rational or intellectual analysis.

> ...of this Tree we may not taste nor touch;
> God so commanded, and left that Command
> Sole Daughter of his voice; <u>the rest</u>, we live
> Law to ourselves, our Reason is our Law. (9.651-55; emphasis mine)

Commentators on Genesis often drew significance from the fact that Eve's version of the prohibition ("Ye shall not eat of it, neither shall ye touch it, lest ye die" -- Genesis 3:3) differed somewhat from the one given to Adam by God ("thou shalt not eat of it: for in the day that thou eatest thereof thou shalt surely die" -- Genesis 2:17). In <u>Paradise Lost</u>, however, this minor difference in wording is downplayed (Musacchio 155; Evans 48). Milton's Adam, for example, tells Raphael that God has warned him not to taste the fruit

of the Tree of Knowledge; but in response to Eve's transgression, he also speaks of the fruit as "under ban to touch" (9.925). Likewise, Milton's narrator observes that Adam and Eve are "Charg'd not to touch the interdicted Tree" (7.46). In any event, Milton's Eve recites the prohibition twice, and is specifically described as "yet sinless" when she repeats it for the second time (9.659).

The serpent responds to Eve's careful recitation of the law "with show of Zeal and Love / To Man, and indignation at his wrong" (9.665-66). He flatly rejects the possibility that Eve could die from eating the fruit: its very name, he observes, identifies the Tree as a source of knowledge and hence of life. He renews his false claim to have eaten the fruit without incurring death or any other punishment.[19] He denies the possibility that God could justly punish Eve for "such a petty trespass" (slyly adding, "Not just, not God; not fear'd then, nor obey'd" -- 9.701). He encourages Eve to imagine a world in which the fruit transforms humanity into "Gods, / Knowing both Good and Evil as they know" and in which God himself praises her for her "dauntless virtue" in risking death for the sake of wisdom. Satan lastly raises the possibility that the sun, rather than God, is the true source of life on Earth, and that God is withholding "this fair Fruit" (and its associated knowledge) out of malice and envy. This speech, replete with false possibilities (impossible worlds), constitutes the sum total of the serpent's role in the Fall. Satan makes no further efforts to induce Eve to disobey the divine command, nor does he figure in Eve's subsequent temptation of Adam.

Milton tells us that the serpent's words win "too easy entrance" (9.734) into Eve's heart: we should reflect, however, that given all that hangs in balance for humankind, <u>any</u>

entrance must surely be accounted "too easy." Although the serpent's words seem reasonable and true, and although the sight and smell of the savory fruit fill her noontime appetite with longing, Eve does not immediately and impulsively reach for the forbidden fruit. Lewalski identifies Eve's final soliloquy before eating the fruit as "the formal means by which she takes full responsibility for her act" (Rhetoric 238); but John Tanner refines this observation still further by suggesting that even in this final speech Eve is still "engaged in persuading herself to transgress and not in justifying a decision that she has already made." He notes:

> The rhetorical model is that of the deliberative soliloquy -- an explicitly provisional, self-reflective, tentative mode of discourse. Her internal debate in punctuated by numerous interrogatives signalling her indecision even as they move her argument toward a decision. (112)

Eve's soliloquy illustrates the inherent limitations of deductive reasoning: she fails to consider the possibility that the serpent could be lying and therefore proceeds from a false premise to a series of erroneous deductions and misguided questions (Waldock 37). Because she believes that the forbidden fruit has the power to endow animals with the human qualities of reason and speech, she describes it as "best of Fruits," "worthy to be admir'd," and even as "too long forborne" (a passive construction which carefully fails to specify by whom). She next retraces the serpent's arguments, puzzling first over the name of the forbidden Tree -- a name endorsed by God himself and which seems to

acknowledge the tree's inherent worth -- and she wonders whether God would really forbid humankind the knowledge of goodness or wisdom. She recalls what she has been told about the penalty for eating the fruit -- and asks herself why this penalty does not seem to apply to the serpent. Could it be that this fruit is only for animals? Perhaps. But if so, why should the first animal to benefit from it promptly offer to share it with humankind? Why am I afraid, she demands, or rather how can I even know what to be afraid of, when it seems that I do not know what is meant by "Good," "Evil," "God," "Death," "Law," or "Penalty"?

Up to this point, Eve's soliloquy suggests a confused and increasingly frustrated state of mind. Given what the reader has seen of Adam and Eve's paradisal existence, however, there are many possible ways that Eve could choose to resolve her agitation. For example, she could decide that she will ask Adam what he thinks of all this (she knows that he enjoys such questions more than she does); or she could decide to pray (she knows that praying helped when she was disturbed by a bad dream); or she could decide that all these questions can wait until after lunch (she knows from her hunger that the noonhour is approaching and that Adam is expecting her).

One may argue, of course, that as soon the serpent begins his idolatrous address to the Tree of Knowledge -- "O Sacred, Wise, and Wisdom-giving Plant" (9.679-80) -- and certainly by the time he completes it, Eve should run away, calling on Adam (and if necessary on God) for assistance (McColley, Milton's Eve 176). While this is true, Eve's efforts to process the serpent's misinformation need not imply her will's approval of a

particular course of action or line of thought. Adam notes this fundamental distinction between temptation and sin in his conversation with Raphael:

> ... I to thee disclose
> What inward thence I feel; not therefore foil'd
> Who meet with various objects, from the sense
> Variously representing; yet still free
> Approve the best, and follow what I approve. (8.607-11)

Eve's speculations, while false and misguided, are not necessarily sinful. As long as Eve is not deliberately prolonging the temptation for its own sake -- and her soliloquy, on the contrary, suggests that she is troubled and uncertain throughout its duration -- her condition remains unfallen, albeit precarious. Eve still knows that God has forbidden the human occupants of the Garden to eat this fruit, and she can still choose to obey him.

Eve's final observation before eating the fruit concludes with an ambivalent question which simultaneously implies and resists its own answer:

> Here grows the Cure of all, this Fruit Divine
> Fair to the Eye, inviting to the Taste,
> Of virtue to make wise: what hinders then
> To reach, and feed at once both Body and Mind?
> (9.776-9; emphasis mine)

As Tanner astutely observes, nothing hinders Eve: she is as free to reach out and take the forbidden fruit as she is free to persevere in obedience. Hence, even at this late juncture, Eve's words do not necessarily constitute a forthright declaration of intent: to observe that "nothing hinders" is still something less than to affirm "I will" (Tanner 112). Furthermore, by using present participles to describe the context, Milton manages to suggest that Eve's unspoken recognition that "nothing hinders" occurs more or less coincidently with the definitive action by which she falls (Tanner 112):

> So saying, her rash hand in evil hour
> Forth reaching to the Fruit, she pluck'd, she eat:
> Earth felt the wound.... (9.780-02; emphasis mine).

In effect, Tanner concludes, Eve "does not choose to transgress and then commit the deed in a simple linear fashion"; rather she "commits the fatal deed even while...she is still playing with the possibility of doing it or not" (113). In this way, Milton strives to avoid depicting an Eve who is already fallen before she falls: i.e. who experiences cupiditas (evil desire) before she actually eats the forbidden fruit.

Ultimately, the serpent "beguiles" Eve not with flattery or with logic but with possibilities[20]: the possibility that God could be withholding knowledge from Adam and herself; the possibility that "Death" could really mean their transfiguration into gods; the possibility that she and Adam owe their being not to God but to the natural world. Eve knows that she and Adam have the power to actualize possibilities; and dazzled by the

possibility that these new possibilities (these "fair appearing good[s]") seem to represent, she hesitates, wavers, and is "on a sudden lost" (9.900).

In Paradise Lost, cupiditas is a consequence, rather than a cause of the Fall. Eve devours the forbidden fruit with a single-minded intensity that contrasts markedly with the uncertain and self-questioning tone of the soliloquy which precedes her eating; and only as the fallen Eve "ingorg[es] without restraint," does the poet confirm that Eve expects the fruit to imbue her with divinity. Eve is also notably oblivious to the "signs of woe" which are Nature's response to her fall: a Miltonic evocation, perhaps, of what Luther considered to be "the typically repressive effect of sin on human consciousness" (Nyquist, "Reading" 224).

Suffused in the afterglow of her deed, Eve imagines that she has actualized a satanically-inverted world in which God is "our great forbidder"; Raphael and his fellow angels are "his spies"; Nature (particularly the Tree of Knowledge) is an object of worship rather than of stewardship; and experience (rather than faith) is the "Best guide" to wisdom. When she finally remembers Adam (who has been conspicuously absent from her thoughts throughout the temptation), Eve first imagines sharing her new knowledge with him. Almost immediately, however, she is distracted by the tantalizing possibility of keeping the knowledge of the fruit to herself, and thus becoming Adam's equal...or even his superior. Although this prospect evidently pleases the fallen Eve, she is galvanized into action by her sudden recognition of a very different possibility:

> ....but what if God have seen,

> And Death ensue? then I shall be no more,
> And Adam wedded to another Eve,
> Shall live with her enjoying, I extinct;
> A death to think. Confirmed then I resolve,
> Adam shall share with me in bliss or woe:
> So dear I love him, that with him all deaths
> I could endure, without him live no life. (9.826-33)

In Paradise Lost, the fallen Eve resolves on the temptation of Adam specifically because she is able to picture a possible world in which she falls but Adam does not. The reality of this possible world effectively vaporizes the impossible worlds that she has been imagining, and she determines to act quickly to prevent its actualization. Eve's unfallen love for Adam is thus transformed by her fall into a murderous possessiveness -- a willingness to kill, if necessary, to preserve the object of her desire. As she embarks on her temptation of Adam, Eve will claim that during their brief separation she experienced an "agony of love till now / Not felt" (9.858) -- a reference, perhaps, to this same jealous agony that prompts her to ensure Adam's fall.

As Eve gives final homage to the Tree of Knowledge, the poem's perspective shifts abruptly to that of the unfallen Adam who, while awaiting Eve's return, has experienced a repeated sense of misgiving (9.846-7). Adam's troubled presentiments emphasize the nature of the prelapsarian marriage bond -- a unity of heart and mind that transcends even physical separation (Evans 283). But Adam also detects, as Eve does not, the "faltering

measure" (9.847) which accompanies her mortal deed: a textual reminder of the very different realities that Adam and Eve now inhabit. Peter notes that when the unfallen Adam and the fallen Eve meet, "it is almost as though the two worlds, of innocence and disaster, are about to collide" (129); and his observation is salutary, for during this "peculiar slice of time" (Danielson, "Typology" 123), the fallen world is not yet actualized and the possibility of unfallenness is not yet irrevocably lost. The possibility that Adam could continue to choose obedience is still very real -- real enough for Eve to be intent on destroying it, and real enough for Adam to feel the desperate need to deny it.

With regard to the temptation of Adam, Evans notes that Milton's Eve is wholly original in her approach:

> She appeals neither to Adam's love nor to his valour.... Instead, she tells a carefully calculated series of lies designed to arouse his loyalty not to her but to the idea of hierarchy. In her soliloquy she had contemplated keeping "the odds of Knowledge in my power" in order to be "sometime Superior" to Adam; now she claims that the reason she is offering him the fruit is to avoid just that possibility.... (283-84)

Milton's Eve makes "a lightly veiled threat": that is to say, she dangles before Adam the possibility that unless he joins her in eating the fruit, "he will lose, not her love, nor even her respect, but his authority over her" (Evans 284).

> Thou therefore also taste, that equal Lot

> May join us, equal Joy as equal Love;
>
> Lest thou not tasting, different degree
>
> Disjoin us, and I then too late renounce
>
> Deity for thee, when Fate will not permit. (9.881-85)

Eve's tone is light ("bland words at will"), her expression untroubled ("count'nance blithe"), and her flushed cheeks ("her Cheek distemper flushing glow'd") betray her for the liar she has become (9.855;886;887).

But the unfallen Adam ("On th'other side" as Milton says) is not disturbed by the false possibility that Eve proposes. He pays no attention to Eve's attempts at persuasion,[21] nor does he respond to the substance of her arguments (Nyquist, "Reading" 222). Instead, focussing on the central fact -- that Eve has eaten the forbidden fruit -- Adam retreats from this new and unbearably painful reality to an "inward silence" (9.895) and thence to an unspoken soliloquy of unfettered anguish.

> O fairest of Creation, last and best
>
> Of all God's works, Creature in whom excell'd
>
> Whatever can to sight or thought be form'd
>
> Holy, divine, good, amiable, or sweet!
>
> How art thou lost, how on a sudden lost,
>
> Defac't, deflow'rd, and now to Death devote?
>
> Rather how hast thou yielded to transgress

> The strict forbiddance, how to violate
> The sacred Fruit forbidd'n! some cursed fraud
> Of Enemy hath beguil'd thee, yet unknown
> And mee with thee hath ruin'd, for with thee
> Certain my resolution is to Die.... (9.896-907)

Adam's painfully honest emotion contrasts powerfully with the fallen Eve's bland recitation of lies and half-truths; and the reader's initial response to Adam's lament is almost certainly a rush of sympathy and admiration for Adam's willingness to declare the (unfallen) world well lost for love. But this first reaction hardly seems adequate: as Burden notes, if Milton's thesis is the justice of God's providence, then "Milton must think that the choice that Adam eventually made was not right but wrong" (163). In this context, C. S. Lewis provides a traditional Christian reading of Adam's relative responsibilities to God and to Eve:

> If conjugal love were the highest value in Adam's world, then of course his resolve would have been the correct one. But if there are things that have an even higher claim on a man, if the universe is imagined to be such that, when the pinch comes, a man ought to reject wife and mother and his own life also, then the case is altered, and then Adam can do no good to Eve (as in fact he does no good) by becoming her accomplice. (127)

Other critics, perhaps less ready to condemn Adam on theological grounds alone, have suggested that Adam's decision to die with Eve is not truly motivated by love but by something rather less noble. Tillyard, for example, accuses Adam of "mental levity" and of the fear of being left alone (Milton 262). Irene Samuel maintains that Adam's motives are fundamentally selfish: "His sole concern is to keep Eve: she is his, not to be taken from him, his possession" ("Mimesis" 28). Fish condemns Adam still more harshly: "Eve is the victim of Adam's passion, for by choosing her, he implicates her in his idolatry, absorbing her into a love that is self-love" (263). Bell finds in Adam's soliloquy further evidence of his always already fallen nature: "To the Puritan Milton," she declares "nothing could be more obvious than the impiety implied by Adam's epithets" (877).

Does this soliloquy proclaim Adam an already fallen creature? As Bell observes, Adam is himself the "fairest" and "best" of God's works; Eve is "th'inferior, in the mind / And inward Faculties...In outward also her resembling less / His Image who made both" (8.542-45). And what of Adam's avowed intention to join Eve in death? Does this not constitute his will's transgression of the divine injunction, whether or not he has yet to enact the forbidden deed?

Adam's praise of Eve is certainly dangerously excessive; I would suggest, however, that the impassioned honesty of Adam's grief tends largely to overwhelm the sort of theological correctness that would condemn a man for losing sight of his innate superiority while mourning the wife he has just lost to Death. In any case, Adam's unspoken praise of Eve discloses only "what inward thence [he feels]": his freedom to "approve the best," as he once assured Raphael, remains intact even if he subsequently

chooses not to exercise it. Most importantly, however, even as Adam "resolves" to die with Eve, his next words reveal that he is all too painfully aware of the fact that it is still possible for him to choose to live without her.

> How can I live without thee, how forgo
> Thy sweet Converse and Love so dearly join'd,
> To live again in these wild Woods forlorn?
> (9.908-10; emphasis mine)

Here, as Fish notes, Adam asks and answers his own question: "He can live without her as he has before" (263). And no sooner does Adam dismiss this possibility, than he is forced to acknowledge yet another possibility -- if only in order to reject it.

> Should God create another Eve, and I
> Another rib afford, yet loss of thee
> Would never from my heart; no no, I feel
> The Link of Nature draw me: Flesh of Flesh,
> Bone of my Bone thou art, and from thy State
> Mine never shall be parted, bliss or woe. (9.909-16)

Adam is deeply shaken (as Eve was before him) by his recognition of the possibility that, with the original Eve lost, God could simply offer to provide him with a replacement.

Milton's text thus twice specifically invokes a possible world in which a still unfallen Adam is mated with "another Eve." Burden argues that, given Milton's well-known views on the subject of divorce, this possibility should be viewed as the logical alternative to Adam's decision to fall with Eve.

> What he [Adam] should do is to leave her. He would have good grounds for divorce. Eve, being Godless, is technically an unbeliever, and St Paul had spoken of marriage in such circumstances as bondage: "But if the unbelieving depart, let him depart. A brother or a sister is not under bondage in such cases: but God hath called us to peace" (I Corinthians 7:15)....Eve, sinful and tempting her husband to sin, has on this view departed from the covenant. Seeking to destroy her husband, she is no longer a helpmeet. (170)

Under these circumstances, Burden maintains, Adam's continued devotion to Eve is at best misplaced, at worst culpable. Adam faces no true dilemma in this situation because he is not being asked to choose between God and his wife: Eve is no longer his wife in any meaningful sense. Adam's situation is not remediless and, as Burden says bluntly, "Milton of all people must know it. The remedy is divorce" (169). The fact that Milton's Adam rejects this possibility does not change the fact that it exists; and its presence at this juncture in Adam's soliloquy testifies to his continuing freedom to choose to obey God's command.[22]

The problem, of course, is that Milton's Adam does not <u>want</u> a divorce. He does not want another woman -- not even "another Eve". I think we do less than justice to Adam's painful dilemma if we attempt to solve it by demeaning the quality of his love for Eve or by discounting the extent to which his decision to fall is genuinely motivated by that love. Even if we concede that there is an element of selfishness in Adam's love, we cannot ignore that "it is selfless, too, in the sense that he is willing, knowing what he knows, to be ruined rather than to live without her" (Reichert 98). Thirty years after the publication of <u>"Paradise Lost" and Its Critics</u>, A. J. A. Waldock's passionate defense of Adam's decision to fall with Eve remains compelling.

> Our predicament is this, that we are asked to set aside, to discount for the moment -- not some trifling prejudice, not some new light modern fancy or custom -- but one of the highest, and really one of the oldest, of all human values: selflessness in love....And we must set this aside, keep it in abeyance while we read, suppress it -- for what? It is by no means enough to set over against this powerful human value the mere doctrine that God must be obeyed: a mere doctrine can never counterbalance it.... (54-55)

Frankly, it seems profoundly insufficient to say that Adam should simply be willing to cast Eve aside; and this is true even if we remember that Milton's God is the God of Abraham and Isaac, and hence by definition, a god who is much given to demanding terrible and incomprehensible sacrifices from his people. The undeniable reality, as Milton's unfallen

Adam is forced to acknowledge, is that not even "another Eve", beloved and graceful though she might be, could ever fill the void that would be left in Adam's heart by the loss of <u>this</u> Eve. Adam's anguished recognition that <u>this</u> individual is fundamentally irreplaceable is not merely an expression of all that is best in human love -- though it is surely that -- but in the specific context of <u>Paradise Lost</u>, it is a literally God-like insight.

> For should Man finally be lost, should Man
> Thy creature late so lov'd, thy youngest Son
> Fall circumvented thus by fraud, though join'd
> With his own folly? that be from thee far,
> That far be from thee, Father, who art Judge
> Of all things made, and judgest only right. (3.1050-55)

The Son's words in Book 3 are a precise expression of Adam's apparent dilemma in Book 9: "should [Eve]...late so lov'd... Fall circumvented thus by fraud, though join'd / With [her] own folly?" (1050-53). Adam's unwavering love and deep compassion for his fallen wife are not misplaced; rather, they recall the Son's intuitive understanding that his Father cannot allow this race of Man -- "late so lov'd" -- to be lost.

The poet tells us that Adam's situation "seem'd remediless" (9.919). To say that it seemed so, however, does not mean that it was; quite the contrary, it suggests that it was not. Even C. S. Lewis was prepared to concede that "for all Adam knew, God might have had other cards in his hand; but Adam never raised the question and now nobody will ever

know. Rejected goods are invisible" (127). Likewise, Grossman notes that "The reader may wonder what might have resulted had Adam prayed that Eve be forgiven rather than joined her in disobedience" (Authors 147). Samuel demands pointedly: "was 'How can I live without thee?' a helpful question to ask? Might he not instead have asked, What can I do for her?" ("Mimesis" 28).

If Adam's apparent dilemma in Book 9 is to choose between the obedience he owes to God and the love he feels for Eve, then as Fish rightly observes, "this is obviously a false dilemma":

> When all values proceed from and are defined in terms of God, the assumption of a clash between any two of them (love and obedience) is possible only if the situation is considered from a point of view that excludes God. (164; emphasis mine)

And this, of course, is the true nature of Adam's failure. For what this apparently remediless situation demands of Adam is a leap of faith[23]: that is, a willingness to turn, in his extremity to the Judge who "judgest only right" and to ask for his help in this new and troubling situation.

Adam does not possess the Son's intuitive understanding of his Father's will; but he does not require it, for this is not a test of intellect or knowledge. Adam does have much experience of God's goodness. He knows how quickly his prayers are answered: he has asked to know his creator and God has appeared to him; he has asked for a companion

and he has received one "exactly to [his] heart's desire" (8.451); he and Eve have prayed for peace of mind following Eve's disturbing dream, and their peace of mind has been promptly restored; they have prayed that any evil in the Garden might be dispersed, and Raphael has been sent to warn them of Satan's malice and to instruct them in the need for vigilance. Most importantly, however, Adam has learned that he is permitted to challenge the fitness of decrees which seem inimical to God's goodness (as when God instructed him to "find pastime and bear rule" with the beasts) and this, above all, should encourage him to turn to God now.[24]

In Book 3, the Father, observing and lamenting the coming Fall of Man, notes that the punishment for transgressing "the sole Command" is necessarily death ("Die he or Justice must"), but adds the following proviso: "unless for him / Some other able, and as willing pay / The rigid satisfaction, death for death" (3.210-12; emphasis mine). The reader, trapped in the contingencies of fallen history, tends naturally to equate this "other" with Jesus of Nazareth, the redeemer of Christian tradition. In Paradise Lost, however, the Father's observation is a generic one: any of the faithful angels is free to volunteer to "be mortal to redeem Man's mortal crime," just as the Son is free to refrain from volunteering. So too, the unfallen Adam must be able (supposing only that the "charity so dear" dwells within him) to "pay the rigid satisfaction" by offering his own sinless life for the sake of fallen humanity (that is, for the sake of the fallen Eve). Danielson summarizes:

> In an act of dazzling heroism such as only an unfallen person could perform, he [Adam] could have done what the fallen Eve wished she could

> do and what the second Adam ultimately did do: to take the punishment of fallen humanity upon himself, to fulfil exactly "the law of God," as Michael puts it in Book 12, "Both by obedience and by love" (12.402-03). Of course we have trouble imagining what shape human history might thereafter have taken. The scenario is hypothetical, though nonetheless possible and important. Nothing in the poem in principle precludes it and much in the poem proposes it. ("Typology" 124)[25]

In such a possible world, Adam himself would resolve the apparent conflict between obedience and love, thus becoming, as it were, the "first Christ" (i.e. the first anointed one of God) -- just as in the history of the fallen world, the incarnate Son becomes the "second Adam" (11.383). Danielson notes that this possibility is endorsed not only by the poem's "typological pairing" of Adam and Christ (as in the poem's opening lines -- "Of man's first disobedience .../till one greater man/ Restore us"); but also by the language of Adam and Eve during Eve's temptation of Adam which "echoes parodically the language of the Son's offering of himself in Book 3, [and] the angel's exclamatory response to that offer" (124); and by the fact that Milton's Eve and Adam each subsequently offer to accept "all" of the punishment for their combined disobedience (122-23). Their willingness in this regard comes too late, of course: the fallen Eve's offer is driven primarily by her desperate fear of being abandoned by Adam, and despite her avowed intention to return to "the place of judgment" she does not actually stir from where she throws herself at Adam's feet, until Adam "with peaceful words upraised her soon" (10.945). Adam's words may be relatively

peaceful, but they also rebuke Eve's child-like histrionics -- "Unwary, and too desirous as before, / So now of what thou know'st not" (10.947-48); and Adam's echo of Eve's offer of self-sacrifice -- "If prayers / Could alter high decrees, I to that place/ Would speed before thee, and be louder heard, / That on my head all might be visited" (952-55) -- seems more scornful than sincere. Clearly the opportunity for a genuinely redemptive act of self-sacrifice has passed: nevertheless, Adam and Eve's words serve to evoke the lost possibility that existed while Adam remained unfallen.

Bennett proposes an alternative possibility: she suggests that the unfallen Adam might equally well have elected "not to acquiesce and not to divorce" but rather "to keep the dialogue open, to become 'with much hazard' in but not of the postlapsarian world" (118). Like Burden (though to different effect), Bennett cites St. Paul's advice to the believer married to an unbeliever:

> If any brother hath a wife that believeth not, and she be pleased to dwell with him, let him not put her away.... For the unbelieving husband is sanctified by the wife, and the unbelieving wife is sanctified by the husband: else were your children unclean; but now are they holy.
>
> (1 Corinthians 7:12,14).

The notion of a possible world in which the unfallen Adam and the fallen Eve continue to live together until Eve's death raises intriguing possibilities of its own. Would the unfallen Adam continue to reside in the Garden of Eden or would he be forced to accept exile with

Eve? Would the children of an unfallen father and a fallen mother be fallen or unfallen?[26] Although Bennett does not attempt to answer such questions, her point is well-taken. In the history of the fallen world, Eve lives for at least 130 years (and possibly much more) after the Fall[27]. Adam certainly has the time to contemplate other possibilities before choosing irrevocably to die with Eve.

By "submit[ting] to what seem'd remediless," Adam defines himself as a helpless victim of fate and rejects his true identity as the free creature of a divinely provident Creator. Asserting his inability to live without Eve, Adam attempts to conceptualize his actions as necessary rather than as freely undertaken (Tanner 114-19). Adam's final speech before eating the forbidden fruit is notable for its fatalistic tone of stoic detachment. Whether for Eve's benefit or his own, he indulges in some wishful thinking: "perhaps" Eve will not die; "perhaps" the interdiction matters less now that the serpent has already transgressed. Even so, the reader should note that Adam tells Eve that "perhaps thou shalt not die" (9.928; emphasis mine) rather than "perhaps we shall not die"--suggesting that Adam is still, at least at some level, resisting the prospect of his own disobedience.

Adam also indicates that he still "has within himself a knowledge of God's intentions beyond anything he has been told" (Reichert 102) when he speculates that God himself might not wish to allow Adam and Eve (and the world that he made for them) to be lost.

> ...so God shall uncreate,

Be frustrate, do, undo, and labor lose,

Not well conceiv'd of God, who though his Power

Creation could repeat, yet would be loath

Us to abolish, lest the Adversary

Triumph and say; Fickle their State whom God

Most Favors, who can please him long? Mee first

He ruin'd, now Mankind; whom will he next?

Matter of scorn not to be given the Foe. (9.943-51)

Georgia Christopher observes that Adam's "superior mind" here creates a superior rationalization for disobedience, demonstrating that Adam's superior intellect does not by itself guarantee superior virtue (160). But Adam's words also recall the Son's challenge to the Father in Book 3:

...shall the Adversary thus obtain

His end, and frustrate thine... ?

... or wilt thou thyself

Abolish thy Creation, and unmake,

For him, what for thy glory thou has made?

So should thy goodness and thy greatness both

Be question'd and blasphem'd without defense.

(3.156-57, 162-66; emphasis mine)

Reichert notes that "Neither Adam nor the Son can believe that the Father in his wisdom would let the 'Adversary' triumph" (101); and the Father endorses this perspective when he declares that the Son has spoken "All...As my Eternal purpose hath decreed" (3.171-72). Milton's God thus explicitly rejects the possibility of a universe in which Satan is able to claim that he has forced God to "unmake" his creation. In other words, not only is the world in which Satan triumphs over humankind an impossible world, but even those worlds in which Satan could successfully claim to have triumphed are impossible since, as the Son observes, they would insufficiently manifest God's goodness and greatness.

Adam's recognition, however fleeting, that God has a personal stake in what becomes of his creation (Leonard 226) raises the possibility that even now, Adam could turn to God and urge him to show mercy to Eve that God's own goodness and greatness be not "question'd and blasphem'd without defense" (3.166). Adam's mistake lies not in his perception that God's creation must manifest God's glory, but in the fact that he proceeds from this insight to the highly dubious proposition that God therefore has no choice but to overlook Eve's (and/or Adam's) disobedience. In fact, the Father always has choices which exceed, both in number and in scope, anything that his creatures are capable of imagining. Even the Son, in offering to die for humankind, is confident that he "shall rise victorious" not because he is able to foresee all of the possible consequences of his offer, but because he has complete faith in "the omnipotence and perfect benevolence of the Father" (Samuel, "Dialogue" 242):

...on me let Death wreck all his rage;

> Under his gloomy power I shall not long
>
> Lie vanquisht; thou hast giv'n me to possess
>
> Life in myself for ever, by thee I live...
>
> Thou wilt not leave me in the loathsome grave
>
> His prey, nor suffer my unspotted Soul
>
> For ever with corruption there to dwell.... (3.241-44,247-49)

The Son's serene confidence stands in the greatest possible contrast both to the emotional anguish which Adam expresses in his unspoken soliloquy and to the air of stoic resignation which Adam affects in his final speech before eating the forbidden fruit. Samuel maintains that the nature of the dialogue between the Father and the Son in Book 3 should suggest "what might have been" had Adam, like the Son, been willing to entrust his life and Eve's to the beneficence of the Father ("Dialogue" 242).

The Son's willingness to die for fallen humanity also serves to emphasize the fact that Adam's willingness to die is not in itself sinful; rather, it becomes sinful only when combined with a willingness to disobey God's Law. It may surprise readers to realize that until Adam actually eats the forbidden fruit, he never directly affirms his intention to do so -- he only declares repeatedly that he is prepared to die rather than to be parted from Eve. Could this reticence suggest that Adam, even at this late juncture, is still actively engaged in the process of persuading himself to disobey? Is he, perhaps, "protesting too much" with his repeated (and increasingly vivid) declarations of his willingness to die with Eve?

The fallen Eve, of course, chooses to interpret Adam's willingness to die as a declaration of intended disobedience (Danielson, "Typology" 123); and she proceeds to glorify it as "Illustrious evidence, example high" of "exceeding Love" (9.961-62). Eve, in fact, proclaims her own version of the felix culpa [28]: eating the forbidden fruit, she observes, has provided the occasion for "This happy trial of thy Love which else / So eminently never had been known" (9.976-77). She embraces Adam, weeps for joy, and proffers the deadly fruit. Milton's narrative provides no description of Adam's response to this emotional display: is it, perhaps, during this narrative silence that Adam at last finds himself "fondly overcome with female charm" (9.999)?

Ultimately, the poet tells us, Adam "scrupled not to eat" (9.998); and the "mortal Sin Original" (9.1004-05) is thus completed. As Eve's last thought before her fall is her recognition that "nothing hinders" her eating, so too Adam's fall is explicitly constructed as a negative action: i.e. as a failure to be scrupulous. The Earth trembles in response to Adam's deed -- but this time neither Eve nor Adam notices. Collectively, Eve and Adam have now actualized the fallen world, and in so doing, have rendered the possibility of unfallenness irrevocably non-actual.

Eve's and Adam's falls are both "ethical instants"[29] which resist precise location in Milton's text -- and rightly so, for the condition of the individual soul is known with certainty by God alone. As readers of Paradise Lost, however, we are able to detect the unfallen possibilities which continue to exist until "the last moment of possible return" prior to the definitive actions by which Eve and Adam fall. Throughout Eve's and Adam's separate temptations, we are alerted to the multitude of possible worlds which remain

accessible to them: worlds which Eve and Adam reject, deny, and fail to recognize. Eve is dazzled by the possibility of hitherto unsuspected possibilities, and falls deceived by the serpent's lies. Adam falls not because he is deceived, but because he denies the possibility of possibilities beyond the ones that he himself is able to imagine. Determined to forestall the actualization of the possible worlds that he can envision, Adam chooses instead to actualize the fallen world. Adam's sin -- the sin which irrevocably actualizes the fallen world -- is thus quintessentially a failure of faith: a failure to believe and to trust in the God for whom all things are possible and who turns all possibilities to good.

Conclusion

In closing, I would like to offer my thoughts concerning some of the interpretative and critical perspectives to be gained from a reading of Paradise Lost which seeks to define and explore its many possible worlds.

Vincent DiBenedetto notes that in Paradise Lost, Milton has set himself the challenging assignment of recreating "an already determined mimesis of character, situation, and plot," while at the same time demonstrating that "his unconstrained characters had been thoroughly and divinely empowered to prevent" the events which scripture required him to depict (1). This constitutes a major technical problem for Milton: i.e. how to present a predetermined story as something other than a predestined series of events. Throughout this thesis, I have suggested that Paradise Lost not only presents the Fall as the product of Adam and Eve's choices, it also repeatedly evokes the possibility that Adam and Eve could have made other choices. Thus, Milton's depiction of paradisal life emphasizes the possibility of unfallen existence: unfallen human beings, Milton assures us, would marry, have children, enjoy friendships, engage in physical labour, study the natural world, and strive to grow in spiritual and moral wisdom. Similarly, by presenting an extra-scriptural episode (the separation debate) as the pivotal factor in determining the context within which the temptation occurs, Milton implicitly raises the question of "what might have been" and hence the possibility that the Fall (as we know it) might never have happened at all. Finally, Milton's accounts of the temptations of Eve and Adam repeatedly call the reader's attention to the ongoing existence of alternative possibilities which Eve and Adam either fail to recognize or which, for their

own reasons, they choose to reject or deny. In each of these cases, the textual presence of non-actual possibilities constitutes a powerful argument for the reality of Adam's and Eve's continuing freedom to actualize worlds other than the fallen one that they actually do.

A "possible worlds" approach can provide equally valuable insights into the limits of human freedom in Paradise Lost. Consider, for example, two "possibilities" proposed by the fallen Eve during the time when she and Adam stand reconciled to one another, but not yet to God.

> It lies, yet ere Conception to prevent
> The Race unblest, to being yet unbegot.
> Childless thou art, Childless remain: so Death
> Shall be deceiv'd his glut, and with us two
> Be forc'd to satisfy his Rav'nous Maw.
> But if thou judge it hard and difficult,
> Conversing, looking, loving, to abstain,
> From love's due Rites, Nuptial embraces sweet,
> ...Then both ourselves and Seed at once to free
> From what we fear for both, let us make short,
> Let us seek Death, or he not found, supply
> With our own hands his Office on ourselves....
>
> (10.987-94, 999-1002)

Adam's "more attentive mind," of course, rejects these misguided proposals that would seek to prevent the propagation of the human race. Instead, as Adam calls to mind "Part of our Sentence" -- that the Seed of Woman is to bruise the serpent's head -- he suddenly understands that "death brought on ourselves, or childless days" (10.1037) would serve only to forestall God's plan of salvation for humankind. Christopher draws particular attention to the pre-eminent role of the "Word" in drawing Adam and Eve to repentance.

> [Adam's] instant de passage from despair to faith is precisely the moment when Adam recalls Christ's words of judgment and perceives the promise in them. The moment changes everything; there is now a reason for loving and living and having children. Once Adam sees the promise, he begins to see promise everywhere....Adam's insight [is]...monumental. It lets Adam choose to live. (167)

Adam's sudden insight into the meaning of the Word of God and its promise of salvation prompts him to encourage Eve to join with him in seeking God's forgiveness with "sorrow unfeign'd, and humiliation meek" (10.1104).

Thus far, Milton's text suggests that the fallen Adam and Eve, though all but crushed by fear and misery, nevertheless choose freely to repent their disobedience and to entrust themselves to God's mercy. We are apt to be somewhat disconcerted, therefore, when in Book 11, the Father ascribes Adam and Eve's apparently freely-willed decision to "My motions in [them]" and describes their hearts as "variable and vain / Self-left"

(11.91;92-93). Peter denounces the Father's characterization of Adam and Eve's contrition as "downright unfair," and demands to know "why, if God is now conferring a special degree of 'Strength' upon the humans, he was so chary of doing it while they were being tempted" (146). Is Peter's indignation justified? What is the relationship between Adam's "insight," the repentance it inspires -- and what the Father, in Book 11, refers to as "My motions in him"? Do Adam and Eve repent freely or by divine fiat? Are Milton's fallen Adam and Eve ever really free to commit suicide or genocide or, indeed, to do anything other than repent?

A "possible worlds" analysis would suggest that although Milton's Adam and Eve are free to stand or fall, they are never "free" to actualize a world in which Satan could be said to triumph or any other world in which (to quote the Son) God's "goodness and greatness" could "Be question'd and blasphem'd without defense" (3.165-66). Throughout Paradise Lost, Milton's God judiciously intervenes in his creation in order to forestall the actualization of any world that would fail to be to the glory of its Creator: worlds, for example, in which Satan overcomes Adam and Eve with "violence" rather than with "deceit and lies" (5.242-43); in which Satan successfully perverts God's creation by drawing all of humankind to hell or by compelling God to "unmake man" (3.160-64); or in which the war between Michael's and Satan's legions causes heaven to go "to wrack; with ruin overspread" (6.670). These worlds are impossible because they violate the one necessary truth in all the possible worlds of Paradise Lost: namely, that God be God.

The fact that Milton's God prevents the actualization of such inherently undesirable worlds suggests that such divine interference defines the limits of creaturely free will. The

worlds proposed by the fallen Eve would (apparently) allow Satan to "Draw after him the whole Race of mankind/ By him corrupted" (3.161-62). I would suggest, therefore, that Milton's Adam and Eve, while free to stand or fall, are probably not free to actualize a world in which they commit suicide or otherwise die without having children.

Adam and Eve's experience in the immediate aftermath of the Fall does suggest that without divine intervention, fallen humanity would be capable only of despair and hatred. In this context, the providence of the Father's declaration in Book 3 becomes evident:

> ...I will clear thir senses dark,
> What may suffice, and soft'n stony hearts
> To pray, repent, and bring obedience due.
> To Prayer, repentance, and obedience due,
> Though but endeavor'd with sincere intent,
> Mine ear shall not be slow, mine eye not shut.
> ...They who neglect and scorn, shall never taste;
> But hard be hard'n'd, blind be blinded more,
> That they may stumble on, and deeper fall;
> And none but such from mercy I exclude. (3.188-93,199-202)[30]

Adam and Eve's repentance is desirable, of course, but it would almost certainly be unwise to conclude that Milton's God has no choice but to compel the fallen couple to repent.

Should Adam and Eve actively resist God's prevenient grace, God could "harden their hearts" -- and cause them to be overcome by lust or perhaps by the fear of death. Whatever response Adam and Eve choose to make to God's "motions," we have the Father's word that the human race will be brought into being (7.155-56) and that Satan's aims will be defeated (3.85-86). We may probably conclude, therefore, that Adam and Eve's "sorrow unfeign'd" at the conclusion of Book 10 constitutes a freely-willed response to divine grace.

The above example suggests the utility of a "possible worlds" approach to an understanding and delineation of the possibilities and limitations of human freedom in Paradise Lost . Such an approach, I believe, is no less powerful, and perhaps even more significant in providing readers with insight into a character whose centrality to Milton's epic becomes more evident to me with each successive reading: i.e., the Father.

Paradise Lost presupposes a God who has chosen to create, to create through his Word, to create angels and humanity, and to create in accordance with the Genesis accounts. Milton's poem also tells us, however, that God's choices in this regard should be understood as contingent rather than necessary. When the Father sends forth the Son to "bid the Deep / Within appointed bounds be Heav'n and Earth" (7.166-67), he expressly proclaims the creation to be a free act of the Divine Will:

> Boundless the Deep, for I am who fill
> Infinitude, nor vacuous the space.
> Though I uncircumscrib'd myself retire,

And put not forth my goodness, which is free

To act or not, Necessity and Chance

Approach not mee, and what I will is Fate.

(7.168-73; emphasis mine)

Milton's conception of divine freedom is in the tradition of Thomas Aquinus, Johannes Wollebius and William Ames, all of whom believed that "because the goodness of God is perfect, creation can neither add to his perfection or increase the good" (Fallon, "Divine Freedom" 442) -- any more than it can subtract from God's perfection or decrease the good. Milton's God is free "To act or not," and hence enjoys what Fallon calls the "'significant freedom'[31]...to choose among equal alternative goods" (448;emphasis mine).

Leibniz believed that every effect must have a sufficient cause; and hence concluded that God creates necessarily and furthermore, that he necessarily creates the best of all (com)possible worlds (Fallon, "Divine Freedom" 433-34). Milton's God, however, is gloriously free of any such strictures: in Paradise Lost, the only necessity (that is, the only thing that must be true in all possible worlds) is that God be God. Milton's God does not need to create because a world consisting only of God would still be infinitely good. Moreover, given that Milton's God chooses to create, he does not need to determine what all of the events in his creation are to be: rather, he need only determine the limits of possibility itself. The benevolence, omniscience and omnipotence of Milton's God function as the systemic constraints which make creaturely freedom possible -- and without which creaturely freedom would be a terrible evil. Thus in

Paradise Lost, God's rational creatures are empowered to actualize an astonishing range of possible worlds precisely because there are divinely ordained limits to the kinds of worlds that are possible in the first place.

John Rumrich argues that Milton's God "profits" from the Fall because "the extreme difficulty of saving fallen humankind reflects God's glory more fully than the relative ease of materially enabling the advance of obedient creatures" (143-44) and because "in a fallen world, God gets all the glory" (147). But Rumrich begs the question: in an unfallen world, God's glory would still be infinitely manifest; indeed, the very idea that the glory of creation could be other than God's would not exist. Hence, the notion that Milton's God requires or is in any way dependent upon human or angelic existence (much less human or angelic disobedience[32]) in order to manifest the full extent of his glory or goodness is not merely blasphemous but patently absurd. Any possible creation will manifest the infinite power, glory and goodness of its creator -- that is what it means to say that in any and all possible creations, God must be God.

The Father may easily be misconstrued as a character whose pronouncements seek to impose a kind of closure upon our reading of the events occurring within the "worlds" of Paradise Lost. Christian traditionalists such as C. S. Lewis warn that we must be prepared to grant "Milton's premises" (123), and the fact that we may find these premises emotionally or morally repugnant is deemed to be of little consequence. Miltonists in the critical tradition of Bell, Waldock and William Empson challenge the Father's authoritative reading of events -- but at the risk of reducing the Father to something rather more akin to an unreliable narrator than to "God." Yet the essential quality of the character that we

come to know in Paradise Lost as "The Father" is freedom: Milton's God is free to act or not; free to create or not; free, in fact, to do anything other than cease to be God. Having fashioned himself as "Father," Milton's God is both creator and font of possibility; and his role in Paradise Lost is emphatically not to impose closure but rather to open up infinite vistas of possibility to which his creatures may then freely respond. In Satan and the Son, we perceive the two extremes of such creaturely response: Satan, as "Adversary" to God, concludes that all possibilities, even the possibility of repentance, lead inevitably to his own damnation (4.93-102); the Son, by virtue of his perfect faith in the Father, understands that within Death itself there exists the possibility of yet another manifestation of God's infinite goodness.

In the Genesis story of Adam and Eve, the human couple fail what is apparently a ridiculously simple (even simple-minded) test, and the consequence of their failure is an apparently grossly disproportionate penalty. In Paradise Lost, Satan recounts the story of the Fall in precisely these terms:

> ...[Man] by fraud I have seduc'd
> From his Creator, and the more to increase
> Your wonder, with an Apple; he thereat
> Offended, worth your laughter, hath giv'n up
> Both his beloved Man and all his World....(10.485-89)

By the time Milton is through with the story, of course, Satan's self-serving summary is exposed as a ludicrous oversimplification of a very complex series of events. What Milton has done, in effect, is to construct a "possible world" of the Genesis story of Adam and Eve: a world which is consistent with the skeletal story provided by Genesis, yet which is infused with cosmic significance. In Milton's re-telling, the sin which brings "Death into the World and all our woe" is no longer the simple violation of a ritual taboo but rather a clear- if wrong-headed decision not to entrust the survival of all that is most precious and desirable in human existence to the benevolence of Divine Providence. In the "actual" world of Paradise Lost, Adam's sin constitutes a profound rejection of the terrible risk that faith in God must inevitably represent for God's rational creatures; and it actualizes a world fundamentally more difficult and more painful than the one that is offered to humankind "In the beginning." Even so, the world actualized by the Fall -- by virtue of humanity's predestined Redemption -- will serve no less well than an unfallen one would to manifest the infinite power, glory and goodness of Milton's God. To the God for whom all things are possible, the Fall of the human race, no less than its creation, contains the possibility of "goodness infinite, goodness immense" (12.469) and hence, of a sublime revelation of the God who turns all possibilities to good.

[1] See Dennis Danielson's discussion of the theological problem of evil in Milton's Good God 1-10 and his summary of the free will defense 92-93.

[2] The former represents Augustine's belief regarding fallen (though not unfallen) humanity; the latter and more extreme Calvinist stance is articulated in the Westminster Confession of 1647: "The almighty power, unsearchable wisdom, and infinite goodness of God so far manifest themselves in his providence that it extendeth itself even to the first fall, and all other sins, and that not by a bare permission, but such as hath joined with it a most wise and powerful bounding;...yet so as the sinfulness thereof proceedeth only from the creature, and not from God" (quoted in Danielson, Milton's Good God 81). In either case, freedom from external (as opposed to internal) compulsion is held to constitute free choice.

[3] Although Augustine maintained that Adam and Eve's marriage remained unconsummated until after the Fall, he rejected any suggestion that sexual activity was incompatible with the state of innocence: "It is quite clear that they were created male and female, with bodies of different sexes, for the purpose of begetting offspring, to increase and replenish the earth, and to deny this is a great absurdity" (City of God 14:22). Aquinus endorsed Augustine's position, adding that the pleasure of unfallen sexuality would certainly have exceeded that of fallen sexuality because of the "greater fineness of the human body before sin" (Summa Theologica 1.q98,a2,ad3). (Both quoted in Fiore 30).

[4] Unfallen sexual intercourse would quickly become a curse, rather than a blessing, if it invariably resulted in conception: the unfallen world would face a population crisis of staggering proportions within ten generations.

[5] In "The genesis of gendered subjectivity in the divorce tracts and in Paradise Lost" Mary Nyquist disputes the significance that McColley attributes to the naming of the flowers by Milton's Eve: Eve's "naming [is] asssociated not with rational insight and dominion but rather with the act of lyrical utterance" (100). While I accept Nyquist's reservations regarding its implications for Eve's status in Eden, the fact that Eve names the flowers does confirm her active commitment to her role as gardener. In earlier literary expansions of Genesis, Eve sees the flowers of Eden solely as potential adornments to her beauty (McColley, Milton's Eve 110).

[6] Throughout Before and After the Fall: Contrasting Modes in "Paradise Lost" Kathleen Swaim refers to the "contrasting textbooks" of the two angelic instructors: Raphael (nature) and Michael (scripture).

[7] See also Grant McColley, "The Astronomy of Paradise Lost" regarding the historical context of the astronomical theories advanced by Raphael. McColley maintains that the discussion of astronomy in Paradise Lost is significantly outdated by seventeenth-century standards, suggesting that Milton had a very limited interest in the subject.

[8] "The story of the fall of Satan is a parable to Adam, giving him the kind of knowledge he needs in the only form appropriate to a free man" (Frye 74).

[9] See Diane McColley, Milton's Eve especially chapters 5 and 6; Stella Revard, "Eve and the Doctrine of Responsibility in Paradise Lost"; Diana Benet, "Abdiel and the Son in the Separation Scene."

[10] Genesis 3:6 - "And when the woman saw that the tree was good for food, and that it was pleasant to the eyes, and a tree to be desired to make one wise, she took of the fruit thereof, and did eat and gave also unto her husband with her; and he did eat."

[11] See J. M. Evans 272-75; 8-49, 57; 72-73; 198.

[12] See McColley, Milton's Eve 147-54.

[13] See also Milton's Eve 151-66. McColley maintains that "again and again Milton explicitly dissociates Eve from exactly the weaknesses that his predecessors and contemporaries assigned to her and carefully preserves her unfallen liberty and her delicate yet sufficient adherence to active goodness" (141).

[14] See William Poundstone, Labyrinths of Reason: "There is reason to believe that the ability to conceive of possible worlds is a fundamental part of human intelligence. All the thousands of choices we make in our lives, momentous and trivial, are acts of imagination. You imagine the world in which you get your car washed this afternoon and the world in which you don't and decide which you would rather live in" (132).

[15] Diane McColley offers the most comprehensive argument for this reading of Eve's objections to Adam's preference for working together. See "The Separation Colloquy" in Milton's Eve; and "Eating Death" in A Gust for Paradise. See also John Reichert 90-93.

[16] Virginia Mollenkott uses the analogy of inadmissable evidence in "Milton's Techique of Multiple Choice" in which she examines Milton's practice throughout Paradise Lost of periodically offering the reader a choice of possible interpretations of a subject: e.g., Raphael's speculative lecture regarding planetary motion.

[17] See Shumaker 1186; Danielson, Milton's Good God 189-201; McColley, Milton's Eve 157-58.

[18] Vincent DiBenedetto disputes Lawrence Babb's contention that Milton's Eve is "a second-class human being" (49), noting that while Milton's Eve "is inferior to Adam in her powers of intellect, Milton is never given to equating intellectual inferiority with second-class human status, such a title being reserved for the unconscientious, the malicious, the immoral" (6).

[19] In many versions of the Fall, the serpent actually eats the fruit without incurring any harm; in Paradise Lost the serpent merely claims to have done so (Evans 277). Milton's Eve is thus misled by Satan's lies rather than by a demonstration that the fruit is "harmless."

[20] In Anxiety in Eden, John Tanner suggests that Miltonists seeking a vocabulary to describe "the sinless conditions that precipitate sin without referring to fallen concepts" (28) might do well to consider Kierkegaard's concept of angst or "anxiety," which Tanner describes as the "psychological byproduct of freedom" which "registers the pressure which future possibilities exert upon the present" (3). While cupiditas (evil desire) directs itself toward the possibility of evil, anxiety (which "presupposes ignorance of its object") directs itself toward the possibility of possibility itself (30). Although my thesis does not posit a specifically Kierkegaardian anxiety in the falls of Adam and Eve, I wish to acknowledge the contribution of Tanner's Kiekegaardian reading of Paradise Lost to my efforts to recognize and explore the poem's many possible worlds.

[21] "And Adam was not deceived, but the woman being deceived was in the transgression" (1 Timothy 2:14). Dennis Burden notes, "If Adam cannot be deceived, then it follows that he cannot be persuaded eat the forbidden Fruit. Persuasion to do the wrong thing must be deceitful" (160; emphasis mine).

[22] Northrop Frye likewise argues that Adam should divorce Eve once she has fallen (60).

[23] Fish notes that "A leap of faith is always a refusal to accede to what, at the moment, seems remediless" (270).

[24] The pattern for "challenging" Divine decrees may be found in Genesis 18:20-33, in which Abraham bargains with God regarding the fate of Sodom. Like Abraham who implores "Oh let not the Lord be angry, and I will speak", Milton's Adam begins his request for a companion by saying, "Let not my words offend thee, Heav'nly Power,/ My Maker, be propitious while I speak" (8.379-81). The Son's comment to the Father -- "That far be from thee, Father, who art Judge / Of all things made, and judgest only right" (3.154-155) -- is similarly patterned on Genesis 18:25: "Shall not the Judge of all the earth do right?".

[25] See also Irene Samuel, "Dialogue" 242-43, Stanley Fish 261-72, and John Leonard 217-27 for the possibility of the unfallen Adam sacrificing himself for the fallen Eve.

[26] In The Christian Doctrine, Milton observes that "It would seem...that the human soul is not created daily by the immediate act of God, but propagated from father to son in a natural order" (980). If so, the children of an unfallen Adam might very well be unfallen even if their mother were fallen. On the other hand, Michael warns Adam that when the

"Sons of God" tarry with the "Daughters of Men" -- "The world erelong a world of tears must weep" (11.627). One presumes, however, that even if one's mother were fallen, it would be preferable to have an unfallen, rather than a fallen, father.

27 According to Genesis 5:3-5, Seth is born to Eve when Adam (and presumably Eve) is 130 years old. Adam is 930 years old when he dies. The date of Eve's death is not specified.

28 In Paradise Lost, the felix culpa is invariably a fallen viewpoint: Eve indulges in it at this juncture; so does Satan in his speech to the rebel angels (2.14-42). The fallen Adam's declaration, taken by Arthur Lovejoy as evidence of Milton's perspective, is decidedly tentative: "full of doubt I stand,/ Whether I should repent me now of sin...or rejoice / Much more, that much more good thereof shall spring" -- 12.473-78). In contrast, the Father's assessment of the Fall is unambiguous: "Happier, had it suffic'd him to have known / Good by itself, and Evil not at all" --11.88-89). Unfallen human beings learn to know the good directly; fallen human beings learn to know good, if at all, by knowing evil. See Danielson, Milton's Good God 202-27 for a detailed refutation of the notion of a "fortunate fall" in Paradise Lost.

29 In Anxiety in Eden, Tanner draws on Kierkegaard's understanding of sin as "an ethical instant" which constitutes a breaking of ontological barriers (32-34). Tanner observes that for both Kierkegaard and Milton, "Sin springs into existence not by degrees but full grown" (44).

[30] It is possible that Milton's Adam and Eve are among those whom God chooses "of peculiar grace" (3.183). However, the provisional nature of the Father's instructions to Michael ("If patiently thy bidding they obey" -- 11.112) would seem to argue against this.

[31] Stephen Fallon ("Divine Freedom" 448) notes that he borrows the term "significant freedom" from Alvin Plantigna, The Nature of Necessity 165-66.

[32] See Lovejoy, "Milton and the Paradox of the Fortunate Fall." See also Danielson, Milton's Good God 202-27 for a detailed refutation of the position that a fallen world allows for a more profound revelation of God's goodness than would be possible in an unfallen one. Danielson notes that since Milton presents the Son as the King and Messiah of the unfallen angels, the reader is given every reason to expect that in an unfallen world, the Incarnation would still serve as the focal point of human history. See also Richard Ide "On the Begetting of the Son in Paradise Lost": "The begetting in heaven would thus seem to mark a pivotal moment in angelic history like that marked by the advent of Christ in human history" (148).

Works Cited

Babb, Lawrence. The Moral Cosmos of "Paradise Lost". East Lansing: Michigan State UP, 1970.

Bell, Millicent. "The Fallacy of the Fall in Paradise Lost." PMLA 68 (1953): 863-83.

Benet, Diana. "Abdiel and the Son in the Separation Scene." Milton Studies 18 (1983): 129-43.

Bennett, Joan S. Reviving Liberty: Radical Christian Humanism in Milton's Great Poems. Cambridge, Massachusetts and London: Harvard UP, 1989.

Blackburn, Thomas H. "'Uncloistered Virtue': Adam and Eve in Milton's Paradise." Milton Studies 3 (1971): 119-37.

Burden, Dennis. The Logical Epic. Cambridge: Harvard UP, 1967.

Christopher, Georgia. Milton and the Science of the Saints. Princeton: Princeton UP 1982.

Daniells, Roy. "'A Happy Rural Seat of Various View'" in "Paradise Lost": A Tercentenary Tribute. Ed. Balachandra Rajan. Toronto: U of Toronto P, 1969. 3-17.

Danielson, Dennis. Milton's Good God: A Study in Literary Theodicy . Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1982.

----------------. "Though the Telescope of Typology: What Adam Should Have Done." Milton Quarterly 23 (1989): 121-25.

Davies, Stevie. The Feminine Reclaimed: The Idea of Woman in Spenser, Shakespeare and Milton. Lexington: UP of Kentucky, 1986.

DiBenedetto, Vincent P. "Scripture's Constraint and Adam's Self-Authoring Freedom: A Reading of the Fall in ParadiseLost." Milton Quarterly 25 (1991): 1-14.

Duncan, Joseph E. Milton's Earthly Paradise: A Historical Study of Eden. Minneapolis: U of Minnesota P, 1972.

Empson, William. Milton's God. London: Chatto & Windus, 1961.

Evans, J. M. "Paradise Lost" and the Genesis Tradition. Oxford: Clarendon, 1968.

Fallon, Stephen M. "The Uses of 'Seems' and the Spectre of Predestination." Milton Quarterly 21 (1987): 99-101.

----------------. "To Act or Not: Milton's Conception of Divine Freedom." Journal of the History of Ideas 49 (1988): 425-49.

Fiore, Peter A. Milton and Augustine: Patterns of Augustinian Thought in "Paradise Lost". University Park: Pennsylvania State UP, 1963.

Fish, Stanley. Surprised by Sin: The Reader in "Paradise Lost". Toronto: Macmillan, 1967.

Fresch, Cheryl. "'And brought her unto the man': The Wedding in Paradise Lost." Milton Studies 16 (1982): 21-33.

Frye, Northrop. The Return of Eden: Five Essays on Milton's Epics. Toronto: U of Toronto P, 1965.

Giamatti, A.Bartlett. The Earthly Paradise and the Renaissance Epic. Princeton: Princeton UP, 1966.

Grossman, Marshall. "Authors to Themselves": Milton and the Revelation of History. Cambridge; Cambridge UP, 1987.

----------------. "Dramatic Structure and Emotive Pattern in the Fall: Paradise Lost IX." Milton Studies 13 (1979): 201-19.

Hamilton, K.G. "Paradise Lost": A Humanist Approach. St. Lucia, Queensland: Queensland UP, 1981.

Hartman, Joan. "We Ribs Crooked by Nature: Gender and Teaching Paradise Lost." Approaches to Teaching Milton's "Paradise Lost". Ed. Galbraith M. Crump. New York: Modern Language Association of America, 1986. 126-34.

Ide, Richard S. "On the Begetting of the Son in Paradise Lost." SEL 24 (1984) 141-55.

Leonard, John. Naming in Paradise: Milton and the Language of Adam and Eve. Oxford: Clarendon, 1990.

Lewalski, Barbara Kiefer. "Innocence and Experience in Milton's Eden." New Essays on "Paradise Lost". Ed. Thomas Kranidas. Berkeley: U of California P, 1969. 86-117.

----------------. "Paradise Lost" and the Rhetoric of Literary Forms. Princeton: Princeton UP, 1985.

Lewis, C. S. A Preface to "Paradise Lost". London: Oxford UP, 1942.

Lewis, David. "Possible Worlds". The Possible and the Actual: Readings in the Metaphysics of Modality. Ithaca and London: Cornell UP, 1979. 182-89.

Lovejoy, Arthur O. "The Historiography of Ideas" orig pub 1938. Rpt. in Essays in the History of Ideas. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins UP, 1948. 1-13.

-----------------."Milton and the Paradox of the Fortunate Fall." ELH 4 (1937). Rpt. in

Essays in the History of Ideas. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins UP, 1948. 277-95.

MacCaffrey, Isabel Gamble. "Paradise Lost" as "Myth". Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard UP, 1959.

McColley, Diane Kelsey. Milton's Eve. Chicago: U of Illinois P, 1983.

----------------. A Gust for Paradise: Milton's Eden and the Visual Arts. Chicago: U of Illinois P, 1993.

McColley, Grant. "The Astronomy of Paradise Lost." Studies in Philology 34 (1937): 209-47.

Mollenkott, Virginia R. "Milton's technique of Multiple Choice." Milton Studies 6 (1975): 101-11.

Milton, John. John Milton: Complete Poetry and Major Prose. Ed. Merritt Y. Hughes. New York: Macmillan, 1957.

Musacchio, George. Milton's Adam and Eve: Fallible Perfection. New York: Lang, 1991.

Nyquist, Mary. "Reading the Fall: Discourse in Drama in Paradise Lost." English Literary Renaissance 14 (1984): 199-229.

---------------. "The genesis of gendered subjectivity in the divorce tracts and in Paradise Lost." Re-membering Milton: Essays on the texts and traditions. Ed. Mary Nyquist and Margaret W. Ferguson. New York and London: Methuen, 1987.

Patrides, C.A. Milton and the Christian Tradition. Oxford: Clarendon, 1966.

Peter, John. A Critique of "Paradise Lost". New York: Columbia UP, 1960.

Poundstone, William. Labyrinths of Reason: Puzzles, Paradox and the Frailty of Knowledge. New York: Doubleday, 1986.

Reichert, John. "`Against his better knowledge': A Case for Adam." ELH 48 (1981): 83-109.

Rescher, Nicholas. "The Ontology of the Possible". The Possible and the Actual: Readings in the Metaphysics of Modality. Ithaca and London: Cornell U P, 1979: 166-81.

Revard, Stella. "Eve and the Doctrine of Responsibility in Paradise Lost". PMLA 88 (1973): 69-78.

Rumrich, John Peter. Matter of Glory: A New Preface to "Paradise Lost". Pittsburgh: U of Pittsburgh P, 1987.

Samuel, Irene. "Paradise Lost as Mimesis." Approaches to "Paradise Lost". Ed. C.A.Patrides. London: Arnold, 1969. 15-30.

----------------. "The Dialogue in Heaven: A Reconsideration of Paradise Lost III, 1-417." PMLA 72 (1957) 601-11. Reprinted in Milton: Modern Essays in Criticism. Ed. A. Barker. New York: Oxford UP, 1965. 233-43.

Shumaker, Wayne. "The Fallacy of the Fall in Paradise Lost" in "Notes, Documents and Critical Comments." PMLA 70 (1955): 1185-203.

Stein, Arnold. Answerable Style: Essays on "Paradise Lost". Minneapolis: U of Minnesota P, 1953.

Swaim, Kathleen M. Before and After the Fall: Contrasting Modes in "Paradise Lost". Amherst: U of Massachusetts P, 1986.

Swan, Jesse G. "Author-Functions and the Interpretations of Eve in Paradise Lost". Milton Quarterly 26 (1992): 59-69.

Tanner, John S. Anxiety in Eden: A Kierkegaardian Reading of "Paradise Lost". New York and Oxford: Oxford UP, 1992.

Tillyard, E. M. W. Milton. London: Chatto, 1930.

----------------. Studies in Milton. New York: Macmillan, 1951.

Waldock, A. J. A. "Paradise Lost" and Its Critics. Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1964.

Walker, Julia. "'For each seem'd either': Free Will and Presdestination in Paradise Lost." Milton Quarterly 20 (1986): 13-16.

Willey, Basil. The Seventeenth Century Background. London: Chatto, 1934.